

THE MAINTENANCE OF ETHNICITY: ITALIAN-
AMERICANS IN SOUTHEASTERN
OKLAHOMA

BY

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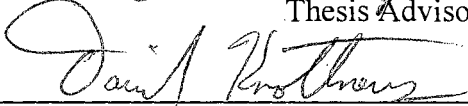
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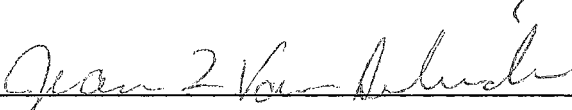
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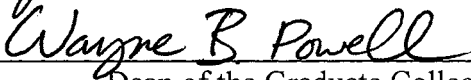
Thesis Advisor











Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I sit here thinking of something clever or heartfelt as seems to be the customary manner for which this section is supposed to be, I am reminded of the last six years and so many of the events that led me to this place I now find myself. It was about six years ago that I found that I was coming to Oklahoma State University from California. It was also about this time six years ago that I found that my father would not live to see that day. I ended up spending three months caring for my dad as I watched him physically 'wither away'. It was strange to begin the road trip to Stillwater from Las Vegas only six days after my father died. But as my father would have said: "Whata you gonna do? Life goes on."

Indeed life has gone on.

As I arrived in town, I had a scheduled meeting with Dr. Arquitt so he could introduce me to what I was to be involved with as a graduate student. I was depressed. The secretary at the time, Jan Fitzgerald had a really strong rural accent, and although she was to be a mother figure for me for two years, I could not help but think I had died and gone to Okie heaven. As I talked with Dr. Arquitt he told me that Oklahoma was the last place he thought he would ever live. He seemed okay by his stay here, but I thought this was just too much. It only became worse when we had a hail storm a few days later that opened my eyes to the furies of the plains. Nevertheless, I stayed, and my relationship

with Dr. Arquitt became one I have relied on over the years to get me through the humps encountered in everyday life. In fact, although I kid him by addressing him as “big daddy Arquitt” I would be foolish not to mention that he has become a father figure for me. And his confidence in me these last several months as I have struggled with my dissertation, and hopelessly applied for jobs has helped tremendously.

At that first meeting Dr. Arquitt told me I would be working with people with developmental disabilities for my first two years here. At that time I did not know who people with developmental disabilities were. When I found out that he was talking about people with mental retardation, physical deformities and such, I wondered further if maybe Connecticut was the place I should have attended. Yet, in retrospect, the experience has created in me a longing to see a more egalitarian society, and placed my life in perspective.

My first day of classes at OSU found me in Dr. Knottnerus’s classical theory course. He scared me as he spoke of writing papers for publication in journals and presentation at conferences. My thought was that only big time sociologists went to conferences and published, and he wanted me to do that? But hey, three journal publications and 12 paper presentations later, and hopefully several more to come, it was and has not been as difficult as I thought. What I have found though in Dr. Knottnerus is someone who gets excited about sociology, and never gets tired of talking about it.

In the early days as a graduate student, the department was full of graduate students with larger than life egos. Myself included. At times those days were trying, as classroom discussions would burst out into arguments with everyone holding their own

views as god-like in status. These discussions would carry-over to places like Eskimo Joe's, or "The Wall" with fiery exchanges occurring over a few pitchers of beer and some lousy pool playing. Yet, I would be remiss if I did not admit to missing those days. During those days our arguments made us better sociologists and better human beings. Some of those I will miss and hope to see at meetings are people like Dan Martin, Gary Steward, Doug Martin, Dan Jack, Liz Howard-Eells, Dennis Waskul, Richard Soutar, Mark Douglass, Ed Jones, Mike Collins, and Royal Loresco. Royal is someone I have some close ties with. Besides us both being Celtics fans, both from southern California, and besides coming in at the same time, we shared many of the same hopes and dreams. We both wanted to be great sociologists and all the glory that comes from that prestige. We hoped we would end up at some great university where students would flock toward us to be our graduate assistants. However, as unemployment gets closer for the both of us, we have reached similar conclusions regarding the nature of teaching, and that is making the effort to educate, and facilitate further education. We both want to be the kind of professor that students will look back on in their own personal lives, and say "he made a difference in my life." For both Royal and myself, that may come at a community college.

I want to thank all the hundreds of students who enrolled in my classes. Their confidence in me, and their comments and suggestions over the last few years has made me a much better teacher and human being. I also want to thank many of the students who hold minority status. Their willingness to thank me for telling their side of the story to the many white males in my classes allowed me to realize the impact and the

importance of what we as sociologists are supposed to do.

I also want to thank the other members of my committee. Dr. Carlozzi, chosen simply because he is of Italian descent, but gave me something that proved to be valuable, that is, the idea of discrimination. As is evident by the large amount of information provided in this study on discrimination against Italians in southeastern Oklahoma, it is a topic that should be studied further. I would never have thought to ask about this topic if it were not for a suggestion he made. In addition, because Dr. Carlozzi is Italian, his presence was motivation for me to tell the story that is so similar to what our own families went through.

To Dr. Brown, I want to thank you for your suggestions and encouragement to look beyond the sociology literature. Your allowing me to do a book report on *The Broken Fountain* by Thomas Belmonte opened my eyes to different approaches that could be utilized in studying people. Until then I was stuck in a more positivistic paradigm which would not have given me the results I longed for. In addition, your open door policy and willingness to talk to me, the many articles you gave me, the books you recommended, and the book on Native Americans in California have provided me information I will be using for years to come.

To Dr. Van Delinder, I appreciate the time and energy you put into helping me not only with my dissertation, but also the article on dreams. Your knowledge of the ethnic literature scared me to death. Yet, in the long run I expect that your help will prove beneficial in the formation of several journal articles that I hope will get me tenure somewhere (Harvard?). I have appreciated your presence in the department since you

arrived and I have encouraged students to enroll in your classes. I hope someday you will be running the graduate department and move us out of position number 95.

I would also like to thank all the many people whose names you will read over the next 200 + pages. I met so many fine people who treated me like family. The wine, food, and great conversation were wonderful. I hope that I can provide a setting in which you will all be remembered. In addition, I would like to thank Andrea Nadali and his girlfriend Allesandra for their help in translating Italian books and documents. Their help in framing the Italian context of this work was essential.

In August of 1998 I told my wife that I was sorry for all the grief I was going to cause her over the next several months while I wrote my dissertation and applied for jobs. I am happy to say that I came through this splendidly keeping my word, that is, being a real pain in the ass. But I do want to thank you Cindy for putting up with the working weekends, the near 400 mile trips in both rain and scorching heat, and the crying fits I went through when I felt all was lost. You were not ready for all the grief I caused because you came into the game a little later than I would have hoped. However, it is always the best feeling to come home and see you smiling and letting me know everything will be okay, and that I too am loved.

Of course I would not be here without my mother and father. To my mother, it has been difficult knowing you have been in Las Vegas without either Bill or myself there to keep an eye on you. I certainly feel the desire to repay you for all the advice, worry, guidance, and yes, money you have “invested” in me over the years. I hope those three letters after my name will be partial payment so you can introduce me to your friends:

“This is my son Doctor David LoConto.”

To my father, it is difficult to imagine that once there were 75 LoConto's living on Gage Street in Worcester, and now it is difficult to find more than one living in any given city. It saddens me that the time has past where we all can live nearby. However, I want to thank you dad, even now, nearly six years since you passed, I cannot stop thinking about you. Your thoughtful guidance over the years, your instruction on how to be a good person, and your never forgetting your roots has been instrumental in keeping me focused. I only wish I could have met all the people in our past, but you brought them so much to life. I hope I have made you proud. Rest easy papa.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When thinking about Oklahoma, the first things that might enter ones' mind would revolve around such things as 'The Great Plains', 'tornado alley', 'cowboys', 'Indians', and 'The Grapes of Wrath'. Rarely would someone think of Italians. Americans associate Italians or Italian-Americans with the northeastern United States in such cities as New York or Boston, or the western United States in such cities as San Francisco or Las Vegas. Yet, in southeastern Oklahoma there remains a small settlement of people of Italian descent who still identify themselves as Italian and/or Italian-American. Their story, like that of all immigrant groups who came to the United States, is full of history, tradition, and struggle. However, as time moves on, the older Italian-Americans are passing, and with them they are taking their histories, traditions, and the struggles they endured. Yet, there are some that still hold to their ethnicity and their identity of being 'Italian'.

Ethnicity is a 'past oriented' form of identity which typically includes recognition as belonging to a group or collective (Alba, 1985, 1990; Romanucci-Ross, 1995). For a group of people to be identified as an ethnic collective, there needs to be some form of consensus regarding the idea of a common past the collective understands as common in their history (Mach, 1993; Vecoli, 1995; Weber, 1968). There appears to be a need for rituals and traditions such as common language, religion, food, family structure, and occupations that are viewed as standard to the group. Barth's definition of what an ethnic group is helps frame ethnic identity, and does so by going beyond the cultural "stuff"

mentioned above. He stated an ethnic group:

1. Is largely biologically self-perpetuating;
2. Shares fundamental cultural values realized in overt unity in cultural forms;
3. Makes up a field of communication and interaction; and
4. Has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (p. 11).

In McAlester, Oklahoma, in Pittsburg County, there is a sign that reads “Welcome to McAlester, Home of Cowboys and Italians.” Whatever the history of this group of Italian-Americans, there appears to be some construction of an identity called ‘Italian’ that is significant enough to have a sign made celebrating their ethnic heritage.

No sociologists or any type of behavioral or social scientists research has been conducted on Italians in southeastern Oklahoma. The United States government conducted a study on the overall status of immigrants throughout the United States, coming to Oklahoma in 1908, giving great detail of the lives of immigrant miners (See U.S. 33rd Congress, 1911). Two historians (Brown, 1975, 1980; Clark, 1955) have conducted research, but have taken most of their data from that same congressional document, with Brown (1980) adding anecdotal data as a supplement. Others have conducted studies on mining and mentioned Italians or Italian-Americans in their writings (Ryan, 1932, 1935; Sewell, 1997). The histories are sufficient by making this population known to the public, however, their writing is brief, leaving out most of the everyday life

experiences of these individuals. My study will contribute a theoretical framework that helps explain the persistence of ethnic identity among descendants of Italians living in southeastern Oklahoma. Further, it seeks to explain the continuation of this ethnic identity beyond “the processes of assimilation so complete” spoken of by Kenny Brown (1980, p.71).

The sole historical study (Brown, 1980), consisting primarily of anecdotal tales is not enough to tell how this group has maintained an ethnic identity for over one hundred years. However, there is little documentation of Italians in Oklahoma. The history of Italians in Oklahoma has been largely overlooked in Oklahoma history books; rarely mentioning immigration to work in the mines. This is possibly due to the small number of people who worked these mines in rural southeastern and eastern Oklahoma. Even cultural histories of Oklahoma which mention immigration exclude the immigrants who worked the mines (Stein & Hill, 1993).

This failure to acknowledge the significance of cultural histories of Italian communities throughout the Midwest and South (even by Italian-American authors) is evident by the continuous amount of research conducted on Italians on the coasts with the exclusion of the former. A recent Arts and Entertainment television special celebrating 500 years of Italians in America failed to mention Italians in the Midwest and South except for a short discussion on Al Capone in Chicago, and discrimination in New Orleans. This is the case even though there are or were small Italian communities in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Alabama, and Utah (see Vecoli, 1987). When a

country such as Italy has over one-third of its inhabitants emigrate from 1873-1924 (Amfitheatrof, 1973; Mangione & Morreale, 1992) to find work, they are bound to be scattered throughout the world. There should be little surprise that immigrants came to Indian Territory to work.

These immigrants, like all immigrants, did not randomly arrive in Oklahoma. There were social and economic factors that pushed them from their homes in Italy. There were also social and economic factors that pulled them to the United States and then Oklahoma. These push-pull factors and the networks that developed to keep them in Oklahoma or drive them out will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to address the issue of the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity of Italian-Americans in Pittsburg, Coal, and Latimer Counties of southeastern Oklahoma. The focus will first center on the history of the Italians in southeastern Oklahoma illustrating the rituals, traditions, and overall patterns of behavior in areas of employment, organizations, religion, festivals, education, family, friendships, foods, and their relationship to the maintenance of ethnic identity. These are areas addressed as indicators of ethnicity in determining assimilation (Alba, 1990; Crispino, 1980; Gans, 1979, 1982). An exploratory analysis using structural ritualization (Knottnerus, 1997) will be adopted in association with both symbolic interactionist and social constructionist theories. Structural ritualization is especially useful as a means of identifying rituals and traditions, and making the distinction of patterns of behavior over time. Symbolic interactionism introduces the negotiative aspect of human conduct as

humans build and rebuild their world around them in accordance to the physical phenomena they face daily. Qualitative methodologies will be integrated using both participant and unobtrusive observations. These methodologies will provide the means by which detailed data will be obtained, and a more complete picture and analysis of current Italian identification among these individuals in southeastern Oklahoma assured.

Significance of the Problem

As mentioned above, Italians in the Midwest and the Southern United States have rarely been studied, and certainly are not included in typical narratives of the lives of Italians in America. Their absence from historical and sociological research is glaring considering the vast amount of research apportioned to Italians on the coasts (Alba, 1985; Bean, 1989; Crispino, 1980; DeConde, 1971; di Leonardo, 1984; Gabaccia, 1984; Gambino, 1974; Gans, 1982; Mangione, 1980; Salmoane, 1996). The types of problems and antagonisms experienced by Italians in the Midwest and South could suggest their continued marginalization in aspects of American life. Alba (1985, 1990), Crispino (1980), Gans (1982), Johnson (1985), Mangione & Morreale (1992), Martinelli (1986), Roche (1984), Scarpaci (1980), Vecoli (1978) have demonstrated that Italians have long since been main-streamed into American life. There are still pockets of discrimination that aid in the marginalization of people of Italian descent in America such as the view that all Italians have mob connections. However, those of Italian descent are now able to exercise their rights as part of the white-anglo-saxon contingency in the United States.

While Italians and their descendants for the most part are no longer marginalized, their movement in the strata of the United States could be the basis for new research.

Italian communities that dot the Midwest and South have not and are not typically objects of research. Sociologists specifically have accomplished little research relating to these groups. Much of the work that has been done about Italians in these regions has been conducted by historians and nonacademics in Arkansas (Milani, 1987), Texas (Belfiglio, 1984, 1987), Wisconsin (Andreozzi, 1987), Nevada (Balboni, 1996), Alabama (Fede, 1994), Michigan (Moran, 1987; Sturgul, 1987), Minnesota (Vecoli, 1987), and Louisiana (Scarpaci, 1980). These works are typically brief with little analysis other than to state that the maintaining of ethnic rituals and traditions were all but gone due to small population bases from which they originated (See Vecoli, 1987a).

These same processes are ones in which sociologists should be interested. As Alba (1985, 1990) talks of the “twilight of ethnicity” of European ethnics, the Italians’ and many other European ethnic groups’ perseverance, change, and maintenance of their ethnic identity over the last 100 years are areas that sociologists could exhaust further. Theories in ethnicity research dealing with such things as assimilation (Barkan, 1995), symbolic ethnicity (Alba, 1985, 1990; Gans 1979; Waters, 1990), social constructionism (Kibria, 1997; Mach, 1993; Milligan, 1998; Nagel, 1994, 1996; Twine, 1996), labor market (Portes & MacLeod, 1996; Sorensen & Krahn, 1996; Waldinger, 1995), and negotiated order (Kourvetaris, 1990; Lee, 1980) are areas which could be utilized in sociology to paint a picture which could lead to greater understandings of the complexities of American society.

Theoretical Orientations

As one can see from a sample of the variety of areas one could study regarding

ethnicity there are indeed a multitude of theoretical foundations from which to choose and address. With this in mind the present study will focus on the subject of ethnic identity and its maintenance utilizing symbolic interactionism, using Mead's ideas on the interplay between self and society (See Mead, 1932, 1938, 1962, 1964, 1982). This theoretical orientation was continued through aspects of Blumer's work (1936, 1948, 1954, 1955, 1958), but also through Strauss and negotiated order theory (See Maines, 1977, 1982; Strauss, 1959). This will then lead to a discussion on the social construction of ethnic identity as these two theories lend themselves to each other. Structural ritualization, with its relationship to structure, and social constructionism provides additional insight toward explaining and understanding the maintenance of ethnic identity of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma.

The symbolic interactionist perspective is useful to my study because of its emphasis on the interactional relationship between the self and society. Symbolic interactionism from its earliest beginnings to its flirtations with postmodernism and critical interactionism has been a major source of information to help in the understanding of identity formation and maintenance.

Social constructionism with similar postulates as symbolic interaction and negotiated order, says that "the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people" (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). These interchanges among people create a world of reality that is *sui generis*. Therefore, when social constructionists study ethnic identity, they emphasize creative choices made by both individuals and groups, including how they define themselves and

others, who their antagonists are, how their antagonists define them, and the entire relationship of insiders and outsiders in the effort to control knowledge (See Merton, 1972; Nagel, 1994).

Structural ritualization integrates aspects of symbolic interaction, focusing on rituals (See Goffman, 1967), but also includes aspects of social constructionism. Therefore the 'fit' of this theory should provide grounding by integrating macro and micro levels of analyses, allowing for a more systematic explanation of the issues and maintenance of ethnic identity of the Italian-Americans in southeastern Oklahoma, thereby distinguishing itself from other more historical or ethnographical forms of analyses. In addition, the theory could be used as a means of identifying the so-called ethnic boundaries (See Barth, 1969; Nagel, 1994) that aid in identifying groups, such as language, which unifies some, while ostracizing others, creating a situation of isolation of some groups from others, hence the insider-outsider relationship.

The following work is organized as an inductive approach. It attempts to understand the common sense meanings and experiences of the participants of a social system. In this approach the researcher tries to understand and develop an explanation about the development, maintenance, and salience of certain social processes (Kellehear, 1993). My findings will appear in the sequence of an introduction, a literature review; research strategies, prelude to emigration, an account of different domains of interaction, and a discussion, with an epilogue which contains two theories that could possibly be used in future research.

Because this research examines the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity,

the literature review will begin by focusing on the contributions of symbolic interaction to the research on the self and identity. In addition, a brief review of social constructionist literature will lead into a discussion of external factors addressed by postmodernists. From there the review will focus on ethnic identity literature addressing recent trends from social constructionism to labor market theory. After this is a review of structural ritualization.

In the methodology chapter is a discussion of the methods that were used in this research. I used both participant and unobtrusive observation to get a more complete picture to discuss. Chapter Four addresses the historical background of Italians, and by doing so addresses factors that pushed Italians out of their country of origin. The remainder of the chapter addresses the 'Institutional Domain' of interaction discussing (1) employment; (2) organizations; (3) religion; (4) festivals; and (5) education regarding Italians in southeastern Oklahoma. Chapter Five addresses the 'Structural and Informal Domain' of interaction, discussing: (1) the family; (2) friendships; and (3) foods. Each domain discussed in each chapter are presented as separate vignettes with background information to compare with changes that have occurred in the movement from Italy to southeastern Oklahoma.

Chapter six begins the discussion and integration of theory as a means to explain the information in chapter five. Structural ritualization will be addressed using both symbolic interactionist and social constructionist orientations to provide the foundation from which a detailed explanation of ethnic identity formation and maintenance of southeastern Oklahoma Italians unfolds. A typology of the many domains of interaction

found in this study will be used as a means to further discussion on the topic of ethnic identity. The limitations of this research, and recommendations for further research will follow. As an epilogue, two new theories, conflictual structural ritualization and strategic ritualization will follow which could be advanced in further research on ethnic identity.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SELF AND IDENTITY

This chapter primarily focuses on the concepts of the self and identity with ethnicity addressed briefly. The notion of the self and identity are important instruments in discussing the ethnic identity of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma. The overarching negotiation between the self and the larger milieu (society) is an ongoing feature of ethnic life, but also represents the theoretical orientations of symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, and also structural ritualization. Therefore the understanding of these concepts is critical to the understanding of the research and explanation of ethnic identity formation and maintenance on this population.

To begin, a definition of the concepts of 'self', the 'self-concept', and 'identity' will be provided. Second, because of the vast array of literature on these concepts, a symbolic interactionist perspective will be addressed, focusing on three foundations from which symbolic interactionists explain the self and identity: (1) situational; (2) social structural; and (3) biographical or historical. Thirdly, a brief review of social constructionism will be provided integrating aspects of postmodernist thoughts on the self and identity and the construction of selves and identities. Included in this will be external factors addressing the problems of progress and its impact on the self and identity. Fourth, a review of ethnic identity will be discussed focusing mainly on social constructionist and labor market theories. From there, a review of structural ritualization will proceed.

Definitions

In Meadian thought, the self refers to “a process that arises when action is blocked and that involves taking the role of the other, imagining, planning, and selecting action. The self allows the individual to be both subject and object of his or her own actions” (Ashley & Orenstein, 1990, p. 481). This is achieved through reflexivity which emanates from the interaction of the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ (Mead, 1962, 1982).

“The self-concept can be thought of as the sum total of the individual’s thoughts and feelings about him/herself as an object” (Gecas & Burke, 1995, p. 42). This self-concept is made up of all the identities, values, beliefs, attitudes, motives, and life-experiences that make-up an individual, and how this individual defines him/herself (Gecas & Burke, 1995).

The self-concept is comprised of multiple identities. Identities refer to the various meanings attached to oneself by the individual and others (Burke, 1980; Gecas & Burke, 1995). These meanings can be both institutional, such as father, mother, or teacher. They can also be impulsive, such as loving irritable, or inquisitive (Turner, 1976). As such, identities can be thought of as the most visible and easily identifiable of the three concepts defined. The concept of identity (also referred to as ‘elementary selves’ by Mead, see Mead, 1962) helps in placing a location of an individual by observing relationships one has, the memberships in groups, behavior, and appearance (Stone, 1962; Strauss, 1959).

Similarly, ethnic identity is one of the multiple identities an individual is comprised of. The many identities or selves a person is comprised of are initiated, adjusted, and

negotiated with the physical and social phenomenon around them. Along with mother and father, an identity could also be 'Italian'.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives

There are three foundations from which symbolic interactionists build their explanations of self and identity which can be useful in studying ethnic identity: (1) situational, which focuses on the creation and recreation of the self and identity; (2) social structural, which focuses on the impact of structural features such as roles, groups, and institutions; and (3) biographical or historical, which places great emphasis on the interpretation of history and its impact on how parameters are defined regarding identity. All three perspectives utilize standard interactionist thought for deduction, that is, each perspective encourages that the viewpoint of the actor involved be taken into account. All agree that meanings are created and recreated through language, communication and interaction. All three also consider the belief that the self is reflective of the society in which it resides.

However these three do differ in substantive areas. The situational perspective is more reflective of the Chicago school of symbolic interaction whose proponents continually look at the processes involved in interaction (Becker, 1964; Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959; Stone, 1962; Strauss, 1991). Emphasis is placed on the definition of the situation as defined by W.I. Thomas (1969). In this view actors are continually involved in creating and recreating the situations and thereby creating and maintaining identities based on their definition of the social phenomena occurring in their realm of perception. Here you will find actors managing different situations through negotiating (Maines,

1982; Strauss, 1991), bargaining (Blumstein, 1973), role making (Turner, 1962), engaging in impression management (Goffman, 1959), facework (Goffman, 1967), and altercasting (Weinstein & Deutschberger, 1963). Because of this, identities become fictions, but become real in their consequences providing scenarios from which actors play their part. Foote (1951) stated that individuals have multiple identities and these serve as active agents which influence one's choices. In this sense, identities provide individuals with meanings, goals, and purposes in life¹. This is not unlike the same processes that individuals who have a strong sense of ethnic identity deal with in their daily lives, who through traditions and past oriented identities provide themselves with meanings, goals, and purpose.

The methodological approach for such a perspective is qualitative, relying heavily on participant observation (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1992) which was best suited for my research. For interactionists of the Chicago school, to understand the behavior and be able to explain 'how' something is occurring is best done by being a part of the scene that is being studied. Goffman's research (1959, 1961, 1963, 1967) reflects such a methodology. Goffman's abilities to infiltrate a setting, conduct interviews, but also have a keen awareness of the social phenomena occurring around him were his trademark (Brissett & Edgley, 1990). Like most Chicago school interactionists, Goffman was able to fight the systematic, theoretical driven research that is still the driving force in

¹

It must be stated that in the above types of situations in which actors manage, they are doing so interacting with the structures/processes around them. It is a continual negotiation.

sociology today (Brissett & Edgley, 1990).

In contrast to the situational perspective, the social structural perspective developed later at the University of Iowa (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). This perspective did not focus as much attention on the emergent qualities of human behavior as did the Chicago school, which created a contrast where this study is helped by a focus on more social forces, such as history, roles, groups, and social institutions². The emphasis was placed on more quantitative methodologies and the belief in a scientific measurement of self and identity. This was accomplished through what has been termed the *Twenty-Statements Test* (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954; Turner, 1976; Zurcher, 1977). In this type of method the researcher would ask respondents to continue the statement “I am . . .” based on the question ‘who am I?’ By doing this the researcher hoped to get at the self attitude that each respondent has of themselves and therefore reach the true meaning of what Mead was discussing in his works. While the *Twenty-Statements Test* does not directly relate to this study, the overall emphasis on social forces addresses more structural issues which relate to the pressures ethnics feel from both outside and inside the ethnic group.

Continuing the thought of the Iowa school, Stryker (1980, 1991; see also Stryker

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Meltzer and Petras (1970) were one of the first to make the distinction of separate schools of symbolic interaction. However, one must question whether they took the time to consider the entire body of the research of the Chicago school. As mentioned earlier, Blumer and many others conducted studies looking at many of the same issues attributed to the Iowa school. In addition Denzin’s (1992) discussion of still further a ‘California’ school of interactionism which directs a more critical interactionist approach ignores many studies conducted at the University of Chicago.

& Serpe, 1994) developed Identity Theory in which individuals have a hierarchy of identities which are tied to roles within the social structure (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Rosenberg, 1979; Stryker, 1991; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Stryker differentiated these identities on the basis of salience and commitment. The theoretical presupposition of this thought is that the greater one's commitment to an identity, the greater the salience. The greater the salience will directly influence the behavioral choices associated for the situation at hand (Stryker, 1980, 1991; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Stryker was attempting to make a connection between self and society by answering the question "Why is one behavioral option selected over another in situations in which both are available to the person?" (Stryker & Serpe, 1994, p. 18). Stryker's answer reflects the actor's social and personal costs that are involved in playing a role and having an identity. Strength of ties to other social networks and also interactional ties will influence commitment to identities, enhancing or detracting the salience of the identity. I have demonstrated hierarchical structuring of identities in another work analyzing dreams of individuals, as they dream of those who have died that were close to them (LoConto, 1998). Results suggest that individuals will continue to hold on to salient identities associated with individuals now deceased, as they are unwilling to give up these identity hierarchies. Likewise, those who have strong ties to ethnic identity will focus on social networks, interactional ties and a commitment to the past.

Related to this perspective, but a part of the Chicago School, are Strauss's views on identity and names (1959). Names act as a means of classification, therefore identity, and often have their influence from the past or tradition. Volunteer names reveal this fact

more so, however, the names given to individuals act as a means of classification and thereby define the situations for all those involved. Names reflect different status symbols within the group or society. According to Strauss this is part of the process in naming. When we name something, we define it, and we create boundaries in which the thing is confined. Similarly, being called “Italian” creates a definition of the situation in which certain actions become interpreted as “ethnic” rather than another classification.

The historical and biographical perspectives bring in temporal considerations at the personal and societal levels. The research is qualitative, typically relying on, but not restricted to historical analysis and in-depth interviews which were techniques I used for this study. The basic premise is to find how individuals make sense and derive continuity from their past to provide consistency and identity in the present (LoConto, 1998; Maines et. al., 1983; Mead, 1932, 1964; Strauss, 1995). This perspective within symbolic interaction is paramount when understanding ethnic identity. This body of research builds on the statements of George Herbert Mead (1932, 1964). For Mead, although he acknowledged a past and a future, it was in the present in which we find meaning. Mead stated that the past was not static. Rather, when individuals remember past events they bring with them into memory all the experiences that have occurred to them from the time of the remembered past event and the present in which they are remembering. What we see happening is the individual or group interacting with the past, as in any structure, negotiating to aid in the creation and recreation of meaning. Therefore the past is fluid justifying meaning in the present, as are all structures within society. The process of ethnic identity is then used by individuals and groups to establish a link with the distant

past or country of origin.

However, unlike mis-interpretations of Blumer's work which would have one believe that actors are in total control, Mead acknowledged the influence of structures, such as history on individuals and groups. Mead talked about 'specious presents' in which the beginning and ending of acts took place (1932, 1964). These acts would match side-by-side creating a continuous string of action in which the actors involved would move from one specious present to another. By do so, there develops a direction from which the actors move. "The order within which things happen and appear conditions that which will happen and appear" (Mead, 1964, p. 347). According to Mead, meanings are developed through this direction. During this direction, definitions are created to identify subject matter that is continuing. Upon defining phenomena, identities are established through these definitions. These definitions tell us who we are, and define the parameters from which to act. These parameters of actions create continuity between ethnic groups pasts, and their present. The action provides the continuities in everyday life that result in recreating realities and identities.

These recreations of the past serve a way to unite peoples, and creating myths that cultures buy into. This provides the many norms, values, attitudes and beliefs that make up a culture. These recreations help answer questions such as: "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" These are important for ethnic identification as finding meaning in life through ones past, and the past of those who share a similar identity. There becomes a shared consciousness or collective conscience in which all peoples of that culture go along with the myth. This provides a legitimacy of the myths recreated in the past. As

Thomas (1969) asserted that if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.

What we find in symbolic interaction then are the overriding themes of George Herbert Mead stressing the ability of the individual, but the influence of the structure. So, when looking at the three areas in symbolic interaction as discussed above, all three, the situational, social structural, and historical/biographical rely heavily on the aspect of negotiation in which individuals or groups continually negotiate through their daily lives attempting to find meaning and continuity, something that ethnic identification requires.

The Social Construction of Identity

The influence of George Herbert Mead can be found in writings typically associated with the school of thought known as 'social constructionism'. Underlying premises of identity, symbols, meanings, negotiation, and the creating and recreating of reality can be found in the writings of Berger and Luckmann (1966), Bond and Gilliam (1994), Mach (1993), Middleton and Edwards (1990), Sarbin and Kituse (1994), Searle (1995), Tonkin (1992), and many others. The use of the premises listed above are essential to understanding the ingroup-outgroup relations between ethnic groups and the larger milieu. The functions they serve are pivotal in understanding the ethnic identity of individuals and groups. As mentioned above, the identity of individuals and groups is complex, taking into consideration memories of the past, conditions of the present, and wonderment for the future (Mach, 1993). At both the individual level and the group level, identity is determined with ones relations to others and the context. It has to involve another object at which to base this determination towards. In addition, the

context is very important. It is another object to which individuals act towards. This is expressed best by Kluckhohn and Murray (1948) when they said that “every man is in a certain respect a) like all the other men, b) like some other men, c) like no other men” (p. 35). Therefore, as Mead and the symbolic interactionists have proposed, identity is a process based in action or interaction, placing emphasis on the dynamics of the relationship of the individual or group with others, and the context in which it occurs (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1932, 1934, 1964, 1982; Strauss, 1959, 1991).

From this point of view identity and ethnic identity brings with them a sense of boundaries, parameters, and classifications. These boundaries, parameters, and classifications are brought into the reality of situations through interactions with others. Others may of course be members of ones own group, another group, and/or the larger milieu. As Weber (1968) suggests when discussing these boundaries between the dominant and subordinate group:

The resulting social action is usually merely negative: those who are obviously different are avoided and despised . . . Persons who are externally different are simply despised irrespective of what they accomplish or what they are, . . . In this case antipathy is the primary and normal reaction. . . . this antipathy is not only linked to inherited traits but just as much to other visible differences. p. 385

Some have suggested that these classifications are part of the human condition, and that regardless of the specifics of the classifications, humans have a way of distinguishing themselves from others based on some form of classification (Mach, 1993). Mach continues this line of thought by suggesting that any form of identity has to involve power relations. These power relations aid in determining the structure of the interactions that are to occur and these structures will aid in determining identity, and the order in which

things are to occur.

This is similar to Merton's (1972) piece on the insider and outsider dynamic. The definitions are created by the dominant group, others then act toward the world around them in accordance with these preordained models of what lies around them.

Interpretation of the world is therefore related to these power relations which determine or strongly influence how one sees both oneself, and others (Elias, 1965; Mach, 1993).

Merton states that once these models become more firmly into place, they become 'functionalized' into society, and state what is normal and what one is to think.

Merton makes the distinction of insiders and outsiders in terms of types of knowledge, with knowledge functioning as a form of power. The insider doctrine as Merton posits can be seen in terms of monopolistic access and privileged access. The former being one of more power with outsiders having no access to the knowledge. In the latter, outsiders have access to the knowledge, but at a greater cost. These types of knowledge have been addressed in the conflict writings of Dahrendorf (1959), Marx and Engels (1970), Mills (1956), Michalowski & Bohlander (1976), Quinney (1970, 1977), Vold (1979), although not specifically by the terms mentioned above. Those mentioned above agree that those in power have knowledge that those of less power find themselves excluded.

The interesting aspect of Merton's thoughts are reminiscent of Durkheim's (1984) fears of increased heterogeneity, that is, organic solidarity, where diverse groups have their own set of knowledge, that is, specialization in the division of labor. This is a form of the system of knowledge, that is, society is comprised of diverse groups who have their

own sets of doctrines that are different and excluded from the doctrines of other groups. This is true even if the other groups have more power. Therefore, what could exist is a smaller group, an ethnic group, where their power base is small, where they have little access to the necessities of economic advancement. However, in their colony, neighborhood, or enclave, they may in fact be privy to types of knowledge such as language, the hierarchy of that group, access to goods, etc. that the insiders or the dominant group would not have access to. Hence we see a diverse arena in which given different situations and contexts, power relations will vary and classifications of identity will also.

This same type of emphasis is found now in studies of ethnicity. The current trends have been toward social constructionism in explaining ethnic identity. The focus is on the “ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures, . . . negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction inside and outside ethnic communities” (Nagel, 1994, p. 152). These social constructionist views could reflect choices that individuals make as any other identity in identity sets as they negotiate or create meaningful actions through the world around them (Alba, 1985, 1990; Gans, 1979, 1994; Waters, 1990). In addition, there can be outside pressures from the larger milieu to conform to societal expectations, placing emphasis on the differences (alleged or real) between the ethnic group and the larger milieu (Elias, 1965; Mach, 1993). Similarly, this research addresses the formation and maintenance of ethnicity against these pressures from the larger milieu through the maintenance of certain rituals or traditions which continue parameters that suggest the salience of the ethnic group and its group identity.

A social constructionist position, as is that of symbolic interactionists, is more tangible than past orientations with the emphasis on ethnic identity as something that is negotiated, created, recreated through a myriad of social phenomena that removes itself from behavior that is static and one dimensional. Instead, the picture is painted showing that ethnic identity is continually in a state of flux or process being shaped by their members and the world around them (Conzen, Gerber, Morawska, Pozzetta, & Vecoli, 1992; Nagel, 1994). This would tend to fly in the face of researchers who suggest straight or even bumpy line theories of assimilation who often argue the inevitable discontinuation of ethnic identity (See Crispino, 1980; Gans, 1992).

Nagel's (1994) analysis of ethnic identity as something comprised of identity and culture refers to these concepts as no longer 'prior or fixed' aspects of ethnic organization (See p. 153). She instead sees them as something emergent; revised and revitalized. Nagel suggests placing emphasis on the mechanisms used "by which groups reinvent themselves" (p. 153). This allows for analyses like the current study which addresses the processes involved in ethnicity. Prior studies have suggested that since there was intermarriage, religions changed, language disappeared, and different foods were eaten that people were less substantively ethnic (Alba, 1985, 1990; Crispino, 1980; Gans, 1979, 1992, 1994). However, now ethnicity is seen as something less associated with concrete criteria, but instead something more dynamic and fluid. An example appears in Bakalian's study (1991) cited by Nagel (1994):

For American-born generations, Armenian identity is a preference and Armenianess is a *state of mind*. . . . One can say he or she is an Armenian without speaking Armenian, marrying an Armenian, doing business with Armenians,

belonging to an Armenian church, joining Armenian voluntary associations, or participating in the events and activities sponsored by such organizations (p. 13).

This statement crystallizes what is occurring for many of the people of Italian descent in southeastern Oklahoma. What will be evident is that 'being Italian' is something negotiated by individuals and groups in different contexts and socially constructed providing meanings that substantiate the individual or group identity in the moment.

The social constructionist view on ethnicity appears to have its beginnings with the writings of Fredrik Barth (1969) who in his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* states there is a relationship of ethnic identity with the negotiation that occurs between individuals, the groups they belong in, and the larger milieu. What occurs, which is similar to both Blumer (1936, 1948) and Merton (1972), is an emergent form of ethnic identity that is ascribed, and negotiated, with meanings changing as situations and contexts change.

For ethnic whites in the United States, their choices of ethnic identity can be quite extreme and varied. One could be European, native American, white, various European ethnicities, or they can be regional within their ethnic group. This will greatly depend on the context with which one finds oneself. Someone of Italian descent could be of European descent in discussions revolving around power relations in the United States regarding who is a minority and who is not. They could be viewed as a native American by virtue of being born in the United States. Still others may see them as Italian or Italian-American in situations discussing nationality. And among other people of Italian descent there might be a distinction between regions such as, sicilian, neopolitan,

abruzezi, or pietmontesi. Ethnic identity can then be compared to other identities or self-concepts, as individuals negotiate through their daily lives viewing themselves in the looking-glass seeing themselves as others see them, and then reshaping that to match their perceptions they have of themselves.

Some areas that aid in shaping ethnic identity are such external factors as discrimination, as a collective of individuals are being identified as different from the larger milieu. While this distinction could be made collaboratively by both the collective and the larger milieu, or simply by the collective, it typically originates from the larger milieu (Aguirre & Turner, 1998). Therefore discrimination is exercised as the members of more powerful groups (larger milieu) deny members of other groups (typically defined by the more powerful groups, hence setting the parameters for ethnic identity) access to resources deemed valuable in that society. This could take the form of resource competition; otherwise known as economic discrimination. Ethnic groups may struggle for allowances to resources within the larger milieu. In the case of Italians and Italian-Americans, although their representation is now reaching parity with people of English and German descent (See Alba, 1985, 1990), through most of the twentieth century they have been under represented in top administrative positions. Earlier barriers were such things as language, few vocational skills, and little education. Organizations would develop (See Salmoane, 1996) such as the Sons of Italy to aid Italians to adjust to their troubles. This also would create parameters encouraging their ethnic identity. Religion has served as a factor, as ethnic groups may or may not have similar religious practices and faiths as the larger milieu. The early history of Oklahoma and Indian Territory found that

there were few Catholics (Brown, 1974). This isolation led to much early group solidarity throughout the state, and was especially noticeable in the schools as children were often discriminated against for being Catholic (See Chapter Five for further discussion on discrimination). The act of immigration is a tremendous factor in placing oneself in the social structure of any society. As a stranger to the new society with different customs, languages, and culture in general, in American, one is typically categorized as an outsider and placed in positions of lower status by the larger milieu (Aguirre & Turner, 1998). For people of Italian immigrants who came to the United States between 1873 and 1924, they typically did not see themselves as Italians until they arrived here and were labeled by the larger milieu. Even to this day, many people of Italian descent make regional distinctions that those Americans of non-Italian descent do not acknowledge. A group's history is necessary to negotiate through especially if living amongst the group, thereby being identified as one, and also exhibiting any of the traits identified as being part of that ethnic group. The discrimination factor, for instance with powerful political figures linking people of Italian descent with historical crime families frames the ethnic identity of some. To escape these trappings is difficult. Often times history is far stronger than our own abilities (Mead, 1964).

Postmodernism and Identity

Related to social constructionism is the social psychological avenue in which postmodernism has taken into its realm of research. People like Kenneth and Mary Gergen who are categorized as both social constructionists and postmodernists have done research which has created a bridge between the schools of thought. Social psychological

postmodernism has emerged as “the securities and constraints imposed by tradition have substantially receded in modern societies, presenting individuals with greater choice, freedom and possibilities for action, as well as new threats to the self in the form of impersonal bureaucracies, depersonalizing communities, and alienating work conditions” (Gecas & Burke, 1995, p. 57). Many of the modernist writers attempted to deal with these changes describing the self in terms as the ‘ambivalent self’ (Weigert, 1991), the ‘minimal self’ (Lasch, 1984), the ‘impulsive self’ (Turner, 1976), and the ‘mutable self’ (Zurcher, 1977). All of these attempts at addressing changes in the self reflect the same problem, that is an inability to make the self genuine. There becomes a realization that the self has slowly lapsed away. We are left with nothing but images and surfaces that are continually being replaced by other images and surfaces. In this way, the researcher becomes aware that the identity being observed is conditional, relational, and fleeting. Gergen (1991) addresses these conditions which can be readily applied to the current state of ethnicity in American when he says:

The postmodern condition more generally is marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality—to be accepted as legitimate expressions of the true and the good. As the voices expand in power and presences, all that seemed proper, right minded, and well understood is subverted. In the postmodern world we become increasingly aware that the objects about which we speak are not so much “in the world” as they are products of perspective. Thus, processes such as emotion and reason cease to be real and significant essences of persons; rather, in the light of pluralism we perceive them to be imposters, the outcome of our ways of conceptualizing them. Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The center fails to hold. (p. 7)

There soon becomes a great emphasis on the presentation of information. As in the judicial court system of the United States, whoever can tell the most convincing story will win the case. Those individuals who can portray a reality that is convincing and entertaining will continue to sway or dominate the scene. This stream of thought is similar to symbolic interactionists and social constructionists as there is a continual creation and recreation of meanings through interaction. However, with postmodernists they place emphasis not on reality so to speak, but on such things as illusions, imposters, and cons. With a profusion of scenes occurring simultaneously and continually, actors find it difficult to get a grip on societal attitudes, but rely more on contextually oriented ones. If this view is the more accurate, ethnic identity would need to be created and recreated contextually, and reinforced by both structural factors and individuals. By doing this, there would appear to be more order and structure to that identity, and not ambivalence as has been suggested (See Turner, 1976; Weigert, 1991; Zurcher, 1977).

Considering the postmodernist, social constructionist, and symbolic interactionist view, it would appear that Gans (1979) and Waters (1990) are useful to this study because ethnic identity is similar to other identities, and is one more choice in the hierarchy of identities individuals carry with them and make. Gans referred to this as 'symbolic ethnicity'. Symbolic ethnicity emerged at a time during the ethnic revival of the 1970s³ (Alba, 1985, 1990; Gans, 1979, 1994). Gans sees current ethnicity, specifically that of European ethnics as an ethnicity of last resort. Due to continued intermarriage, the

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In Oklahoma a revival of sorts began to take place with Italian ethnicity with the beginning of the Italian Festival which now draws over 20,000 people each year.

destruction of neighborhoods, suburb living, the diaspora of the overall population, individuals are now in a position in which they actively select their ethnicity (See Waters, 1990). It is not something attributed to them by others. In this sense, ethnic identity is no more salient than any other identity, and carries with it the same transitory nature.

Therefore ethnicity is selected as an identity when it serves a useful purpose, or more or less, when it is convenient. This occurs in such places as festivals. With the continued intermarriage of European ethnics, the break-up of European ethnic enclaves, and the inevitable acquiring of non-ethnic names, ethnicity serves as an extreme subjective experience more and more on an individual level and not group or societally driven. Gans sees periodic revivals of ethnic identity as isolated incidences which occur from time to time. This leads him to see ethnicity not in a straight line, but instead a bumpy line, with an eventual decline of ethnicity as a whole (1992).

Related to this is a much more formal form of ethnic identity. That is a rational choice based on economic survival or exploitation. Ethnicity for profit. This is “where social, political, and economic rewards and punishments are associated with particular ethnic categories” (Nagel, 1996, pp. 23-24). These can be in the form of ethnic niches, the ethnic enclave economy, and the ethnic economy.

An ethnic niche is an entrepreneurial occupation that lends itself to self-employment (Boyd, 1996). An ethnic enclave economy is an arrangement of ethnic-owned businesses that provide opportunities for self-employment, and help members of the ethnic group to avoid being trapped in occupations in the secondary labor market (Bailey & Waldinger, 1991; Boyd, 1996; Portes & Jensen, 1989; Sanders & Nee, 1992).

An ethnic economy is a private economic sector in which a minority has a controlling ownership stake (Light and Karageorgis, 1994). These types of economic arrangements, enforced typically by estrangement from the larger milieu create parameters that allow for continued ethnic identification by the member, the group one is associated with, and the larger milieu.

Similar to symbolic ethnicity, although in a much more apologetic format, is the “invention of ethnicity” version (Conzen, Gerber, Morawska, Pozzetta, & Vecoli, 1992). The invention of ethnicity sees ethnicity as something that is never static, therefore to state changes as signs that ethnicity is dwindling, or that groups are in a downward spiral are misguided. As Conzen et. al. state, ethnicity is “a process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories” (pp. 4-5). They see ethnic groups continually in a state of flux, creating and recreating their identities, adjusting to the continuing flow of a changing world around them. Because ethnic groups are allowed to continue in this process of negotiation and renegotiation, Conzen et. al. make tremendous allowances for fluctuations in ethnicity, but they also allow for revivals, and new cultural traditions to develop. They do not see individuals as being passive, but active agents in their identities. This runs consistent with symbolic interactionist, social constructionist, and postmodernist views of actors negotiating their realities (Blumer, 1969; Gergen, 1991; Mach, 1993; Maines, 1982).

The focus then for Conzen et. al., due to negotiation, is on the relationship of the ethnic group with the dominant culture. They see these relationships as being

'competitive, cooperative, and conflictive'. Yet, they see these relationships as essential in creating and identifying ethnic groups in America as the larger milieu is often responsible for defining the ethnic group as such initially (Conzen, et. al., 1992; Mangione & Morreale, 1992; Vecoli, 1995). In essence then, there is little difference between this view and most of the others in this review. The emphasis is on the relationship and interaction between the larger milieu and the embedded group (ethnic group) and their members. It is with this thought that the theory of structural ritualization be introduced as a means to aid in the further understanding of ethnic identity formation and maintenance. What should emerge is an explanation of ethnicity as something that is both in a general state of decline, yet yields times of resurgence, but also is changing and redefining itself, adjusting and adapting to both the internal and external forces at play both within such groups or collectivities and also the larger milieu.

Structural Ritualization

Structural ritualization addresses the processes involved in group formation within a larger context. The theory looks at how ritual, that is, the routine, is of central importance in determining how a social group maintains a form of organization in the larger milieu. Ritual, often referred to in terms of 'traditions', will in part help maintain a group's cohesiveness in the face of enduring pressures from the larger environment. In the case of ethnic identity, structural ritualization is being utilized to aid in explaining how ethnic groups, specifically Italian-Americans in southeastern Oklahoma, negotiate and renegotiate their ethnic identity in the face of pressures of living in "The Heartland of America."

When discussing ritual, the emphasis is on patterns of behavior which may be both formal and informal in nature. These patterns of behavior may be defined in terms of 'ethnic' behavior, as Conzen et. al. (1992) would say, by attending ethnic festivals, eating ethnic foods, or maintaining the religion that is identified with that ethnic group, such as Catholicism with Italians. These patterns of behavior or rituals, therefore do not need to be identified as only formal or informal, as rituals take place in both milieu. Therefore, ritual can be equated with a more general term: 'routine' (Knottnerus, 1997).

Structural ritualization focuses on ritualized symbolic practices (RSPs), which refers to "social behavior in which people engage in regularized and repetitious actions which are grounded in actors' cognitive maps or, to use another phrase, symbolic frameworks" (p. 260). This is a general definition which allows for informal ritual behavior that was mentioned above, and includes the more routine RSPs at both the cognitive and noncognitive levels.

RSPs are enacted in specific contexts which are referred to as "domains of interaction." The domain of interaction provides the context that facilitates types of RSPs such as an ethnic festival would provide the context, from which, in an Italian case, would allow for games such as 'morra', or 'bocce' to be played, Italian food to be eaten, the Italian language to be spoken, and strengthen ties to friends of similar descent. Similar domains of interaction could be church, the type of employment, the dinner table etc. The "domain set" would indicate the totality of domains of interaction which RSPs are or can be acted out. For this study, the domain set would constitute Italian ethnic identity.

RSPs are ranked much like Stryker (1980, 1991) and others' (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Rosenberg, 1979; Stryker & Serpe, 1994) in which certain identities are preferred over others, and individuals create contexts (domains of interaction) in which these identities can emerge. Likewise, certain RSPs have more significance to groups or individuals. The eating of Italian food, going to Catholic Mass, speaking the Italian language, and being a hard worker account for RSPs that are highly regarded as markers of Italian ethnic identity in southeastern Oklahoma.

The first assumption is the rank of RSPs is determined by the sum of salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and RSP resources. Salience is "the degree to which an RSP is perceived to be central to an act, action sequence, or bundle of interrelated acts" (p. 262). Repetitiveness is the "relative frequency with which an RSP is performed" (p. 262). Homologousness is the "degree of perceived similarity among different RSPs" (p. 263). It is important to clarify that homologousness refers to RSPs that act to attain or refer individuals or groups toward the same ideal, that is, in this case, ethnic identity. RSP resources are the "materials needed to engage in RSPs which are available to actors" (p. 264). Of course these resources are dichotomized between human and nonhuman resources.

The second assumption states that the rank of an RSP shapes the actors' cognitive maps in the social or embedded group. That is, depending on how the RSP is ranked, it will influence how individuals see their world around them. If an RSP is highly ranked, such as the Catholic religion, we would expect to see values, beliefs, and attitudes that reflect the high ranking RSP. In essence, from a symbolic interaction point of view, by

understanding the rank of importance of an RSP, researchers would be able to relate to the individuals or groups definition of the situation.

The third assumption states that these cognitive maps will shape or influence the behavior of the individuals. In other words, once these RSPs become internalized, the individuals will act out this behavior to the point of becoming habitualized. And these practices will become reflective of the entire group, such as the art of making 'choc' beer (Brown, 1980). Although most Italians made wine, the wine did not last all year, so there needed to be a supplement to the wine. Italians began making 'choc' which is a symbol of Italian ethnicity around southeastern Oklahoma. For years, the art of making 'choc' was habitualized for the Italians living there.

The fourth and fifth assumptions are regarding isomorphism and nonisomorphism. These state that the greater, or more inconsequential the RSPs of the larger social environment will influence whether or not the social or embedded group will be more like the larger environment, or less like them with regards to their own RSPs. If the larger environment has a strong solidarity which had RSPs that were highly homologous, then we would expect that the social or embedded group would be more like the larger environment. If these RSPs were not homologous we would expect to see a more pluralistic larger environment, and possibly a badly organized one. For Italians in southeastern Oklahoma, the differences between themselves and the larger milieu will be accentuated as the RSPs, whether they be different in form, will be defined differently by the Italians and the larger milieu, therefore being viewed as behavior specific to either group.

As is plainly illustrated by the above assumptions, structural ritualization

addresses the impact of ritualized practices of the larger environment on the social or embedded group. As Knottnerus states:

When ritualized practices and symbolic patterns in a social environment are strongly accentuated and presented to the inhabitants of an embedded group they instill “schema-driven action repertoires” which are variations of standard practices. The greater the impact of these ritualized practices on actors the more similar or isomorphic will be their immediate social world and the wider environment with which they are located. When, however, actors are presented with ritualized practices that differ from each other, the structure of their embedded group and the wider milieu will be less similar. (pp. 259-260)

This approach should be valuable in understanding the relationship of ritual and the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity in southeastern Oklahoma. Using structural ritualization I will address the issues of influences of the larger milieu on the ethnic group, but also address the negotiative factors involved with personal and group decision making as they adjust and adapt to these influences around them. The following chapter addresses the research strategies used for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH STRATEGIES

This research attempts to understand the relationship of the larger milieu and the embedded group/ethnic group, that is, those individuals of Italian descent in the coal counties of southeastern Oklahoma and the relationship of rituals and traditions and how these individuals have lost, left behind, maintained, and/or created their ethnic identity. By understanding this relationship I hope to get a better grasp of how these processes shape ethnic identity. Qualitative methods are best suited for this endeavor. Qualitative methods study phenomena in their natural environment and make sense and interpret meanings people bring to themselves within social contexts (Blumer, 1969; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Stanfield II, 1994; Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Because qualitative research is multi-method in focus involving an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter, triangulation will be attempted in this study. Triangulation implies “a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). It is a time when the research deploys whatever methods, strategies or empirical materials which are at hand. If new ways are developed or discovered, they are employed. Triangulation attempts “to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question . . . it is an alternative to validation . . . adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation” (p. 2).

The present study is an integration of two larger methods of qualitative analyses: unobtrusive and participant observational methodologies. Unobtrusive observation uses

such methods as: (1) written and audio and/or visual records: (2) material culture (physical objects, settings and traces); (3) simple observation; and (4) hardware techniques (cameras, videos, etc.).

There are particular advantages to unobtrusive observational analyses.

Unobtrusive observational analyses allows the researcher to assess actual behavior, that is, the subjects under study are typically not manipulated in any form or fashion. The researcher is typically safe from harm as there are no repercussions of being identified as a possible threat to the population. Because the data is typically static, that is, in the form of documents, there is a likelihood of repeatability. Unobtrusive methods are non-disruptive and non-reactive. Typically the data collected are easily accessible, inexpensive and a good source of longitudinal data (Kellehear, 1993).

There are also disadvantages. There is the possibility of distorting the original record and the risk of decontextualization. The researcher may miss intervening variables. There is a greater risk of selective recording. There is a reliance on a single method of collection of data, and there is limited application range. All of these disadvantages suggest that, due to the distance involved between the subjects and the researcher, interpretation of the data is more subject to inaccuracies (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979).

Under unobtrusive observation, the types of methods used in this research were visual methods, written archival data, visual archival data, and simple observations. Visual methods were first used by anthropologists to document different races and provide further evidence to support the theory of evolution. The saying of “pictures don’t

lie” evolved from this method. However, it was not until Bateson and Mead (1942) used visual methods in their study for the book *Balinese Character* that visual methods were brought into the mainstream of the social sciences. Visual methods are the “recording, analysis, and communication of social life through photographs, film and video (Harper, 1994, p. 403). This is a method that requires long, in-depth research. Theory is indispensable for this type of method. Photos were taken of families, geography, architecture and social events to demonstrate to the reader the climate of change influencing identity in Pittsburg, Latimer, and Coal Counties. Photos will be organized conveying a message related to theories of identity associated with time and space (Gergen, 1991; Klapp, 1969; Mead, 1932, 1964). That is, the impact of time and space on the rituals and traditions which influence the ethnic identity of the Italian-American population in southeastern Oklahoma.

Of course the use of visual aids to impart information to the reader provides partial truth of what is occurring in the region of study. It is being used to augment and fill out a picture of a people. Visual methods fall under the critique of postmodern critics who say the photographs must be interpreted by someone, and that different photos will conjure up still further images of subjective thoughts of the reader. Therefore it is imperative that I integrate the photos into the theoretical explanations of the social phenomena observed (Harper, 1994) and compare them with the results of the other methods to insure consensus on meanings attached to the photos.

In addition, written archival data and visual archival data were used for this research. Some sources of the written archival data were the local newspapers in

southeastern Oklahoma, and Oklahoma City, the United States Census, the Pittsburg County Genealogical society, minutes and other documents from various Italian organizations, and local unions, mining reports, mining studies, the 33rd Congress of the United States, and the multitude of work done on Italians and Italian-Americans in general.

Visual archival data were obtained through the archives of the University of Oklahoma which have several archives dealing with areas of mining and immigrants in Oklahoma from the turn of the century, including a file of some 55 photos titled "Italian miners in Krebs." In addition 24 photos dating back as far as 1882 were made for this study by Stephen DeFrangé of Krebs, Oklahoma who collects artifacts from the area. Mr. DeFrangé also provided photos of the towns of Castiglione and Carovilli in the Molise region of Italy from which many of the residents of Krebs originally came.

Simple observation was conducted in the course of traveling to and through the three county area. My wife and I ate at all the Italian restaurants in the area, and also some of the other restaurants. I walked the streets, and the neighborhoods, visited graveyards checking to see both who were buried there, but also to see if segregation was practiced in the graveyards. In addition I visited various monuments, such as the Miners Memorial in McAlester, Oklahoma, and museums in both McAlester and Krebs looking at many of the old artifacts from the mining days. I attended three festivals associated with Italians in the area. While these could possibly be thought of as participant observation, the Italian Festival was observed with complete anonymity as opposed to the other two festivals in which, especially for the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Festival I was

treated more like a guest of honor. The Italian Festival attracts over 20,000 people and most of the people of Italian descent in the area have nothing to do with it. Therefore I did not know anyone at the festival. However, the other two festivals were run by the people I was interviewing and had interviewed.

Participant observation on the other hand allows the researcher to describe what is going on, who or what is involved, when and where things are happening, and how they occur and why (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). In participant observation the researcher utilizes direct observation of social phenomena and in-depth interviews.

The advantages and disadvantages of participant observation nearly mirror those of unobtrusive observation. For the participant observer there is always the concern over safety as the researcher can be involved in situations in which there may be harm done. While there seemed to be little fear of being in a dangerous situation, some interviews were in the backwoods of the three coal counties, and thoughts of *Deliverance* ran through my head. More problems involve the chance the researcher will be a disruptive influence to those being studied and change their behavior. However, because of the amount of time spent in the area (nearly 10 months), while behavior may have been changed initially, most of the people opened-up and let their hair down. Also, because of such a long period of study, research can be, and was expensive.

The advantages of participant observation are: less probability of distorting data; less probability of decontextualizing or ignoring intervening variables; not being restricted to having selective recording, nor having a limited application range. In all, participant observation may be said to compensate for the weaknesses of unobtrusive

research to provide ample room for triangulation to elicit a more detailed picture of what is occurring in the social phenomena being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

There are some features to participant observation which can be especially relevant to social research. Participant observation has a special interest in understanding human meaning and interaction (Blumer, 1969; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). This interest can be viewed through participant observation from the viewpoint of the insider.

Through participant observation, knowledge can be obtained of the views, attitudes, and values of the population under study (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). Participant observation is located in the here and now. The research is occurring in the moment. Participant observation also stresses the importance, the interpretation, and understanding of human existence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is open-ended, flexible, opportunistic and requires constant redefining. Participant observation utilizes an in-depth approach. It requires the participant to establish and maintain relationships with subjects. Finally, in participant observation the researcher is using direct observation and other methods for gathering information such as in-depth interviewing and case studies.

When interviewing is used to reconstruct the reality of a social group, individual respondents are treated as sources of information. Either the researcher asks directly about general issues or interprets individuals' responses in such a way as to throw light on attitudes, situations, and patterns. Interviews are a rare time in which "both parties behave as though they are of equal status for its duration, whether or not this is actually so" (Benney & Hughes, 1956, p. 142). It is a form of interaction so common, yet so taken-for-granted. For this research, whether it took the form of structured, semi-

structured or unstructured; whether it was with one person or ten; or whether it took place in two hours, or over the course of several months, these interviews were the cornerstone of this research.

Interviews take one of three basic forms, structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, and can be done both with one individual or in groups of two or more (Fontana & Frey, 1994). With structured interviews researchers assume they already know the very thing the interview is designed to uncover (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). Interviewers ask a series of pre-set questions with a limited set of response categories (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Semi-structured interviews include a pre-set list of questions used in the field, which direct the respondent toward the material of interest. For this research some form of semi-structured interviews were utilized using a set questionnaire (See Appendix 1) which attempts to make known the RSPs and how these practices foster or hinder the maintenance of ethnic identity. All questions are open ended to allow the respondent to feel free to talk and elaborate on the material in question. The hope was to eventually be able to gain enough information to design a more concise questionnaire with forced-choice items. This would allow future quantitative research using factor analysis for checking reliability and validity across the four factors of salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and RSP resources.

Unstructured interviews were also used for this study. This is partly due to the immense variety of the people being sought out, and their cultural backgrounds (generational time, their personal histories, and region of their ancestors) (See Table

One)⁴. In unstructured interviews it is assumed the interviewer does not know in advance what questions are appropriate to ask. The answer to this dilemma develops out of the social context of the interview and the rapport the interviewer establishes during the interview (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). This way the interviewer will become more sensitized to which questions are more relevant and meaningful to the respondent (Blumer, 1969; Schwandt, 1994). Therefore, not only do meaningful questions emerge from this process, but meaningful answers as well (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979).

Group interviews, although not initially part of the type of interviews expected, were conducted most exclusively. Typically thought of as ‘focus groups’ and used primarily in marketing research and political party research, the format follows that of interviews with one individual, only with several individuals simultaneously. This process has the advantages of being less expensive; it could generate more data; is often more stimulating to respondents; aids in recall; and is much more cumulative (Fontana & Frey, 1994). By these same accounts, the “emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, the group may be dominated by one person, the group format makes it difficult to research sensitive topics” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365). However,

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Many of the individuals I interviewed were over 65. This created problems staying on task for the semi-structured questionnaire. Partially this was due to questions still in exploratory format, that is, never truly pretested, so questions at times seemed rather irrelevant to what the respondents wanted to talk about. Therefore, for many of the people, at different times, interviews were unstructured with respondents telling me everything they knew about their family, their town (in Italy and Oklahoma), and every tradition, event, and piece of the puzzle they could think of.

for this research many of the people willing to be interviewed would invite others to participate, hence creating a snowball type sample. These group interviews were the most common and were advocated by myself. This format did aid in the recall of others and created a much more down-to-earth atmosphere.

In addition to interviewing, participant observation was used. What I attempted to do is find the relationship between words and deeds by learning this populations' definition of the situation. Formal and informal features, processes, rituals, traditions, patterns of behavior, and common denominators that characterize their view and situation were observed. By doing this I was often placed in positions in which one could say that I went "native" in the collecting of data.

Fontana and Frey give a brief synopsis of what the interviewing process should involve which includes⁵: (1) Understanding the language and culture of the respondents; (2) deciding on how to present oneself; (3) accessing the setting; (4) locating an informant; (5) gaining trust; (6) establishing rapport; and (7) collecting empirical materials. I went into this research assuming that I knew what the language and culture would be of the respondents. Being of Italian descent and growing up surrounded by people of Italian descent I assumed I would understand much of the culture before I began the research. While this is partially accurate, I am now unsure whether my knowledge of the group was based on my own experience or on reviews of the literature on the Italian/Italian-American cultures prior to the research.

⁵

This is not in the order they stated, however they also gave a disclaimer as to the order, elements, and combinations of such.

The presentation of self that I brought with me into this setting was again based on my family history. Assuming as I did that 'all Italians are the same', I felt that I could act like myself, remembering all the lessons I learned as a child on how one was supposed to act. Therefore, it was important to be polite, yet gregarious, hugging, kissing the cheek, speaking with my hands, never saying 'no' to any food or beverage and, most importantly, remembering my family history. This proved to be of great use as nearly all respondents wanted to know my family history prior to telling me about theirs.

Thirdly, my wife and I went to St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Krebs for a Saturday Mass. I watched the parishioners carefully, noticing the hierarchy that was quickly evident in the town. The following week I called the priest of the church who is Vietnamese. I explained to him what I was doing. I asked if I could talk with him face-to-face to get some history of the church. He quickly told me that he was not Italian and had only been at St. Joseph's four years. He said that many of the parishioners were Italian and knew far more than he did. I asked him if he could introduce me to some of them. His response was to give me the telephone number of Nick Finamore. This allowed me to access the setting and locate an informant. I called 'Nick' the next day and told him what I was doing. He was leery of some stranger calling, but he continued to be polite. When I mentioned that in 1996 I talked with Giovanna Massaro (an Italian immigrant who came to Krebs in 1908), he replied "Jenny?" Nick then became quite at ease and asked questions on how she was doing. After that, he asked me to call him in a week to set-up a time when I could come visit. By name-dropping I was able to gain some trust.

Establishing rapport came quickly over a bottle of home-made wine, vintage 1967, at the coffee table in the kitchen. My familiarity with my family background, knowledge of Italian-American history, the stereotypical Italian look (olive skin, brown hair and eyes), and interest in telling a more complete story allowed Nick (who is 72) and I to become good friends. At that point his wife Ernestine joined us as did Noah 'Pug' Rich (Onofrio Ricci), a good friend of Nick. Pug had this nickname (which will be discussed later) because his face was flat and looked somewhat like a Pug dog. They then introduced me to Angelo Scarpitti, who told me more about the Italians in the coal counties. What I thought would be an introduction to an entire network of individuals resulted in four relationships with people I now considered to be close friends, with no leads. I could not get these four individuals to introduce me to others.

At this point I decided I needed to be more aggressive and thought a mail-out to as many people of Italian descent in the area would be helpful. I went to Southwestern Bell and picked up a local telephone book. I went through the telephone book and found every name I thought sounded Italian. I found a total of 222 names that had addresses. I wrote a letter (Appendix 2) and mailed a copy of the letter with a recipe for 'pasta e fagiole' (Appendix 3), with a form (Appendix 4) and a stamped envelope for them to mail-back to me. The addition of the recipe was to aid in breaking the ice. My hope was that these individuals would view me more as a person they might relate to⁶. Sixty-eight

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The recipe was helpful as several people wrote thanking me for the recipe; gave me some of their own recipes; and also made comments of how they ate that when they were younger.

came back 'return to sender'. A letter from the Krebs Post Office politely told me that all the people in Krebs had post office boxes, therefore the Post Office did not deliver mail to their homes. Five letters came back with people writing that the person I was trying to contact was dead. Two wrote back stating they were not of Italian descent. Of the 147 delivered, there were approximately 25 responses (17%). The reason for the ambivalence (approximately 17%), is that several people would show up with their letter without my knowledge of their coming at group interviews. In all, 60 people were interviewed. Most occurred in homes, with one occurring in church, one in a fast-food establishment, and one in a hotel lobby. Everyone was very helpful, pleasant, and provided significant insight into the history and way of life of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma.

Table 1
Number of People of Italian Descent by Type of Ancestry, 1990

<u>Type of Ancestry</u>	<u>County</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>Pittsburg</u>	<u>Latimer</u>	<u>Coal</u>	
Single	1,051	149	88	1,288
First	1,613	214	99	1,926
Second	334	103	62	499
Total	2,998	466	249	3,713

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Oklahoma.

Population Under Study

The focus of this study is on the people of Italian descent in Pittsburg, Latimer, and Coal Counties in Oklahoma. According to the 1990 United States Census (See Table 1) there were 3,713 people of Italian descent living in the three county area. Of

those 1,288 were of single ancestry, 1,926 listed Italian as their first ancestry, and 499 listed Italian as their second ancestry. While Pittsburg County has the largest population of people of Italian descent with 2,998 - Latimer County has 466, and Coal County has 249. In addition, my attempt was to interview 50 individuals for this study. Instead I interviewed 60 individuals, and turned down several more. The reason was due to redundancy. By the time I had interviewed the thirtieth person I found myself hearing the same stories. I often found myself telling individuals more about their own history than they were telling me. I finished the last of the interviews I had agreed to and that left a total of 60. A breakdown of the people interviewed can be found in Table 2.

Table 2
Characteristics of Respondents Interviewed

<u>% Italian Descent</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>n</u>
100	= 24	Catholic	= 45	Female	= 30
75	= 17	Protestant	= 15	Male	= 30
50	= 15				
25	= 2				
0	= 2				
				<u>Age</u>	
<u>Generation as American</u>				15 - 24	= 3
				25 - 34	= 3
First	= 3			35 - 44	= 23
Second	= 24			45 - 54	= 1
Third	= 23			55 - 64	= 6
Fourth	= 8			65 +	= 24
None	= 2				

Research Questions

The following research questions provided the framework for the present study.

The aim was to explore the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity of people of Italian descent in southeastern Oklahoma.

1. What is the history of the people of Italian descent in the three county area?
2. How has life changed since World War I for those of Italian descent?
3. What are the domains of interaction which frame the context of ethnic activity?
4. What are the most prevalent Ritualized Symbolic Practices (RSPs) in existence in this population?
5. How have these RSPs changed?
6. What RSPs have ended?
7. What RSPs are still the same?
8. What is the relationship of the RSPs of the Italian-American population to that of the larger environment? That is, what are the forces at play which may influence continuation or termination of ethnicity?
9. How can the four factors of: salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and RSP resources be measured?
10. How is ethnic identification used as a device by an individual or group to establish a link with the past or country of origin?
11. How does ethnic identity define parameters of actions that create continuity between the past and present?

Reliability and Validity

Reliability with any qualitative research is always suspect (Adler & Adler, 1994; Fowler, 1988; Fowler & Mangione, 1990; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). Using triangulation

through several methods helps in maintaining reliability and validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As with any qualitative study, it is important that I have described the methods for this study in a fashion to allow for replication.

Limitations

The limitations fall under two broad categories: (1) time and money; and (2) the amount of time between immigrants arriving and their descendants relating information to the myself. The first limitation is always a consideration when conducting participant observation. The amount of time needed to gather enough information is considerable. The nine to ten month period of data collection was minimal. During the summer people began asking how long I was going to be doing this research. My initial responses were the early fall. This began to change to responses of 'maybe two years'. Then finally I began telling people that they may as well understand that I was going to be part of their lives until I died. Nevertheless, because of the amount of time in this study, the amount of money spent was tremendous. Three hours driving from Stillwater to Pittsburg County was tiring, and during the heat of the summer of 1998 it was taxing on the car. In one particular week in July I drove approximately 1800 miles costing approximately 55 dollars in gasoline, ate out 8 times at an approximate cost of 75 dollars and made several long distance phone calls which cost approximately 15 dollars. This week was common for the months of June, July, and August.

The second limitation was trying to gather historical information from individuals who were two or three generations removed from their ancestor who emigrated to Oklahoma. Relating valuable information regarding pre-World-War I was difficult as

they could not tell me much of that time period. However, this did allow for the gathering of information about the post-World War II period. In addition, it became apparent that after about 30 interviews that I was telling the people I was interviewing more about their family history than they were telling me.

Ethics

There are six areas which are a concern for those doing research, especially conducting more in-depth research: (1) the privacy of the subjects; (2) consent of the subjects; (3) confidentiality of the subjects; (4) protecting the subjects from harm; (5) cheating; and (6) negative use of the research by the researcher or others (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). The first four points are interrelated. All persons and/or families interviewed were given a statement of confidentiality which ensures that if individuals wish to remain anonymous they will be (See Appendix 5). Family names are used only as they appear in public records, and all respondents were informed about the nature of the research. In fact, people were so aware of the research that they were introducing themselves to me at the Mt. Carmel Celebration asking me how the research was going. One couple in particular were inquiring about the research, however when I told them the study was on the Italian population their interest ended.

Point five, that of cheating is not a problem. Cheating would entail the doctoring of data. The nature of this study is qualitative. There is an abundance of data available to choose from. Point six however is a problem. There is never any certainty of what others may do with one's research. I have attempted and will continue to try to avoid hurting anyone with this research.

The following chapter begins with a brief historical description of life in Italy prior to mass emigration. This will provide a background for understanding some of the factors that pushed them from their lives and homes in Italy. In addition, five institutional domains of interaction (employment, organizations, education, religion, and festivals) will be discussed seeing differences in these domains over time.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS, PART 1

The following chapter discusses two important factors of the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity regarding Italians in southeastern Oklahoma. First, the historical factors which provide a background to understanding the Italian population and the influences that 'pushed' them away from Italy are considered. The divisions between regions in Italy and the depressive economic conditions encouraged nearly a third of their population to leave between the years 1873 and 1924 (Cinel, 1991; Mangione & Morreale, 1992). Second, this chapter focuses on what are deemed the institutional domains of interaction, that is employment, organizations, religion, festivals, and education. These domains provide a context from which an analysis addressing the differences in the rituals and traditions of Italians in Oklahoma can occur.

Prelude to Emigration

Like any immigrant group, to understand their place in American society, one must also understand some of the antecedents in the home country. What is now Italy is a land marked by continuous internal conflict. Except for the brief period from the third century B.C. to the third century A.D., Italy has been the site of foreign invasion and/or political fragmentation (Crispino, 1980; Romanucci-Ross, 1995). What is now recognized as the country of Italy did not have its beginnings until 1861 when Victor Emmanuel II, king of Sardinia, declared the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy. At that time Italy was separated into eight different states, where all but Piemonte were under foreign rule or the rule of the papacy. The goal of the *risorgimento* was to remove

all foreign rulers and establish a truly Italian governed republic (Mangione & Morreale, 1992). By 1870, with the secularization of church land, the *risorgimento* was successful in unifying Italians politically, although not socially.

Southern Italians who were used to foreign rule thought that with unification their lives would improve as they experienced greater autonomy. However this was not to be the case. Northern Italians dominated the government. Soon uprisings and revolts became common. Francesco II, former King of the Two Sicilies, in alliance with the papacy helped finance a rebellion in southern Italy. Peasants began rebelling against the same government they helped to instate. It took nearly five years and 100,000 troops to curtail the uprising (Mangione & Morreale, 1992). The end result was a continuation of the divide that had developed over centuries. As one unknown Italian statesman said in 1870 “although we have made Italy, we have yet to make Italians” (Mangione & Morreale, 1992, p. 32).

An analysis of Italy or Italian immigrants and their ancestors always needs to understand the divide that exists in the different regions of Italy. The land in the southern part of Italy is not good soil which makes it difficult to grow crops. In the early years of unification there was an absence of waterways. This created catastrophic effects as strong winter storms would produce landslides, wasting away what little topsoil was available. While those in the north knew that waterways would improve the economic and social situation in the south, by 1921 only 8% of the artificial waterways in Italy were in the south. Because of this, drinking water was rare, with most villages relying on rain water to drink. Those that had wells bottled drinking water for sale. In addition, an inferior

form of water was also sold which was to be used for such purposes as washing, however, consumption of this water led to the spread of trachoma, an eye disease which prohibited thousands of emigrants from admittance into the United States. Famine was common as was cholera. Malaria was a serious threat and Italy was known as the most malarial area of Europe. Even as late as 1904, malaria killed 20,000 Italians annually. Industry was not quick to develop and the development of roads and highways did not alter the overall misery experienced in the south. In addition, the sheer isolation of the area from the rest of Europe and the continual foreign influence over centuries created different languages, dialects, accents, foods, saints, customs, and histories (Crispino, 1980; Mangione & Morreale, 1992; Vecoli, 1995). As early as 1848 northern Italians were afraid to invest in the south for fear of not being understood (Finzi & Bartolotti, 1990). In addition, only 2.5% of those from southern Italy, spoke Italian. What had developed in Italy was a land of strangers.

After unification, northern Italy implemented legislation that benefitted the areas north of Rome. At this time the amount of immigration coming from Italy, specifically the south, began to increase at an alarming rate, while those from the north slowed down. In fact of all those who emigrated from 1873-1924, 25% were from Sicily, and 85% were from the *mezzogiorno* (Gambino, 1974).

When Italy unified as a nation, the 1848 constitution of Piemonte was used as the model for the new national constitution which favored those in the north. This left southern Italy with little or no say in the government they helped to create. They had overwhelmingly voted for annexation anticipating more say in the newly established

government. The new government increased taxes and military presence in the south with the troops given orders to shoot anyone bearing arms. What was once hatred for the Spanish and Bourbons was now directed to the north.

In Sicily, more antagonism developed. Stories were circulating of Sicilians killing soldiers and policemen, burning them alive and selling their flesh in the marketplace. Although these stories were fiction, Sicilians were soon viewed as cannibals. Executions of men and women were occurring in the streets of Palermo, Alcamo, and Racalmuto. Military personal were instructed to arrest anyone who was of military age or had the face of an assassin (Mangione & Morreale, 1992). For five years there was civil and class guerilla warfare in the south. To make matters worse, every male was required to serve in the military for seven years. This upset many southerners who felt that they were to give their lives for a government that did not want or respect them.

To Leave or Not to Leave

This was the backdrop for the ensuing mass emigration. Centuries of political corruption and foreign intervention left the people of Italy, specifically the south, distrustful of everyone outside their village. Governmental policies that were hoped to be helpful only continued the plight of these people. Inevitably the end result was *la miseria*, life that served no purpose other than to suffer. This was the setting from which more than a third of the Italian population left, even though Italians, specifically southern Italians were “as attached to their soil as an oyster to its rock” (Amfitheatrof, 1973). Even into the 1860s there appeared to be no signs of a mass emigration. Labels such as “home loving people,” where southerners were “an apathetic lot, hopelessly fatalistic,

hardly the sort to stray from what they conceived as their preordained way of life” (Mangione & Morreale, 1992; pp. 67-68) were used to describe the *contadini* and *popolozzi*.

On the one hand there was the view that Italians, specifically southerners were tied as one with the land, and on the other they seemed to be in what might be described as a Marxian false consciousness with folk beliefs that the ‘meek shall inherit’ the earth. These folktales highlight these differences as southern folktales lean more toward life and death, and the struggles to survive compared to northern Italian folktales which focus on a variety of topics, including romance, war, and spirits (Calvino, 1956). With this sort of mentality in the south, it seemed impossible that class consciousness would emerge in the form of mass migrations with 4.5 million moving to the United States.

A new law that changed the mentality of the people, was one allowing citizens to travel any and everywhere. The importance of this ruling allowed Italians to travel outside of their village and region. Prior to that Italians seldom left their village, minimizing their knowledge of the outside world. To be allowed to travel any and everywhere was a landmark. When the first migrants wrote back to the village of their life in their new surroundings it began to stir feelings of possibilities ultimately leading to the emptying of entire villages in the south.

These legislative advantages in the north created havoc even among those in the northern peasant class. A Lombardy peasant stated eloquently what was probably the sentiment of Italians throughout the south by the 1870s:

What do you mean by a nation, Mr. Minister? Is it the throng of the unhappy?

Aye, then we are truly the nation. . . . We plant and we reap wheat but never do we eat white bread. We cultivate the grape but we drink no wine. We raise animals for food but we eat no meat. We are clothed in rags. . . . And in spite of all this, you counsel us, Mr. Minister, not to abandon our country. But is that land, where once cannot live by toil, one's country?

An immigrant spoke of how conditions were before he left Italy for the United States. It is a telling tale of what life was like for many Italian peasants.

It was unbearable. My brother Luigi was six then and I was seven. Every morning we'd get up before sunrise and start walking about four or five miles to the farm of the *patrunu* - the boss. Many times we went without breakfast. For lunch we ate a piece of bread and plenty of water. If we were lucky, sometimes we would have a small piece of cheese or an onion. We worked in the hot sun until the late afternoon, then we had to drag ourselves home. We got there exhausted, just before sunset, so tired we could barely eat and fell asleep with all our clothes on. If we complained that the work was too hard our mother - God rest her soul - would say, "And who is going to give you something to eat?" And life went on this way day in and day out, until *si vidiva surci viridi* - "we began to see green mice."

By the 1870s it became apparent to some in the Italian government that the emigration that was occurring was reason for concern. A member of the Chamber of Deputies named Ercole Lualdi stated "Do not delude yourselves into thinking that these people are leaving in search of riches. They are leaving in tears, cursing the government and the *signori*."

By 1870, some towns had already lost half their population through emigration. Younger males were leaving to avoid military service. Lualdi was concerned that if the trend continued with the young men leaving that there would not be enough workers to help Italy participate in the industrial revolution. His views were ignored and more continued to leave. Throughout the 1870s statesmen from all regions of Italy warned of

what was occurring. Yet, the belief was that emigration was a sign of a healthy country, not an impoverished one. Numbers show that annually during the 1870s, 117,596 Italians left for foreign shores. The majority of these were farm laborers. By the end of the nineteenth century, 5.3 million Italians had emigrated⁷, which was close to a half million more than Italy's population growth during the same period.

Italian authorities still did not understand the magnitude of what was to befall them. Discussion revolving around the debate of the masses that were leaving Italy centered around whether to legally control the amount of emigration making it illegal, use propaganda, or provide economic opportunities to allow them to stay. Inevitably the government found that they should use propaganda to help divert emigration. Therefore, stories abounded of the horrors of America. People starving, dying, experiencing ill health were common tales. However, the government found certain comfort feeling that the worst of the lower classes were the ones who were leaving. So with this element leaving Italy, social, economic and moral improvements would be easier to implement.

Because only two percent of the Italian population were eligible to vote in the early period of their government, the status quo remained with larger proportions of the economy going toward their own interests and escalating the antagonism between the north and south. Southerners would not go quietly along with the policies of the northern government which would have them pay more taxes proportionately.

Soon the padrone system began to take hold, as agents for companies in the

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According to Italian records, approximately 58% of those who emigrated returned. This figure is consistent regardless of the country Italians emigrated to (See Cinel, 1991).

United States were enticing young men to come to *l'America* where they were promised jobs, money, homes, and a better life. During the latter third of the nineteenth century this system paid dividends in bringing hundreds of thousands to the United States. But by 1900, the majority of Italians came because they had family and/or friends in the United States who were helping them. This small fact, in and of itself, may aid in the explanation of ethnic identity. That is, if there are many family members and friends from a specific geographic location living together in a foreign country there is the likelihood of stronger ties to their traditions and their country of origin developing.

Inevitably two government acts occurred which put a stop to Italian immigration to the United States : (1) the changing of American immigration laws with the Reed-Johnson Immigration Act of 1924 which essentially put a halt to southern Europeans immigrating; and (2) the emergence of the Fascist regime which in 1930, innacted laws which made it difficult for Italians to leave the country.

So, here was Italy: a country that had a varied history, with influences from countless invasions since the neolithic period, a country that was ruled by outside influences for centuries, and the animosity toward outsiders that developed because of this. People were born, grew-up and died learning different cultures, histories, folktales, traditions, foods, values, attitudes, norms, and beliefs. They were different people. The overall history of what is now Italy continued to unite the population at some level to some ancient heritage. To a great degree this was possible due to the subjective belief in this phenomena.

However, once unification was complete, regional biases influenced policy

decisions further alienating the people who were to unite. Faced with decisions to either stay and starve to death or try to find another way in another land they left to forge a new life for themselves and effectively change the future of their families forever. Parents would say goodbye to their children as they left the confines of the villages that were the homes for centuries of their families. Whether alone or with siblings, friends, or their entire families, these emigrants came to the United States with various thoughts of what they would accomplish in this new land. When letters would arrive from America, they typically were read in the *piazza* where the towns-people would gather to listen. Afterwards they would tell stories of what they were going to do when they too left for *l'America*⁸. Once in the United States some would stay a short time while others ventured back and forth, sometimes for years between Italy and the United States. Some came not knowing what to expect nor where their futures would lie, and others came believing they would soon be Americans. In every case, these Italians were to face a world of change and create some of their own.

Institutional Domains of Interaction

The changes that were to take place for Italians would come in a variety of ways and places. Acting out their ethnic identity in the form of rituals and traditions could be found in a variety of contexts or domains of interaction. These domains provided and continue to provide sources of ethnic identification that help the continued formation and maintenance of ethnic identity observable in Italians in southeastern Oklahoma. In keeping with the spirit of structural ritualization, the remainder of this chapter is

⁸ Interview with Stephen DeFrange, August, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

organized in terms of institutional domains of interaction. Institutional domains of interaction are domains at institutional order interaction. That is, in this domain we find structured interactions governed by more formal positions, rules, and norms. They are typically stable, institutionally controlled, with large numbers of individuals. What follows is a discussion of the changes over time of the five institutional domains of interaction: (1) employment; (2) organizations; (3) religion; (4) festivals; and (5) education.

Employment

What was the Choctaw Nation from 1832 to 1907 was free of any type of consistent business or industry prior to 1870 (Van Horn, 1939). This relatively minor fact was to play a major role in the evolution of the mining communities of southeastern Oklahoma and the relative depression or recession the area has been in since 1921. In 1870 coal was discovered and quickly mines were set up in North McAlester. The companies that were in control of these mines were owned by the railroads which had and were in the process of laying track in and around the Indian Territory. The mining of coal was easily removed by rail-car which led to efficient means of turning the raw coal into dollars.

These mines were not set-up with long term plans in mind. Therefore conditions in the mines were treacherous and led to many deaths. The mines were operated with a minimum of machinery and capital. The sole object was often to get the coal as cheaply and quickly as possible. This provided a method of business that was based on quick profits, rather than developing the mines thoroughly for larger production at a later date.

Miners often had to be on their knees and also stand in water while mining. This led to miners getting what was referred to as 'miners knee', which is water on the knee. These conditions in the mines led to many premature deaths due to black lung disease, asthma, accidents, the crippling effects of broken bones, and working hour after hour hunched over. Mining conditions in Indian Territory and eventually Oklahoma were more dangerous than in any other mines across the United States (Ryan, 1932, 1935; Van Horn, 1939). These conditions were the result of this attitude of short term investment and maximum profit, that is, get the coal with the least amount of investment. This attitude permeated the entire coal mining business. The cost-effect analysis demonstrated that human life was not worth as much as getting maximum profits (Van Horn, 1939). Therefore their rationalization for mishaps and deaths in the mines reflect one of disconcern. An informal observation of the reasons for deaths in the mines demonstrated miner error, and never poor working conditions. The argument was such that if the miners would take the necessary precautions, there would be no problems in the mines. Any other types of events which led to miner deaths were freak accidents which were inherent in the mining industry.

The coal mines in Indian Territory took advantage of the depression of 1873 in the northeast. With many miners out of work, the coal mining companies targeted the miners of the northeast to come work in Indian Territory (Brown, 1980, Ryan, 1935; Van Horn, 1939). Wages were comparable, and the cost of living was lower. Many of the skilled miners traveled to Oklahoma. They were mainly American, English, Welsh, Scotch, and Irish and were skilled craftsmen who took pride in their work. They readily

took notice of the poor working conditions in the mines. Taking pride in their work and concerned for their own safety, the miners solicited the owners for improvements to the mines (Van Horn, 1939). When these improvements did not occur the miners quickly found reason to begin work stoppages trying to encourage the owners to aid in the mining process. The owners rarely committed to improving conditions. It was easier to hire cheaper labor.

In addition, the experienced American, English, Welsh, Scotch, and Irish miners were used to working in cities such as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They were not used to living in the rural Midwest in which there was little to do other than work. In Indian Territory mining communities were typically developed away from populations. Because there was no efficient way of traveling miners were forced to live where they worked⁹. A typical community included rows of houses, generally two and three room shacks built by the companies, and a community store which allowed workers to purchase their supplies (Ryan, 1935). All other buildings were owned by the company and everything was built on leased land from the Choctaw Nation. Rent was deducted from wages. Wages were typically paid in scrip, and therefore only exchangeable at the company store where prices were generally higher¹⁰.

As the economy improved in the northeast and miners became distraught over both working conditions and social conditions in Indian Territory, they moved back to the

⁹ Interview with Noah Rich, August, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

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These sentiments were expressed by nearly all those interviewed when asked about community development in the coal counties.

northeast. This left company owners in Indian Territory with two problems: (1) a high demand for coal; and (2) not enough miners to mine the coal. They decided to recruit labor from southern and eastern Europe. The rationale was that these men would be willing to come to America and work for less (Ryan, 1932, 1935; Van Horn, 1939). This was especially true considering that many of these men who came did so out of necessity, not desire (Crispino, 1980; DeConde, 1971; di Leonardo, 1984; Gabaccia, 1984; Gambino, 1974; Mangione, 1980; Salmoane, 1996). Coal mine companies felt that these individuals would be willing to work and be grateful for the opportunity to come to America. As Tony Yohe said of Italians “They’d kiss your hand for a job¹¹.” For the Italians, the *padrone* system came into play in the late nineteenth century. Brokers (the *padrone*) acted as middlemen between companies and prospective workers. They would search out immigrants both in the United States and Italy promising them consistent work and money needed to afford the luxuries of life. They originally were attracting people to come to Indian Territory from the big cities of the northeast, but gradually were recruiting people from Italy.

Italians did come zealously to work the mines in Indian Territory. The first Italians arrived in approximately 1874 and were northern Italians¹². By the late 1870s

¹¹ Interview with Anthony Yohe, August, 1998, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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This information comes from the 33rd Congress. However, one person interviewed had said he found a document that stated there were Italians and Germans in what is now Krebs, Oklahoma in 1860. He did not know what purpose there would be in their coming to Indian Territory at that time. As mentioned above, there was no industry prior to the mines.

and early 1880s many southern and eastern Europeans were arriving to work the mines. By 1890 two-thirds of the miners were foreign (Ryan, 1935; Van Horn, 1939). For the American, English, Welsh, Scotch, and Irish miners, these new miners were a tough lot with which to deal. They would work for less which made it difficult to strike for higher pay. In addition, because they were willing to work for less, and because they were willing to come to work, this provided the owners greater opportunities to exploit the miners further and not give in to their demands.

The southern and eastern Europeans who came were unskilled, therefore they made difficult working conditions even more hazardous. Knowledge of the English language was negligible therefore compounding communication problems in the mines. Divisions developed between groups of miners often along ethnic and racial lines. Typically a system developed where the unskilled laborer would do more of the physically demanding work. Southern Italians in particular during the early years were kept from doing the more dangerous work because they were felt to be too 'nervous a race' (U. S. Congress, 1911).

Mining organizations such as the Knights of Labor came into being in 1882. They reached their zenith in 1894. By 1888, 800 miners belonged to this union. American, English, Welsh, Scotch, and Irish miners dominated the Knights of Labor, and although they did not encourage southern and eastern European miners from joining, they did not necessarily want them to join. Their rationale was that southern and eastern Europeans did not know the English language. Otherwise, they said they had no animosity toward these miners. However, behavior based in animosity was often the

norm (See section on discrimination later in this chapter).

Whatever the problem the western and northern Europeans had with the southern and eastern Europeans, these problems ceased in times of trouble. Conditions of the mines often resulted in death and strikes. Mines were often 500 feet deep and damp and chilly. One was always aware of “the squeeze.” The squeeze is when the rock above begins to crack and pop, moving and settling. When one heard the squeeze, it was time to get out of the mine¹³. One of the earliest mine disasters in Oklahoma was also one of the worst of all time in American history. That was the explosion in mine number 11 in Krebs. The Kingfisher Free Press reported on January 14, 1892:

At the time 350 men were in the shaft, most of whom were waiting for the cage to take them out, and the foot of the shaft is one mass of dead bodies. Eighty-five came out by an old entry and forty-two were saved by the shaft, most of whom are more or less burned and bruised, and half will probably die. One man climbed out of the shaft 550 feet deep by working from bracket and was saved. The scene as reported by those who entered the shaft was horrible. Limbs, arms and headless bodies were stacked in a pile and only five out of twenty-four could be identified. Six small boys who attended the fans were mutilated so badly that their own parents could not recognize them and they will be buried side by side.

In times such as an explosion or strike, all miners and their families would typically be united in a common battle against the forces of death or the owners of the mines. What was noticed about Italians was their willingness to buy into the socialist attitudes of the more experienced miners. Italians in particular were ready and willing to organize to remedy the oppressive conditions. Although they had a reputation for being apathetic

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Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, Noah Rich, and Nick Finamore, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

while in Italy (Mangione & Morreale, 1992), these miners were willing to put their necks on the line for a better way of life and a future. Therefore, Italians gained some respect for their work ethic and allegiance to the miners in general. In addition, although Italians were often not allowed in the Knights of Labor, they did organize amongst themselves. Italians created new organizations, fraternal organizations which aided in the betterment and adaptation of Italians in the new world. Such development took place throughout Indian Territory in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

One cannot truly understand what conditions were really like without reading the reports of the time as they describe the physical and social conditions in the coal counties. Consider the backlash from the companies when the miners went on strike in 1894. This was reported in *The Daily Oklahoman* on June 21, 1894:

Details of the horrible state of affairs which exists in the mining region of the Indian Territory have been brought to this city by the evicted miners. The stories of oppression, hardship and cruelty to themselves, their wives and children by the deputy marshals and federal troops are similar to those which sometimes come from Siberia. Many of the men were thrown bodily from their homes, their wives and children beaten and bruised, and their furniture and household effects destroyed, after which they were loaded into box cars like cattle and shipped out of the Territory. The stories told of brutality by the men from the Hartshorne district are revolting to the extreme. August Smith, one of the Hartshorne miners, says troops came to his house and arrested him. They would not allow him to put on his shoes and coat, and refused to let the family eat breakfast. The soldiers threw out his furniture into a wagon and then asked Smith's wife if she wanted to go. "No," she said. "I have worked for this home and if I leave it you will have to shoot me." Smith said, "The house was built by me and belongs to me, though I have no legal title to it. The Commander ordered the privates to put my wife and five children out . . . four or five seized her and dragged her to the wagon and threw her head foremost into it. We were then carted to the station and put into a box-car with dozens of others." Most of the miners and their families were thrown out in a driving rain and no time was given them to dress or eat breakfast. In one instance a family of four was evicted near Alderson. The wife of the miner was struck over the head with a Winchester and severely maltreated by the

soldiers. The woman was enceinte at the time, and while being carted to the station gave premature birth to a dead child. She is in critical condition and may die.

It must be mentioned here that this particular strike of 1894 was downplayed because most of the striking miners were of foreign stock. During the strike of 1898 - 1903 mining companies brought in several strike breakers to keep production going. The newspaper *Capital* reported on July 6, 1899:

At four o'clock this afternoon a train of four coaches loaded with Negro miners from West Virginia went down on the M-K-T; their destination being Coalgate, where they will be put to work immediately in the mines . . . While there is no apprehension of trouble it has been decided expedient and wise to take precautionary measures, and sixteen deputy marshals will be left at Coalgate a few days until matters begin to run smoothly. The importation was a genuine surprise to the miners and people of Coalgate.

Therefore, what we see is a disregard for human life by the mining companies. Miners were tools without faces who brought the mining companies money by risking their lives to grind out a way of life for themselves and their families. Instead, the miners were treated to a hostile environment, as mining companies set up operations in ways that discouraged miners from uniting against them by advocating that no one racial or ethnic group be over-represented. However, after the strike 1898-1903, miners could see with pride that their communities were getting sidewalks, improved roads, water and sewage systems, and gas lights. Differences of race, religion, language, and customs still divided the communities into diverse social groups, making unity of action difficult, however many of the barriers had been overcome after the strike of 1898-1903.

Not all those who lived in the mining counties were miners. The miners needed

food, clothing, and the other necessities of living. Towns, such as Hartshorne, Haileyville, Krebs, and McAlester developed to meet these needs. These towns developed simply because of their close proximity to the mines. Others began to develop independently of the mines. Italians, especially in Krebs began to assert themselves in other lines of business¹⁴. Nick Barone and Barney Tarochione bought a meat market; S. Domenico Giacomo and Vito Barzellone were founders of the Giacomo Wholesale Business. Paul Saffa was a promoter of general merchandise and delivered groceries and feed to the mine towns. Other notable Italians who engaged in the grocery business were Frank Duca, Dee Rich (Ricci), Joe Michael, and Steve Testa. The DeFrangia (Di Frangia) brothers had a machine shop and the Lovera's opened up a bottling plant that sold 'Soda Pop'.

In some of the other towns Italians did well outside of mining. In Coalgate, in the first ten years of the twentieth century, the International State Bank had as their directors Italians Louis Bonino, Joe Flor, and John Gentilini. In McAlester, L. Pistocco opened a grocery store in 1897. In Wilburton there was A. Maggi Grocery; Carignano Grocery was owned by Constantino Carignano; Joe Fioretti owned Fioretti Grocery; and Dominic Giacomo owned the Big \$ Gas House. In several of the towns in the coal counties the Antonelli's were opening markets and bakeries. They were one of the few Italian

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Several of the people interviewed mentioned these other professions that Italians engaged in. A document that proved useful was *Pittsburg County Oklahoma* (1997), produced by The Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc., published by Henington Industries, Inc.

families or individuals who came to the coal counties not to mine. The Antonelli's continued a tradition of grocery stores and bakeries that dates back centuries in Italy¹⁵.

After the strike ended in 1903 miners could see that things were changing for the better. Gradually there were improvements in working conditions, albeit small. Salaries were rising, and miners were encouraged to contact family and friends overseas to encourage them to come to Indian Territory. Pittsburg County increased from a population of 37,677 in 1907 to a population of 47,650 in 1910. According to the Krebs *Banner*, on July 13, 1906

The demand for coal is growing every day. The mines are running with forces almost up to the old standard, yet they are all behind with orders. Bumper crops in Oklahoma and Texas have stimulated the market. At the close of the strike there was no storage coal in the entire southwestern country. The retail trade, manufacturers and railroads were in need. Before this demand was noticeably relieved, the threshing season came on and orders commenced to flow again. It is thought, by some of the operators, that many foreigners who left the fields at the outbreak of the strike will return from alien shores by August. With them will come others. *It is estimated that every miner who returned to the old country will come back accompanied by at least three others of his nationality*¹⁶. This will assist materially in meeting the demand for fuel, but even then there will be room for hundreds of coal diggers . . . The McAlester *Capital* says that 1,000 miners can find employment in Indian Territory immediately and in thirty days there will be room for five hundred more.

The padrone system fell off quickly in Indian Territory. Several people I interviewed whose families came to Indian Territory prior to 1900 said there were family members or friends here. Originally southern Italians had heard of the jobs in Indian

¹⁵ Interview with Minnie Appling, February, 1998, Wilburton, Oklahoma.

¹⁶ Italics added.

Territory from the Sunnyside Plantation in Arkansas¹⁷. After that, they heard from family members. When the Carano family arrived in 1882-1883 they were able to leave children with other members of their home town in Italy of Carovilli¹⁸. Several other families, such as the Ranallo's, Data's, Buffo's, Salto's, Echelle's, Lalli's and others, from various regions claimed that their ancestors came to Indian Territory because they had family and friends in the area¹⁹.

The peak years of Italian immigration to Indian Territory were from 1902-1907. During these years there was much more of an influx of Italians from the south, especially the Abruzeze and Molise regions, with others from Sicily, specifically Calascibetta arriving²⁰. In addition, others continued to arrive from the Piemonte region, specifically from Castellamonte. Most that mined in the coal counties of Oklahoma were Piemontesi.

In the early years of Oklahoma, mining in southeastern Oklahoma expanded with many large mines and small mines developing. Towns were booming. Wilburton was planning for 20,000 citizens shortly as they organized the '20,000 Club' in 1911. These people were organized to help pave the way when Wilburton would reach the 20,000

¹⁷ Interview with Giovanna Massaro, October, 1996, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹⁸ Anonymous interview, July, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹⁹

Interviews with Tony Mattioda and family, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

²⁰

Interview with Frank Maisano, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

mark. At the time they had approximately 6,000 citizens. But the expectation was that as the mines boomed, other industries would develop. A college was opened, and Wilburton felt as though their future was bright. In Pittsburg County more and more miners were moving away from the mining towns and into the 'suburbs' of McAlester. Gradually other options were becoming available. Grocery stores became common on nearly every corner. Other shops, opera houses, appliance stores opened. It appeared that the coal counties were experiencing an economic boom that allowed for many of the modern conveniences of life, including running water and electricity. Although World War I was to slow down immigration and the growth of mining, wages steadily rose (Sewell, 1997).

During the period prior to World War I Italians were very land hungry. Tony Yohe stated that he still pays property taxes on land the size of dinner tables²¹. Marilyn Pistocco said that Italians were "very property conscious. . . . they would buy a lot here, a lot there, two or three lots here. They would go to court, and they would get it for back taxes²²." "Land was precious" another said, as Italians were responding to the conditions they experienced in Italy with absentee landlords²³. In Hartshorne the Cuzzolino's (Cuzalina) and the Clemente's bought up everything they could which led to the

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Interview with Anthony Yohe, August, 1998, Tulsa, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

²² Interview with Marilyn Pistocco, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

²³ Anonymous interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

statement that “we own the whole damn block²⁴.” Most of the people of Italian descent that remain in Krebs own land. This led to having rental property which was and is very common. Some of the immigrants became so adept at buying and selling property that one gentleman, who married an Italian immigrant said that he was always unsure where his home was going to be when he got off work because his wife had at least, on two occasions, sold their house and moved their belongings before he got home²⁵.

Others such as Marrietta Salto would take in boarders. The belief was that if they owned the land they could make ends meet²⁶. They were afraid of returning to conditions that were similar to what they left behind. They knew they had the ability to grow food. This mentality would play a significant role for those Italians who came to the coal counties early enough to make enough money to buy land. It was also to play a significant role in the loss of an entire generation of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma. The war years were the last of the great times in southeastern Oklahoma.

The good times were not to last. With the advent of World War I, coal was in demand, but other fuels were making advances into the economy of the coal belt. After World War I there was an increased demand for coal, and salaries were high, but the writing was on the wall. Continued bad management of the mines by the owners led to more strikes. Soon miners were opening small independent mines called ‘dog holes’

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Interviews with Frank Cuzalina, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

²⁵ Anonymous interview, July, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

²⁶ Anonymous interview, August, 1998, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

which had greater ability to adapt to the lower demand for coal²⁷. The railroads were going to gas and electricity was becoming increasingly used. All of these things influenced a dramatic downswing of the three county area. By 1923 four of the five banks in Coalgate closed. For Oklahomans in the coal belt the depression hit nearly a decade before the rest of the country. A fact that Noah 'Pug' Rich would have us remember:

All the Italians came over from Italy trying to make a better life for themselves and their families. Instead, what they found were hard times just like in Italy. Here they had it almost as bad as in Italy²⁸.

Ryan (1935) gives ten reasons why there was an end of coal mining in the area:

1. Increasing competition between large and small mines.
2. Substitution of fuel oil and natural gas for coal as a fuel in many industries and in many communities.
3. The strike of 1924-1927 and the introduction of strike breakers.
4. Bank failures in the coal fields.
5. Strife among union leaders for office.
6. Destruction of the union and contract conditions.
7. Lax enforcement of the state's mining codes.
8. Working out of easily available coal in the coal fields, and the transfer of production to newer areas.
9. Increasing use of labor-saving machinery and methods for saving fuel among the mines' customers.
10. Opportunities for employment in other industries.

Ryan (1932, 1935) also states that many of the miners could see the writing on the wall early in the 1920s and began looking elsewhere for employment. This led to the mass exodus of an entire generation in the 1920s. The coal companies were having a

²⁷ Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

²⁸ Interview with Noah Rich, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

difficult time employing people. In 1905 the Osage Coal and Mining Company in Krebs employed 677. In Wilburton, the McAlester Coal Mining Company, the Great Eastern Coal and Coke Company, the McAlester Coal and Mineral Company, The Eastern Coal and Mining Company, and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Coal Companies employed 796. In 1932, the Osage Coal Company and Munford Coal Company employed 50 men, and there was nothing in Wilburton. By the 1930s, unemployment in some of the towns in the coal counties was above 90%.

As the mining industry increasingly became more and more weakened by the economic conditions and the ineptness of their leaders, people of the mining communities had to deal with their situations as best they could. Mass exodus was found especially among the youth. When looking at mining reports of accidents in the mines from 1920-1945, one clear observation can be seen: the miners were getting older. As the 1930s continued, the miners were no longer being replaced by new younger workers. An entire generation moved to places like Detroit, Chicago, and Akron. There was not a new generation to step into the mines. There were two reasons for this: (1) there was not enough work in the mines; and (2) the younger generation had already moved away in search of consistent work.

Those that stayed did so because they had property²⁹. The older generations had saved, bought land, homes, and made a decent life for themselves. They knew how to

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Interview with Rose Cattania, July, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

hustle to save a penny and many worked in small privately owned mines which furnished enough money to make ends meet. Among those who opened their own small mines were Giovanni Scarpitti, John DiGiacomo, two of the Maffeo's and others who owned and operated the Craig mine just west of Haileyville from 1933 to 1957. Frank Testa opened the Testa mine in Richfield that continued into the 1950s. These and many others were common for the older experienced miners who still could make enough money to make ends meet doing the job they had learned to do as children³⁰.

The younger ones, who did not have property could not afford to stay. Their option was to stay and scrounge for work or leave. The rubber plant in Akron was paying good wages, and the automobile industry in Detroit was developing strongly³¹. Many were able to gain employment in the mines found themselves frightened by their work conditions. They were life threatening. With other choices so few, they moved on. As Angelo Scarpitti said "people were leaving in droves³²." To this day, many of those whose families stayed have friends and family in Akron and Detroit. In May of 1998, the Sunday Beacon Magazine published a short piece on the 'Okie' connection with Italians in Akron. In July some families went to Detroit for a family wedding. An interesting note is that this particular migration of Italians that left the coal counties of Oklahoma did

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Interview with Ron Testa, August, 1998, Krebs and McAlester, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

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Nearly all interviewed stated family living in Akron, Detroit, or Chicago that had moved from Oklahoma.

³² Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

so as Italians, not regional affiliations from Italy.

However, many Italians and people of Italian descent stayed in the coal counties. Of these individuals that stayed, they had to find their way. Ryan (1935) talks of large vegetable gardens where mining families would grow enough food to sometimes last as much as two years. Throughout Pittsburg County Italians were utilizing every inch of land for the growing of crops so they would have food to eat. Much of the time, even the planting of a few decorative plants would produce fights between husband and wife³³. Many Italians would take the time to not only grow food for themselves, but also grow enough to sell to others, especially those who were making money in other vocations. One gentleman talked about his grandmother who would buy 100 pounds of flour a week to make bread³⁴. The round loaves (which are the Italian style) would be given to Italian friends and family. The other loaves would be shaped elongated and sold to the Americans. He continued by saying that he was not allowed to come home until he sold all the bread. Others also stated that they would sell their mother's bread to grocery stores throughout the coal counties, including markets such as Safeway³⁵.

Other areas where Italians would make extra money was through the selling of Choctaw Beer (choc). Choc was a homemade brew that was adapted from a recipe from the Choctaw Indians. Because it was difficult to get grapes to make wine to last the year,

³³ Several of those interviewed expressed this account.

³⁴ Anonymous interview, August, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

³⁵ Interview with Bill Testa, March, 1998, Stillwater, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

Italians would also make choc and whiskey. Many Italians would set-up dance floors in their homes, and sell choc and whiskey. Others would simply sell choc and whiskey. The little bottles of the cloudy beer tasted great and smooth. Alcohol levels varied and parties would instantly develop when those partook of the home brew. Typically thought of today as a man's job, women also made choc and sold it. Women also worked in sewing rooms and secretaries³⁶.

Many of the men during this time took to hoboing and seeing life on the road. Many of the men went to Akron, Detroit, Chicago, and throughout the United States. Families stayed behind, much like they did in Italy, and the husbands or male family members would make money and send it home. The common practice was to send half of what one made to the family. The end result was the keeping of the land, the home, and the family safe from the tough times.

With the hard times of the 1920s and then the economic depression of the 1930s, Oklahomans had to deal with one last problem, the 'dustbowl'. Although located in the hills of the eastern part of the state, those in the coal counties had to deal with endless drought and excessive heat for three years in a row. Nick Finamore said that it was so hot that "even weeds wouldn't grow". Government officials were telling Oklahomans to kill their cattle to save water. Carmine Finamore met government agents on his property at gun-point telling them to leave his land and to leave his cattle alone. With many homes still without running water, children were forced to carry water to their homes and

³⁶ These statements of family history were common for nearly all interviewed.

families from as far away as five miles.. More young Italian-Americans continued to leave the coal counties.

Table 3
Household Income in 1989 by County

<u>Income in \$</u>	<u>Pittsburg</u>	<u>Latimer</u>	<u>Coal</u>	<u>Total</u>
0 - 17499	47%	50%	58%	49%
17500 - 29999	24%	27%	21%	24%
30000 - 42499	15%	12%	12%	14%
42500 - 59999	9%	8%	7%	9%
60000 - +	5%	3%	2%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Below Poverty Level	20%	23%	27%	21%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of the Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Oklahoma.

When World War II began it was an economic boom for the coal counties.

Besides an increased need for coal which lent itself to the remaining miners for financial gain, two other avenues for employment developed: (1) many of the young men joined the military; and (2) a Navy Ammunition plant opened in Savanna. While an entire generation had moved out of the area over the past 15 years, another generation found themselves able to make a living by joining the military. This allowed many Italian-Americans to make enough money and learn a trade to be able to stay in the region once

their stint in the military was over³⁷. Those who remained behind could find employment working for the Navy plant which employed about 300 people.

In the years following the war, there was an initial boom in the coal business. The prices were good and men could work. In Richville, Ron Testa stated that miners in the late 1940s were making approximately \$50 a day working in the mines. Men like Tony Mattioda in Hartshorne went to work in the mines making good money, staying until 1963 when the mines closed. Again an economic crisis was the result. People had to make do.

Possibly making a connection to their immigrant roots, the now adult second generation of Italian-Americans would need to make a living. Because of the continued existence of the Navy plant, and an overall increase in real wages throughout the United States, there developed a small, yet, reliable economy in southeastern Oklahoma. There still were some mines, albeit small and inconsistent work: such as, the Navy plant; logging in the eastern forests; and an increasing service industry. While many Italians continued to leave, those that stayed became entrepreneurs. However, opening up their own businesses was not new to Italians. This had been occurring since the 1880s. After World War II car dealerships, paint stores, restaurants, markets, hardware stores, hotels and the like developed. The Cioni's and the Pistocco's bought flower shops and

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Several of the people who were born after 1921 stated they did not think about what they were going to do when they were older regarding work. They felt that they would have to deal with finances once they got married and wanted to have a family. More or less it is probable that those who left, Italian and non-Italian had this same mentality, and that once married, they would leave and take their family with them to find work.

greenhouses drawing from their wealth of knowledge of agriculture³⁸.

Still others went to college, becoming pharmacists, businessmen, and engineers.

In 1964 Northrup opened a small plant which employed approximately 300 people.

While the coal county's economies have stabilized, Angelo Scarpitti stated that half of the high school graduates of the area leave and do not return³⁹.

Table 4
Population of the Three County Area in 1920 and 1990.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Pittsburg</u>	<u>Latimer</u>	<u>Coal</u>	<u>Total</u>
1920	52,570	13,866	18,406	84,842
1990	40,581	10,333	5,780	56,694
Net Decrease	11,989	3,533	12,626	28,148
Decrease	23%	25%	69%	33%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1920 Census of the Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics, 1990 Census of the Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics.

The economy in the late twentieth century is still weak. Those who remain continue to have to be creative and market what is left. Some towns such as Hartshorne, are ghost towns compared to their rich past. Nearly half of the households in the three county area have incomes of less than \$17,500 (See Table 3). Because of these poor economic conditions there has been consistent migration out of the coal counties area.

³⁸ Interview with James Pistocco, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

³⁹ Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

Most populations are much smaller or have maintained themselves. Pittsburg County's population in 1920 was 52,570, in 1990 it was 40,581. Latimer County's population has gone from 13,866 in 1920 to 10,333 in 1990. And Coal County has gone from 18,406 in 1920, to 5,780 in 1990 (See Table 4).

Now there are many trying to expand their business beyond the scope of their towns, with little success. Krebs has the best opportunity to remain somewhat independent as it has begun to market itself as "Oklahoma's Lil' Italy." I asked Sam Lovera, who owns Lovera's Market, Krebs Corner, and sells both sausage and cheese to the eastern part of Oklahoma why they are trying to make money using the Italian name. His response was telling: "What else is there?" In fact, when entering Krebs (population 1955), one is struck by the colors of the businesses. Most are the colors of the Italian flag - red, green and white. An apartment complex built by Gene DeFrangé is called 'Carovilli' after the town where the DeFrangé family is from in Italy. Three of the four major Italian restaurants in the county are in Krebs. Lovera's Market is the only Italian market in the state. While some may applaud the Lovera's for maintaining their business, the market was not intended to be an 'Italian market'. Although Sam Lovera admits he feels a duty to keep the traditions of his ancestors alive, the majority of his motivation is making money for his family. But due to large franchises like 'Walmart' moving into the area, paved roads and automobiles to travel outside of the neighborhood, the small corner markets in these small towns can no longer maintain themselves. Sam Lovera said: "Walmart is able to sell products cheaper than my cost on them." The end

result is that to survive, the Lovera's have brought in more specialty items from Italy and built a sausage and cheese processing factory to produce Italian sausage and cheese⁴⁰. Still, every weekend people from all over the state of Oklahoma come to Krebs to eat Italian food and buy sausage, cheese, and many of the items needed for Italian cooking.

Organizations

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there were several fraternal organizations that developed specifically for Italians. They were designed much like any other organizations within the United States for Italians, that is, to help adapt and succeed for however long one wanted to stay. At the beginning many of the organizations were developed for members from specific regions or towns within Italy. Differences in languages of Italian immigrants and regional biases created some discrimination and havoc between groups of Italians. However, over time, Italians made their way into these organizations as Italians, and not based on regional bias. Some of the organizations were Societa di Cristoforo Colombo, Fratellanza Indipendente, Fratellanza Minatori, Menotti Garibaldi, Fratellanza Lavortori, Dante Aligheri, and Stella d'Italia (Brown, 1980). These were secret societies where, as outsiders, Italians could go to be insiders. It is important not to underplay the significance of finding a place to meet for these Italians. These organizations aided in providing a sense of self-worth for immigrants. In an area where Italians were seen as inferior, these organizations were safe-havens, but also places where they could organize to compete for scarce resources.

⁴⁰ Interview with Sam Lovera, July, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

Italians, both in Oklahoma and around the country were known for the desires to solve their own problems. These organizations would provide an avenue to do so.

In the early years of the Societa di Cristoforo Colombo there would be a guard outside the building and no one other than a member would be allowed admittance. This type of protection can still be seen in the Italian clubs in New York. While secrecy may have created concern from those that were non-Italian, minutes of the Societa di Cristoforo Colombo in 1910s, 1920s and 1930s show meetings were designed along the same lines as union meetings, with discussions revolving around dues paid, helping someone who was hurt, and donations of monies.

As the mines gradually closed, the Italian population dispersed, and the acceptance of Italians as part of the population in southeastern Oklahoma continued, these fraternal organizations gradually closed. It was no longer necessary to have all Italian organizations. In the Societa di Cristoforo Colombo times changed to where the Columbus Lodge was opened to the public on Sundays for dinners. Meetings were for playing cards, and the order of business became less important. Finally in 1958 the society closed its doors (Brown, 1980). However, shortly thereafter, the Columbus Club began. Because the lodge was still in existence, Italians still gathered. The sons of the immigrants continued with the club, albeit in a less aggressive and antagonistic form. There they played cards (trisetta), drank choc, and continued their way of life. But by the early 1970s many 'hoosiers'⁴¹ began showing up playing poker. Eventually the club was

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Hoosiers were any person whose origins were of the British Isles. However, in the broader sense, hoosiers were anyone who was not of Italian descent.

raided and the Columbus Club was no more. Nearly 30 years later there is still some bitterness found in the contempt toward those 'hoosiers'⁴².

Religion

Religion is an essential aspect of ethnic identity. One cannot find a strong ethnic order without a strong religious factor involved (Durkheim, 1965; Yinger, 1994). To fully understand or get a better grasp of Italian religiosity in America, one must also understand the conditions of the Catholic Church in the lives of Italians in Italy. The church in Italy was much like any other absentee landlord with which the contadini had to deal. Church attendance for males occurred on three occasions: baptism, wedding, and funeral. As Noah Rich said regarding the Italian immigrants "Italian men went to church when they were hatched, matched, and dispatched." In addition, the church was so wealthy and state supported, that donations from the people who had little or nothing were few and far between. As Crispino (1980) states:

It is to be expected that there would be little support for the Italian national church in America, given the traditional hostility to this institution in the Old Country. The low levels of attendance and financial support in southern Italy combined with a strong attitude of anticlericalism, produced in the immigrant generation, at best, an antipathy to the Roman Catholic Church, and at worst, outright hostility. Furthermore, the early-generation immigrants were confronted with a hierarchy composed of members of an alien ethnic group, the Irish, who did not always practice the love and kindness that they preached. Finally, religion in southern Italy was a combination of superstition and festival; in America it was dogma, financial support, commandments and church attendance. This disjunction between the two contributed further to the continuation of the traditional lack of religiosity of Italian ethnics. p. 63.

Italians brought with them a Catholic system that not only included the teachings

⁴² A discussion of this is provided in the section dealing with discrimination.

of the church, but also folk beliefs that varied from region to region. The belief in fairies, the evil-eye (*malocchio*: the ability to glance at someone and cause sickness, disorientation, or death) and the overall mystic forces continually influenced their lives for good or evil. As McBride (1981) stated: "Witches, werewolves, the evil eye, curses, potions, charms and Black Madonnas inhabited their religious world. Jesus, Mary and Joseph and the Saints competed with all of these for allegiance and deference" (p. 335). Hence, the *contadini* were often apathetic or distant regarding anything that did not effect them directly, seeing events and phenomena as something more supernatural and inevitable.

Traditions for most peasants, especially in the south impacted all stages of the life-cycle. Although Italian-American comedian Pat Cooper could joke that to make sure he would have a son he would have to eat a lot of broccoli, southern Italians would take these beliefs seriously. Such things as "the phase of the moon combined with the day of the week on which Christmas fell; the manner in which milk from the mother would spread when dropped into a bowl of water; the relationship between the end of the last menstrual period and the lunar phases or the color of the afterbirth of the previous child" (McBride, 1981, p. 335) would be used to determine what the sex of the child would be.

Women would wear veils to protect themselves from catching the evil eye. Salt was used to ward off Satan. Because death was seen as the beginning of the afterlife, it was not uncommon for women to wear black clothing for at least a year, and in some cases for the rest of their lives. Loud noises whether coming from wailing, or the sounds of the band were used to ward off evil spirits. The many charms, incantations, and

potions were used first and foremost when dealing with trouble. Italians would then go to their priest or turn to the church when all else failed.

One of the central figures in Italians lives was their patron saint. Each region, village, or town would have their own patron saint (Mangione & Morreale, 1992; McBride, 1981; Vecoli, 1995). These saints would act as intermediaries between the believers, and God or the Virgin Mary and protected the followers from the evils of this world and other worlds. Of course, every year a feast or festa, would occur in honor of the saint (To be discussed later).

The Church in Oklahoma

Because the early miners in Indian Territory were American, English, Welsh, Scotch, and Irish, there was little need for Catholic Churches except for the Irish Catholics who were present. As more eastern and southern Europeans arrived in the coal counties there developed quite a number of Catholics in need of church services. Father Paul M. Ferroar Ponziglione, an Italian Jesuit traveled through the mining camps throughout the coal areas performing mass, marriages, and baptisms until Catholic Churches were erected (Brown, 1980). In the early 1870s a church was built in Atoka near the M. K. & T. Railroad. In 1875 Father Isidore Robot became the first priest for the church.

Soon Catholic Churches as well as Catholic schools were developed throughout the coal counties. In 1885 Father Robot moved to McAlester and set up a small church in Savanna. In 1885 Father Robot established St. Joseph's Church in what was then North McAlester. Other areas established their own churches. Churches were established in

Lehigh in 1887, Coalgate in 1890, Hartshorne in 1895, McAlester in 1896, and Wilburton in 1910. The early churches, even in Krebs, were predominantly Irish. The current parish for St. Joseph's in Krebs was built by Irish professionals in 1903 (See White, 1996). Even though there were at that time a large number of Italians in the area they were unskilled laborers. The Irish had the skills to build the church while the Italians did not⁴³.

Gradually Catholic churches became more populated by Italians. At St. Joseph's, the first Italians were northerners. Although seeing the need for the church (baptisms, weddings, funerals), these Italians, especially the men, did not spend much time dealing with the church. Toward the end of the nineteenth century people from the Abruzese and Molise regions arrived in Krebs and "practiced the religion more than the others did"⁴⁴. The Sacred Heart Parish in Wilburton has decor (pews, statues) that came directly from Italy⁴⁵. In all, although the ground work for many of these churches may have influences from several different ethnic groups, one must still acknowledge the major influence of Italians in these early Catholic Churches.

With this said, however, the relationship of Italians and their churches in the coal counties was not always one of mutual trust or desire. As mentioned above, Italians and their churches in Italy were not on solid footing. After generations of abuse at the hands

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Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, Noah Rich, and Nick Finamore, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

⁴⁴ Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

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The church was restored to its original splendor in early 1998. Interview with Dorothy Cook, Amelia Palmeiri Askew, and Minnie Appling, February, 1998, Wilburton, Oklahoma.

of foreigners, Italians were less likely to trust anyone, and the church was no exception. In addition, the pattern of the Catholic Church being supported by the state in Italy made it difficult for Italians in Oklahoma to learn to donate money to the church.

Like in Italy, the early Italians in Indian Territory and Oklahoma that frequented church were the women. Italian women had the reputation of having the most faith and the greatest devotion. The practice of Italian men to only go to church for baptism, marriage, and the funeral was still in effect. However, children were encouraged and expected to attend. Children of immigrants could expect a whipping from their parents or grandparents if they did not attend church.

With this said however, there continued to be a strain early on for Italians and their church. Conflicts were typically right below the surface. This conflict between the Italians and their church became very apparent in the struggle at St. Joseph's in Krebs from 1914-1916. In the fall of 1914, the pastor of St. Joseph's, Germanus Guillaume had been forced to leave the parish after it became known that he had (with the Bishop's approval, but without the knowledge of the parish), mortgaged the new church that was built in 1903 (after a fire burned down the original), to help pay for a rectory. This project became plagued with cost overruns. His replacement, Louis Sittere was to pay off the rectory debt and place the parish on a solid financial footing. He went at this with vigor, but he had not counted on the stubbornness of the Italians. When he explained that unless the bills were paid the parish could lose its buildings, they replied that in such a case they would buy the property themselves at a sheriff's sale and run the place to suit

themselves⁴⁶. Father Sittere decided that if he could persuade the bishop to close the church temporarily, the parish might come to its senses. On February 6, 1916, by a decree of “quasi-interdict” the church at Krebs was closed and the neighboring pastors could not provide ministry to the Krebs parishioners. However, the Italians were only made more angry by the act of the priest. The Italians resolution to not help the church became more ingrained. In late March of 1916 the church was reopened (See White, 1996).

There were other occurrences in the coal counties which demonstrated antagonism of Italians to the church. In 1914, a priest by the name of Dominic Tarizzo came to Hartshorne to make some contacts with some of his countrymen. The area of Hartshorne was heavily populated with Italians in the mid-1910s. Father Dominic, who was from Turin, Italy was hoping to make some connections with his roots as several of the Italians in Hartshorne were originally from an area not far from Turin. However, a group of drunken miners (believed to be Italian) set upon him and beat-up the priest severely. Father Dominic was so badly hurt, he had to be carried to a home nearby. As he lay there, the miners walked by the home dragging a dead dog. They cursed at the priest and said they would do to him what they did to the dog when he comes out. However, the priest never came out. Father Dominic Tarizzo died of complications of his beating a few

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The practice of buying things at a sheriff's sale was common for Italians. Forever in the search for land for security purposes, their frequenting of sheriff sales to buy property could have developed to the point that they could make such statements to the church about buying the church at a sheriff's sale.

weeks later⁴⁷.

This view of Italians not being helpful to the church, while true, also may be misleading. Many of the Italians that came to Indian Territory were single. Only as they became financially stable did they bring their wives. These numbers increased after the strike of 1898-1903. From that time on the area became more populated with Italian women. The notion of men ignoring the church was more than likely amplified by the lack of influence and numbers of Italian women in the region.

The influence of Italians was very real and apparent. In 1893, of the ten churches in the state of Oklahoma that donated money to the 'Orphan's Collection' the church at Krebs was third highest⁴⁸. On June 26, 1894, a year after the beginning of the 'Our Lady of Mt. Carmel' Festival, the bishop was back in Krebs for the inauguration of the 'Feast of the Visitation'⁴⁹. This is a feast that was celebrated by the church in Krebs on July 2

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This account is in White (1996), however, this was also told to me by Gloria Ranallo Mattioda, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

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It was also suggested that the reason why this amount was so high was because of the \$100 donation the church received to help the sisters whose place of residency was burned down in 1892. In addition, in 1891 the largest group at St. Joseph's were the Irish. However, this may also be misleading, because in 1893 the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Festival began. This would suggest that during this time the Italian population, specifically southern Italian, was substantial enough to have their own festivals become part of the parish activities.

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This was a feast celebrated at St. Joseph's in Krebs. No one interviewed could remember having celebrated this feast. Ernestine Finamore stated that when she was younger that they used to have feasts every month. That was the only statement which suggested the presence of multiple feasts at St. Joseph's. The knowledge of this festival comes from the diaries of Bishop Meerschaert (See White, 1996).

commemorating the visit of Mary to Elizabeth before the birth of Christ. Even though the faithful, at which point now were becoming predominantly Italian and not supposed to be that supportive of the church, they turned out for the 'message'; there were many converts; and the parishioners begged the bishop to speak at night even though the temperature was registering 112 degrees in the shade (White, 1996).

With this said however, there were continued problems regarding financial support from Italians. On May 20, 1895, the bishop returned to St. Joseph's and lectured to the congregation on the "love of God and the neighbor, duties to the family, providing for the future, and the Catholic societies as a help and providence for the family" (White, 1996, p. 192). This statement by the bishop was more than likely given and aimed directly at the congregation of St. Joseph's who voiced their dissatisfaction with their pastor Bernard Murphy. He was angered by the way the parish was responding to his admonitions about financial support, divorce, factionalism, and participation in parish life.

After the problems leading up to and through World War I between Italians and their church had subsided, Bishop Meerschaert congratulated the Italians for being more supportive of the church by 1920. Nevertheless, the male immigrants never did have much to do with the church. Possibly these pressures of distrust of the church; pressures from a predominantly Baptist area; and intermarriage have had their influence on the people of Italian descent. Of the 60 individuals interviewed, 15 individuals, or 25% were no longer Catholic. My sample was not representative of the entire population. However, considering that many of those of Italian descent interviewed volunteered

because they wanted to talk about their heritage, it is possible that many of those who did not come forward were not Catholic. If we assumed 25% of the 3,713 individuals who claimed some form of Italian ancestry on the 1990 census were not Catholic, that would equate to 928 people of Italian descent who are no longer Catholic.

As the years have gone by, the churches in these small mining towns have continued to keep their members as a succinct group. Some interviewed felt the church had been instrumental in keeping Italian ethnicity going because it creates a meeting place. For Italians, although their fathers had a tremendous disgust for the church, they did insist their children attend. In the years that followed, both men and women of Italian descent attended church. The third and fourth generations of Italians have returned more to the ways of their ancestors. Fewer Italian males and females are going to church. If Durkheim (1984) and Yinger (1994) are correct, the maintenance of ethnic identity could become problematic as fewer people of Italian descent attend the same church.

Some interesting religious practices did occur and continue to do so. Italians were fascinated with Mary. This is evident by the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Festival, and celebrations that existed regarding St. Anne, and also the Feast of the Visitation (See White, 1996). In Hartshorne, a Carmelite Monastery was in existence until 1973 at which time it relocated to Oklahoma City. Therefore it is not uncommon to see church services in the area heavily favor the inclusion of Mary in religious worship.

In addition, the Christmas holidays brought new patterns of behavior for these new Americans. The Italians that came here did not know of the Christmas traditions so common now for Americans. For Italian children immigrants, coming to Oklahoma there

was no knowledge of St. Nick, commonly referred to as 'Santa Claus'. Italians did, however, practice giving gifts at Christmas time. Their financial status would reflect the amount and type of gifts they give as is generally the case. However, the person who gave the gifts to the children was not Santa Claus, but the "infant child Jesus"⁵⁰.

Continuing with this thought, the Christmas tree was not known of, but became something new for Italians. Not having money for ornaments like the American families, Italians, especially those from the Abruzzese, Molise, and Sicilian regions would make cacciocavallo cheese. Instead of shaping it like the customary gourd shape that is seen today, the Italians would shape the cheese into angelic figures to hang from the tree, the ceiling, and other fixtures around the house⁵¹. Afterwards, they were able to eat these ornaments. As time went on, the cheese was replaced first with Christmas cards, and then the typical ornaments we see today⁵². At Easter time an Easter Pie was made, and the egg yolk was shaped like an angel on top of the pie⁵³. In addition, cheese again would be shaped into angelic figures. None of these practices exist today and only two individuals were familiar with these practices. This suggests that these practices ceased by the 1930s.

Religious behavior in the home continues to some extent today. Saying 'grace' or 'giving thanks' is common for every lunch meal for most of those interviewed. This is true regardless of the religious background. This remains fairly unchanged since the

⁵⁰ Interview with Rose Cattania, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

⁵¹ Interview with Giovanna Massaro, October, 1996, McAlester, Oklahoma.

⁵² Anonymous interview, September, 1998, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁵³ Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

beginning of the century. In those days, the dinner meal was begun by saying 'grace'.

One religious practice that no longer occurs is the saying of the Rosary every night in the living room. This was a practice common to Italian immigrants with their children. This no longer occurs except possibly on special occasions such as family reunions or religious holidays⁵⁴.

Among Italians there has also been an ongoing secularization of the church and its practices. As mentioned above, Italians, especially southern Italians, were successful in integrating their folk beliefs into mainstream Catholicism. While some of the oldest immigrants who are widows may still wear black to ward off the evil spirits, it is and was not a practice of the second generation or beyond. Wearing garlic around the neck to protect one from the evil spirits also is no longer practiced and only joked about. Frank Maisano talked of how his immigrant grandmother said that olive oil was the cure-all for everything. Sometimes she would mix garlic hanging around the neck with olive oil used as a lotion. The end result was Frank rarely got sick even when the rest of the kids did⁵⁵.

Most third generation Italian-Americans do not know of the 'malocchio', nor do they know the stories of fairies, spirits, and devils. The superstitions of the third generation reflect that of American society and the Catholic or Protestant Christian

⁵⁴ Interview with Roseanne Prichard, September, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

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Frank told of how his grandmother would slick his brown "Sicilian hair" down with olive oil before going to school. One particular winter day it was so cold the furnaces at school had their hands full. Frank was talking in class and the teacher told him to go sit on the other side of the room. . . . It was by the furnace. After a short time the teacher stopped her lecture as a tremendous odor permeated the room. The olive oil on Frank's hair was heating up. Interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

churches in America. The daily rituals of these generations are now much like all rural Oklahomans. Church is important, but there are many other daily events that need to be addressed. The church is now no longer the priority it once was. Not even the festivals attract or renew the religious fervor that once existed in the coal counties.

Festivals

In the past, for Italians in Oklahoma, the festival played a key role in maintaining identity and ties to the old world. However, the festivals were not as prevalent as were found in other places within the United States, or within the Midwest. In the more heavily populated areas where Italians have congregated, the Italian 'festa' still plays a significant role in ethnic maintenance (See Briggs, 1978; Gabaccia, 1984; Gallo, 1974, 1981; Gambino, 1974; Mangione, 1981; Mangione & Morreale, 1992; Vecoli, 1995). The celebration of the saints or other collective celebrations are important for understanding group relations. As Smith (1985) states: "What we say about ourselves when we celebrate ourselves may be much more accurate than what we say in self criticism" (p. 92). Earlier ethnic festivals were able to celebrate the pluralism within American society. These festivals could rekindle purposive action designed to bring identity and group formation. "Festivals are collective rituals during which participants rejoice and interact with feelings of acceptance and conviviality" (Marquart & Roebuck, 1987, p. 449). Typically the early festivals of Italians were organized around patron saints who were regional in origin. Therefore what was and is observed throughout the United States where large numbers of Italians exist, is the acting out of celebrations of saints which indicate the location that the majority of the Italians living in the area have

their roots. In later years festivals organized have been set-up partially to fight off the economic ills of regions (Smith, 1985).

Visiting several towns within the three county area I found few people of Italian descent celebrate the saints. In addition, there appears to be little celebrating of the saints throughout the coal counties both now and one hundred years ago. This could be due to the large number of northern Italians within the three county area and the reluctance of these northerners, specifically the Piemontesi to celebrate the saints. More southern Italians celebrated the saints through festivals. Only the more rural contadini from the north would celebrate the saints (Mangione & Morreale, 1992). Although the 33rd Congress stated that the northerners were assimilating and trying to be Americans, which would account for a lack of celebration of saints through festivals in places such as Wilburton, Haileyville, Hartshorne, Dow, Coalgate, and many others, there is another explanation. Except for the Piemontesi who settled throughout the region, only in the Krebs area did large numbers of any other group of Italians settle. In Krebs the Abruzese and Molise peoples settled who were much more involved with their church⁵⁶. Therefore, due to no large settlement of any one particular region of Italians, and the lack of large numbers in general, the opportunity to have these festivals was minimal at best. However in Krebs, there were celebrations that did occur.

At the turn of the century, in Krebs, at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Italians did celebrate the Festival of the Visitation. The details of the festival are few. However, according to Bishop Meerschaert, it must have been a festival big enough and popular

⁵⁶ Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

enough for the Bishop to make a trip there for it (See White, 1996). However, none of the people interviewed had any knowledge of the Festival of the Visitation. Since the festival was celebrating the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth before the birth of Jesus, and considering the affinity of southern Italians for Mary, this festival would be a southern Italian festival taking place in Krebs.

In addition, there was the celebration of St. Anne, which was not affiliated with the church⁵⁷. This was celebrated on July 26th, and typically would take place out in a field in what was then North McAlester. Italians would gather after the harvesting of the corn and roast the remainder in a celebration, and shoot off dynamite at night. However, again, few of those interviewed had any knowledge or recollection of this. One respondent thought that one woman was specifically in charge of that celebration, and that she might have been Sicilian⁵⁸. There were fewer Sicilians in the coal counties than in other areas of the United States, so it would make sense that there would be little participation in this festival, nor would the church be solicited as it was in the 1890s regarding the celebration of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

The festival that still continues which has had its roots in Pittsburg County since the late nineteenth century is the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Festival. It takes place at St. Joseph's Church in Krebs. The feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel was instituted by the

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Anonymous interviews throughout the summer of 1998 brought this to light. Only those in their 80s could remember. Further support that this festival was not supported by the Church is found in Bishop Meerschaert journals. There is no mention of a celebration of St. Anne.

⁵⁸ Anonymous interview, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

Carmelites between 1376 and 1386 celebrating the victory of their order over its enemies in obtaining the acceptance of its name and constitution from Honorius III on January 30, 1226. The feast was given the date of July 16, because on that date in 1255, accordingly, the scapular was given from the Virgin Mary to St. Simon Stock. It was first approved by Sixtus V in 1587. In 1609 after Cardinal Bellarine had examined the Carmelite traditions, the feast was declared the patronal feast of the order, and is now a major double of the first class with a vigil and a privileged octave under the title “Commemoratio solemnis B.M.V. de Monte Carmelo.” By a privilege granted by Clement X in 1672, some Carmelite monasteries keep the feast on the Sunday after the 16th of July, or on any Sunday within the month of July. The objective of the feast according to the Catholic Church is the special predilection of Mary for those who profess themselves to be her servants by wearing her scapular (Herbermann, Pace, Pallen, Shahan, Wynne, et. al., 1911). In the 17th century, the feast was adopted by many of the dioceses in southern Italy. Hence we see the inclusion of those from southern Italy in Krebs, mainly those from the Molise, Abruzzese, Campobasso, and Sicilian regions in Krebs celebrating this festa.

At the turn of the century, although Italians were consistently being ridiculed by the Catholic Church for not supporting their parishes, the Our Lady of Mt Carmel Festival was something different. In those days, Italians took great pride in ‘their’ festival⁵⁹. The Bishop was expected to show-up for the festival and was often asked to speak to the Christopher Columbus Society at that time. Initially the festival took place at St.

⁵⁹ Anonymous interview, May, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

Joseph's, however the celebration quickly grew and was moved in the 1920s and 1930s to the baseball field in Krebs and took place over two days⁶⁰. Mass would also be given at the baseball field. To begin the festival, the statue of the Virgin Mary would be carried from the Columbus Lodge several blocks to the baseball field. There would be a procession that began at the lodge. Priests, nuns, bishops, church elders and church parishioners would march with the statue. The Italian band, in the early days led by Isaia Lalli, would play music marching down the street. Typically the music would reflect the Italian flavor of the event, playing Italian songs⁶¹. Dynamite would be fired at the consecration. Afterwards, the celebration would begin with people from the entire community bringing food. In the early days there would be a variety of Italian foods representing the many regions Italians were from. Although in those days most of the Italians were from northern Italy, it was the southern Italians who were more involved with this festival. After the ample meal, a carnival would begin which lasted the remainder of the two days. The men would gather and play trisetta, morra, and bocce. Choc beer would be abundant, as would the wine, and whiskey. It was a festive spirit that brought the community together where everyone was welcome.

Gradually the festival began to be reduced. After a generation had moved, and several of the immigrants had passed away, the overall size of the festival became

⁶⁰ Anonymous interview, June, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

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Unfortunately no one could remember any of the music that the Italian band would play for this procession. It was only referred to as "Italian music." The details of this festival were told to me by dozens of the people interviewed.

smaller. The festival was moved back to the church grounds and took place there. The statue of the Virgin Mary would be carried about five blocks from the Columbus Lodge to the church. The statue would be surrounded again by church officials, parishioners, and the Italian band. Members of the Christopher Columbus Society would wear their medallions and blue coats that day. After the service there was no longer a carnival, however there was singing and dancing (both Italian). People wore stereotypical Italian clothes, the Italian band played all day, and they played in the church. There were people everywhere, with community spirit running rampant. Three-legged races, sack races, along with typical Italian games of morra and bocce would continue into the night. The dynamite was replaced with fireworks.

As the years went by, Krebs found itself shrinking in size like the entire coal counties area. The younger Italians were moving away, and those that were moving in were not Italian. Many Italians from Krebs relocated to nearby McAlester and began attending St. John's Catholic Church which has no festivals. This has created a change in the festival. In the 1950s and early 60s the Italian band still marched. It now no longer does. The instruments of the Italian band can be found in the library of St. Joseph's Church. They no longer march from the Columbus Lodge as it has been torn down. They begin outside the church and carry the Virgin Mary from the side of the church and sing their way in.

In the 1980s, Steve Carano, who was in college at the University of Oklahoma and part of the University of Oklahoma marching band there, would bring some of the band members and they would play in the balcony of the church and also on the church

grounds. That did not last after Steve graduated. Now there is no music. Many of the high officials of the church no longer come for the festival. While they used to get approximately 500 to 600 people for the festival in the 1970s and 80s, now there are about 200 to 250 who attend. Although the festival is more and more marketed as a homecoming for all those who have their roots in Krebs, St. Joseph's and the coal county region, few attend the festival that do not live in Krebs.

The church service is still conducted in Latin, and afterwards there is a lot of food including polenta, lasagna, mastaccioli, rigatoni, and new American favorites, such as brisket, apple pie, different cakes, and casseroles. Afterwards, the men still drink their beer, although choc may not be available. Morra is played and wages made, sometimes as much as \$300-\$400 for the winning team. The men play hard, and one can hear the yelling of "dui!" "nove!" and different dialects screaming "*fai funculo!*" However, it is all done in fun, and one can hear the men talking about the match they had several years earlier. The bocce courts are empty, the kids go swimming afterwards instead of playing at the church, and few come back for the fireworks show that occurs at night. For those who are not Italian, they call the festival the Mt. Carmel Celebration and it is not seen as an Italian festival⁶². While attending this festival, several people of Italian descent surrounded me to tell me the way things used to be. They admitted they needed an infusion of new blood in the area - new Italian blood.

One thing that did stand out in viewing this festival was that most of the people who were running the festival were over 65. Even one person, a fourth generation Italian-

⁶² Anonymous interview, May, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

American said that the future of the festival is doubtful because the people who run the event are too old. The next generation did not take over for them. So the festival continues, but as the members who are of Italian descent age and pass-away, the festival is expected to continue to shrink and then cease to exist⁶³.

The Italian Festival which takes place in McAlester began in 1971 under the guidance of Bill Prichard, Dominic Giacomo, and James Dominic, but actually included the entire Italian population. The origins of the festival are different from the folklore that is marketed during the festival. An Italian immigrant, James Francis Dominic (Slick Dom) was the one who thought up the idea of an Italian festival. According to Nick Finamore, Slick Dom went to New Jersey to see friends, family and take some time off. While in New Jersey he saw and attended a festival that was billed simply as an Italian festival. Slick Dom was impressed with this festival and came back with ideas of having an Italian festival. The Pittsburg County Chamber of Commerce solicited Bill Prichard, Dominic Giacomo, and James Dominic to put together an Italian festival. The thought by the chamber of commerce was that this could bring money into the area, while Italians saw it as a way of maintaining their ethnic history for new generations. Several Italians and people of Italian descent got together to develop ways to implement such a festival. James Dominic had a history of being charismatic and able to get people involved, hence he earned the nickname "Slick Dom." However, Slick Dom died prior to ever seeing the

⁶³ This was a sentiment expressed by many of the younger individuals interviewed.

Italian Festival⁶⁴.

Bill Prichard took over and the festival began to become a reality. Originally the festival was going to be in Krebs as this was still the main Italian settlement in Oklahoma. However, pressure from McAlester, the county seat asked for the festival to be in McAlester. The chamber of commerce felt that Krebs was too small and could not accommodate the parking needs, and did not provide adequate access to allow for a large festival. It was decided that the festival would be in McAlester in October around Columbus Day at Chadick Park, where a Walmart is now located. Later it was moved to Schiller Field. Now it is at the Pittsburg County Fairgrounds.

The first festival saw a very community oriented event with a big tent and people bringing food made at their homes⁶⁵. Although it was very community oriented, the festival for some already showed signs of being too commercial⁶⁶. But the festival continued. Each year a *Re e' Regina* (King and Queen) would be crowned. Typically these people would be not only full blood Italians, but immigrants. The typical festival would have singing, dancing, Italian music, Italian food, games of bocce, morra, and things for kids to do such as stomp the grapes in the giant barrels to symbolize the making

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This story of the origins of the festival was told to me by Nick Finamore over an eight month period from January through August of 1998. He made me swear that I would "tell the truth" about the origins of the Italian Festival. Others interviewed had hinted that Slick Dom had something to do with the festival, but Nick had more details.

⁶⁵ Interview with Ernestine Finamore, June, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

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Frank Prichard, Bill Prichard's half-brother went the first year, and returned shortly disgusted by the commercialization of the festival. Interview with Roseanne Prichard, October, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

of “da wine.” This festival too had much more of a carnival atmosphere. With a significant number of immigrants still alive the festival was important as a marker of Italian ethnic identity.

As the festival became more and more of a commercial success, fewer and fewer Italians were involved with it. Pretty soon the McAlester Italian Festival Foundation took control and fewer Italians or people of Italian descent had any say. Of the twelve chairman the festival has had in its 28 years, only three have been of Italian descent. Country music became part of the festival in the late 1970s and has become a tradition. Arts and crafts have now dominated the festival. The festival was moved to Memorial Day weekend to accommodate the increasing number of people attending. As Angelo Scarpitti said regarding the Italian Festival: “The only thing Italian about the Italian Festival is the spaghetti dinner. It’s nothing more than an arts and crafts show.” Others said such things as:

“I’m never going back again. There’s nothing Italian about it.”

“It’s just a craft show.”

“They (those who attend) show up for the spaghetti dinner and wait in line for hours not realizing they’re getting spaghetti out of a can. . . . They can’t tell the difference.”

“We only like it because of the amount of business it brings us.”

“The foods aren’t the same as what I grew up eating.”

“No one making the food is Italian.”

“Getting crowned Re and Regina is now almost an embarrassment. I’m waiting for the day when they crown two people who aren’t Italian.”

Indeed the only person I talked with who goes to the festival now is Nick Finamore who crowns the king and queen. After that he leaves.

Today there is little Italian about the Italian Festival. Nevertheless the festival is an economic success. They bring in about 20,000 people every year. The festival opens with the crowning of the King and Queen. This year, there was no mention, nor a picture in the local newspaper regarding who was crowned Re and Regina. There were only 10 people present for the crowning. The crowning was done approximately 50 yards from where the rest of the activities occurred. Nick Finamore crowns the king and queen talking in Italian, and translating to those watching. Everyone else was over in the rest of the festival. There you would find politicians with booths set-up handing out literature and talking to prospective voters. There were four hangers filled with booths of arts and crafts with each hanger named after an Italian town or region (Naples, Rome, Milan, and Sicily). There were also opportunities to buy Italian sausage “burgers” and a spaghetti dinner. In addition, pitsella’s were sold. T-shirts celebrating the festival had such things as “capisco” spelled phonetically “capiche!!!” on them. While there were a few Italian acts, such as the Italian Dancers from the Dallas Italian-American club, and a few Italian-Americans playing the accordion and piano, seven of the ten acts were country-western singers. Reba McIntyre even played one year. The people cooking the Italian food were not Italian, and there was nothing celebrating Italian ethnicity. In the approximately 120 booths where the arts and crafts were being sold only one had anything for sale which addressed anything Italian. They were t-shirts that read “Not only am I perfect, I’m Italian too.”

The overall sentiment of those of Italian descent I spoke to, both formally and informally, was that when the festival crossed the line and became too commercialized, it lost its charm. They became sickened by it and do not associate with it. Those who own the restaurants enjoy the business the festival brings in, but do not attend. When entering McAlester, there is a sign that reads “Welcome to McAlester, Home of Cowboys and Italians.” The irony is that McAlester was never the home of Italians⁶⁷. In the heyday of Italian immigration to Oklahoma, that is, 1910-1920, fewer than 50 Italians lived there. The Italian Festival today is nothing more than a tourist attraction for those who are not Italian. Those of Italian descent in the three county area do not attend.

Coupled with this decline of Italianness of the Italian Festival, some of the third generation Italians in Krebs began to feel the need to return to the original theme of what the festival was trying to do⁶⁸. The decision was to begin a new festival in Krebs, and instead of just celebrating being Italian, the idea was to celebrate all ethnicities. Mike Lovera (who was rumored to develop an Italian accent when marketing anything Italian), whose father owned ‘Mike’s Market’ in Krebs (now Lovera’s market) decided to make this idea a reality. He began the Ethnic Festival and it occurred on Labor Day Weekend to coincide with the Prison Rodeo in McAlester. The festival began on the grounds of St. Joseph’s Church and gradually became a success. The celebration of the many different ethnicities seemed to be fitting for the town of Krebs that was no longer

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Anonymous interview, July, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma. Also, the census data from 1910 and 1920 back this up.

⁶⁸ Interview with Sam Lovera, July, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

predominantly Italian. Typically the festival would bring in various music artists representing such diverse cultures as Tahitian, German, African-American, Irish, and of course Italian. When Mike Lovera left the area his brother Sam took over. Dealing with the financial pressures that are evident in the area, Sam Lovera made do with what was available. The festival became more commercialized. Companies the Lovera's dealt with in their businesses became sponsors. Budweiser had their own booth for beer.

In the early 1990s a new priest was brought in and he did not appreciate the selling of alcohol on church grounds. He felt that as one person put it, there was "too much gambling, too much drinking to be allowed on church grounds⁶⁹." A bitter dispute began between organizers of the ethnic festival and the priest. The end result was the moving of the festival to the fairgrounds in Krebs, but a loss of favor within the Krebs community of the Lovera's, and the ethnic festival. Although the Lovera family had given a lot of money back to the community and St. Joseph's Church, there developed a rift between members of the Lovera family and the community in Krebs. Many parishioners of St. Joseph's decided not to attend the festival or contribute to it⁷⁰.

Although the church would serve a free spaghetti dinner to those who would come by, the ethnic festival lost its allure. Arguments regarding money and the true purpose of the festival combined with unbearable heat (temperatures over 100 degrees)

⁶⁹ Anonymous interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

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I was reluctant to place this information in this document, however, the story of the festival and the relationship between the priest and the Lovera family was told to me by such a wide variety of people in the coal county area that it seems more fact than gossip.

left the festival reeling. Battles between the town members, and the town officials over parking and street allocation escalated feelings of hostility even more. The Lovera's wanted the festival moved to a lot across the street from their market, but the town's people and officials would not have anything to do with it. The sentiment of those interviewed was that the Lovera's only wanted to fill their pockets with money. After the festival this past year (1998), Sam Lovera decided to discontinue it. He said it took him nearly a month to emotionally get over the failing of the festival.

Education

Much of the literature of Italians and their schooling paints a picture that is less than ideal. Because the education system was thought to represent government propaganda, a good education for Italians meant that one learned to show the proper respect to one's elders (Oliver, 1987). Teachers were no better than priests for Italians (Vecoli, 1978) Throughout the United States, most Italian children were more known for their truancy rates than their in-class achievements. Italians, especially southern Italians, with their distrust of any government institutions found that education, even in America was more of the same. Part of this attitude in America was the acknowledgment that what the children were being taught was beyond the scope of knowledge for the immigrants themselves. With this there was often a backlash from the children who felt ashamed of their immigrant parents who spoke little or no English, and could not write in Italian either.

These kinds of dilemmas facing the children of immigrants, and these dilemmas the immigrants needed to address often created further problems in which children would

get mixed messages as parents would want their children to succeed, but not to ever forget from where they came. In addition, folk wisdom said that “stupid and contemptible is he who makes his children better than himself” (Covello, 1967, p. 256). These conflicts were to act themselves out in the form of generational struggles in which the second generation would strive to find themselves an identity apart from their immigrant parents, trying to become American; and the immigrant parents struggling to teach their children the rules of life to live by. The end result was a generation that was able to bridge a gap between first and third generations that enabled third generation Italian-Americans to succeed in education and make great strides in changing the literature on their ancestors in America.

Like the churches, once Indian Territory started to become populated, families arrived and soon schools were built. The schools in the early mining communities often took the form of one room schools. As populations began to grow schools were built to support various age children. The schools in Oklahoma that immigrant children attended were mainly sponsored by the Catholic Church. This is in marked contrast to what Italians experienced in the northeast where Italians felt the Irish clergy were corrupting their children. Instead, in Indian Territory and Oklahoma the Catholic Church was looked upon by the Italians as a means to teach their children and help them become Americans⁷¹. However, as the mines closed, fewer and fewer children were present to go

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Several interviewed stated that the Catholic school system as more acceptable to their parents. There appeared to be more confidence in the sisters teaching their children, than the American teachers.

to many of the Catholic Schools in the region. Therefore, into the 1920s many Catholic schools began closing and children were bused to public schools in more populated areas such as McAlester⁷².

In the early years of statehood and prior to that, Oklahoma Italians had gained the reputation of not sending or not wanting to send their children to American schools (U.S. Congress, 1911). Many of the reasons discussed in this chapter hint at a distrust of any government or large institution which related back to their experiences in Italy both before and after unification. In addition, the mines in Indian Territory and Oklahoma had jobs available for five and six year old's. Often times the children were runners for the mines acting as a means of communication, and they also attended the fans that kept fresh air coming into the mines. In the 1892 explosion at the number 11 mine in Krebs, six of the 100 people killed were children. Table 5 shows school attendance in 1920 of white children of native parentage, mixed parentage, foreign parentage, and foreign born whites. If these numbers are consistent with or similar to the previous 40 years, we would expect that since by 1890 two-thirds of the miners were foreign that there would be many foreign children working the mines, and not only Italian children. Also it is interesting to note that of the three native white groups that those children whose parents were Native Americans had the lowest percentage of school attendance. As can be seen, children who were foreign born had the lowest amount of school attendance of all four groups. So while there are grounds to argue that both Italians and other foreign borns

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Interview with Gloria Ranallo Mattioda, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

were pulling their children from school, it was more-so the foreign born. Those of foreign parentage who were born in the United States were attending school at a greater rate than those of native parentage.

Table 5
School Attendance of White Population, 5 - 18 Years of Age by Parentage

<u>Age (Years)</u>	<u>Parentage</u>			
	<u>Native</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Foreign</u>	<u>Foreign Born</u>
5	10.6%	13.9%	13.5%	5.5%
6	59.5	66.6	58.9	30.3
7	77.7	86.2	82.5	55.7
8	83.5	88.3	88.2	52.4
9	85.8	91.5	90.1	58.7
10	89.7	95.1	94.3	74.6
11	90.2	95.3	95.0	70.2
12	89.6	94.8	94.9	65.3
13	89.5	95.3	94.2	68.5
14	85.9	92.6	89.4	62.5
15	78.5	86.4	83.4	60.5
16	63.3	71.9	61.8	36.5
17	44.6	51.3	41.5	21.5
18	25.5	30.5	21.7	7.5

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1920 Census of Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Oklahoma.

This is consistent with statements made by those interviewed. No one had ever heard of Italians talking about being pulled from school because what they were learning in the schools was bad. Instead, like in many areas around the country what is found is that school was seen as an opportunity to better oneself and become an American. But current economic conditions always took precedence over future education. As Vincenza Testa

said⁷³:

We were poor and we couldn't or our parents couldn't pay for a college education for ourselves or our kids. In those days a college education wasn't as important. Many times we would have to go to work to help our parents. And sometimes it wasn't worth going to school because it wouldn't help us. So we would stop going.

Giovanna Massaro stated that when she arrived in Oklahoma in September of 1908, that she began school the next day at St. Joseph's⁷⁴. With a fairly large number of Italian children now attending schools, I assumed that Italian clubs or organizations and maybe an Italian language class would be available. However, no one mentioned ever hearing of such things. Occasionally one of the immigrants would informally teach Italian to whoever wanted to be taught, but that was rare.

Many second generation Italian-Americans did go to college including places like the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University and Stanford. One gentleman whose parents came here in 1882 was a professor at the University of Guam. The third generation demonstrated many of the same traits with many earning graduate degrees. What stands out is that education inevitably became a tool for these Italians, especially the third generation, and they have taken their place with the rest of Italian-Americans and Americans in general.

The following chapter addresses the smaller, more group oriented domains of interaction that were inquired about such as the family, friendships, and the foods eaten.

⁷³ March, 1998, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

⁷⁴ October, 1996, McAlester, Oklahoma.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS, PART 2

Structured and Informal Domains of Interaction

In addition to the larger, institutionalized domains of interaction, there were other domains that were addressed which might lead to a better understanding of the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity. Because family structure, friendships and foods eaten are often included in discussions of Italians (Alba, 1985; Belliotti, 1995; Campisi, 1948; Child, 1943; Crispino, 1980; di Leonardo, 1984; Gallo, 1974, 1980; Gambino, 1974; Iorizzo & Mondello, 1980; Nelli, 1983), these areas were deemed as essential domains of interaction for the purposes of this study. Like the preceding chapter, the areas discussed will focus on historical ritualized symbolic practices, to the symbolic practices of today.

The Family

When discussing the Italian and Italian-American families, stereotypes facilitated through the media suggest a wife and mother who stays home, takes care of the children, has little say toward anything outside of the home, and is held under thumb by a domineering husband who works all day doing physical labor. They live either in the same house with one set of parents or they live on the same block. Any deviation it seems from this model would suggest to the person unfamiliar with the Italian or Italian-American family type a move away from the truly ethnic family heritage of which Italians are so famous.

However, it must be remembered that Italy experienced a large amount of foreign influence which created what is truly a melting pot. In addition, the economic conditions

found in parts of the north and south in Italy would create different factors which would influence family life. Inevitably what was and has been discovered is that there is not a single family form in Italy (Barbagli, 1991; Kertzer, 1991). The translation of different family forms in America then should be influenced by the same type of factors, that is, foreign influence (including Italian immigrants from different regions within Italy) and economic factors. We would expect to find family types that were both similar and different than those in Italy.

Three areas in which the Italian family can be observed are: (1) age at marriage; (2) gender roles; and (3) family patterns . Regarding age at marriage, it appears that in areas where there was a greater proportion of farmers to the overall population marriage for both men and women was later, and that there was a higher degree of celibacy (Barbagli, 1991). In areas where there were increased numbers of sharecroppers, their power for negotiation would be reduced due to competition, thereby reducing the income available to them, hence a higher age of marriage and higher rates of celibacy (Biagioli, 1986, Spadoni, 1899). In some studies, celibacy rates were found to be as high as 30% for men, and 18% for women (Della Pina, 1986).

Sharecroppers trying to make ends meet and create the best atmosphere for their families, and having an acceptable ratio of hands and mouths ended up working for years before they could afford to be married. Hence, ages at marriage would also rise with men marrying on the average at 31, and women 25 (Della Pina, 1986). However, the families across Italy would not organize in the same ways. Sharecroppers typically would organize their families accordingly as patrilocal and the agricultural laborers were more

neolocal.

Regions also differed although economic systems were similar. In Sicily, even into the early twentieth century, the age at marriage was young, especially for females. Females would marry at ages of 12 to 18. Whereas in Sardinia, it was typical for Sardinian women to not marry before the age of 25 (Bongino, 1966; Leprotti, 1966). Men typically went into military service first, which was the more northern European custom prior to marriage. In Sicily prior to unification, military service was not required nor expected before marriage. This was also true throughout the mezzogiorno (Barbagli, 1991). Neolocal residence was common as they were agricultural laborers, but each age group of marriages was incorporated into the style which led to neolocal residence.

The differences in ages leads to gender roles within the Italian family. In Sicily and the rest of the mezzogiorno, the pressure was typically on the male to earn enough money to provide for the family (hence the large amount of Italian immigrants who earned money and then came back for a bride or arranged for a bride to emigrate). The inevitable conclusion from this is a difference in ages of husband and wife at marriage. In Sicily, typical ages were 30 for men, and 18 for women (Barbagli, 1991). The end result of such differences in ages, and pressures on the male was gender roles which subjugated the wife to the husband. This appears to be true throughout the south. However, in Sardinia and northern Italy, because ages were much closer between spouses, there tended to be more equality.

However, the picture of an Italian wife held under thumb is controversial. In the southern areas wives needed to get authorization from their husbands to give gifts, sell

property, consult a doctor, and no employment would be accepted without the husband's approval. In the north, specifically the Lombardy-Veneto region, no such authorization was required: Due to centuries of invasion from foreign lands, the family unit became central to survival (Gambino, 1974). Gambino states that "the father is the head of the family and the mother the center" (p. 6). The father made all the important decisions concerning the family. His decisions were accepted as law, even among the married children. No one would criticize their father. The father would rule the family as long as he remained in good health and was able to take care of his family. The eldest son typically was the one who replaced him, however, the father retained patriarchal status.

The father labored and maneuvered to gain the most produce and money to protect his children and family against *la miseria*, that is, disparate poverty (Gambino, 1974; Valletta, 1975). This is not much different than the portrait painted by Banfield (1958) when he stated that the dominant ethos of the community was to "maximize the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family . . ." (p. 85). The nuclear family operated as a single unit (Mangione & Morreale, 1992), and even though the extended family was within a short walk, they seldom acted collectively, except in times of turmoil.

Gender roles often misinterpreted by the lay-person were typically well-defined. The husband did have final say over most issues, however, the wife had considerable power herself. The father would turn over all money to the wife except for a small allowance for himself. The father's position was one of great respect. In places like the mezzogiorno the father's authority would last a lifetime (*potesta paterna*). While in the Grand duchy of Tuscany the father's authority only lasted until age 30 for sons and 40 for

daughters. The home was the site and the source of all that gave meaning to life. A well-kept home was a symbol of a sound family. Furniture that lasted was a sign of family strength and family stability. Plentiful food in the kitchen was a sign of family well-being. Conspicuous consumption was bad. All these things were in control by the wife.

Men viewed women in a variety of ways, but one can see the possession, or property mentality of some of these Italian proverbs:

Like a good weapon, she should be cared for properly

Like a hat, she should be kept straight.

Like a mule, she should be given plenty of work and occasional beatings.

Above all, a woman should be kept in her place as subordinate.

While the wife may have been seen as property, her role was central to the survival, success, and growth of the family. The wife may have acted submissive while in public, in their private life she would assume command relying on her wits and her ability to outtalk her husband. As Constance Cronin (1970, p. 74) stated “She usually does not yell or scream for that provokes a violent physical reaction from him. Instead she wears him down by an ever-flowing stream of words which, like the Chinese water torture, finally produces the desired answer.” So not only did the wife have the responsibility of the family, but she also needed to fetch the water from the well, they helped harvest, and hired themselves out to gather grapes for the making of wine. In addition, women also were *levatrici* (midwives, doctors, and pharmacists all in one).

Women were also more active than some would believe. Women would be side by side with men in the streets demanding change. People like Anna Maria Mozzoni wrote at the time protesting the ‘Madonna’ stereotype of Italian women. Indeed, if the

men needed help, women were right there to aid them. In fact, when men left Italy for foreign shores, it was the women who had to stay behind and work the land, and make ends meet while their husbands saved to send for them.

Research suggests that family composition varied both by region, economic conditions, and ideal (Douglas, 1980, 1991; Tittarelli, 1991). In the north, and especially in sharecropper families, patrilocal families were the norm in which the wife would join the husband's families as they worked to provide for the family farm. In addition other assorted multiple family households were more prominent in the north. Rarely in these situations did patterns of residence become neolocal. Because of the patrilocal family unit, this perpetuated and propagated the multiple family within the north and amongst sharecroppers.

In the south however, contradictory research paints a far different picture. Because neolocal residence seemed to be the norm (Banfield, 1958; Barbagli, 1991; Douglas, 1980, 1991) it would suggest a more extreme poverty as men would go out on their own and try to raise enough money to provide for a family. This again seems to be the mentality which led to the great emigration that occurred in Italy from 1873 - 1924, and to some degree has continued with Italians emigrating all over the world. With poor economies, neolocal residence comes hand in hand.

What appears to be the reality of residential patterns of Italian families is misleading due to the large amount of small communities that dot the Italian landscape. Even if Italians have neolocal residential patterns, the towns in which these individuals live are very small. In the case of two particular towns in an area in which those mainly

who have ties to Krebs, Oklahoma have their roots, that is, Castiglione, and Carovilli, these towns have populations of approximately 500 and 1200 respectively. Marrying within the town, which is common, and moving to a new residence would not place the newly married couple far from their families (Galt, 1991). Therefore ties would be rather strong in some form, if only as Gambino and Valletta have stated to protect against *la miseria*. According to Barbagli & Kertzer (1990), family patterns in the Molise and Abruzzi regions tended to resemble areas located in the extreme north of Italy, which may lead to a better understanding of overall interaction when these immigrants were to meet in Oklahoma.

Douglass (1991), however, points to the difference between the ideal and the real in how people from the Molise region family structures are. For the last 200 years, the ideal family has been the joint family, that is, that oldest son with his new bride moving in with his parents awaiting the time to take over after his father dies or retires. This family structure, though the ideal, has never been the dominant theme of family structure in the Molise region. Instead, the nuclear family has been dominant. But again, as has been stated, the towns or villages are so small that a new residence is not that much of a move.

One additional statement must be made however. When looking at residential patterns in Italy, due to the large amount of agriculture that was occurring in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it must be noted that in the south places of work and residence were separate, while in the north they were often together. Because of this it would seem natural that patterns of residence would be different.

Finally, three types of family tend to emerge (Barbagli & Kertzer, 1990).

Patrilocal residence and late marriage was found in the northern and central country sides.

Neolocal residences with late marriages were found in the cities and in Sardinia.

Neolocal residences with early female marriages were found in the southern country sides. They all tended to buy into, in some degree, *la via vecchia* (the old way)

regarding the topic of the family (Kertzer & Saller, 1991):

1. Fear God and respect the saints or else you will really repent it.
2. The father is the father and he is experienced. The son will never fail if he imitates him.
3. The elders are prudent and experienced; do as they do and you learn and prosper.
4. Always honor and obey your parents; then even the stones will love you.
5. If you don't listen to your helpful mother, everything will turn to shit right in your pants.
6. Father is the master.
7. Experiences gives power.
8. Work hard, work always, and you will never know hunger.
9. Work honestly, and don't think of the rest.
10. Whoever doesn't want to work, dies like a dog.

The Italian-American Family

Because Italian men typically did not marry until they could afford to provide for a family, there were repercussions. Before emigration, men would work and struggle to save enough money. They would be present during these times and courtship would be possible as would arrangements of marriages. However, when emigration became a viable option, instead of working nearby, men were leaving in large numbers to the Americas and other countries in Europe. They were not around. Oftentimes men would either marry, then leave their bride in Italy, or they would leave then, come back to pick a

bride when they had enough money. Women were weary of America, often referring to it as *mala femmina* (a bad woman). Men would sometimes leave never to come back or contact loved ones again. However, in most instances the distance created problems due to the time in between letters, the lack of money, and the lack of seeing each other. When the time finally came for a woman to leave to go to America to get married, or to join her husband, it was very traumatic as many women had never gone beyond the boundaries of the village or town in which they were raised. They were also scared because they knew they may never or probably would never see their parents or families again.

Once on the ships leaving for America various feelings of guilt, excitement, anger, and a host of other feelings made their way through the immigrants minds. While, oftentimes, families were allowed to quarter together, there were times when the women and men were kept separate. The ship rides were varied depending on the liner, the weather, and the make-up of the passengers. Paranoia often struck the superstitious southern Italians with their variety of folk beliefs. Tales of what they do with people who are sick ran through the mind of Theodora Giacomo in 1908 as she suffered from severe migraine headaches which left her immobilized and unable to take care of her infant daughter⁷⁵. Her eight year-old daughter did so for her. However, Theodora was gripped with fear as rumors spread throughout the ship that those who were sick would be thrown overboard. It was common knowledge that those who were sick would not be accepted at Ellis Island, and ships would not turn around in their journey. Therefore, rumors spread that ships crew would throw those sick overboard. It was imperative for Theodora to

⁷⁵ Interview with Giovanna Massaro, October, 1996, McAlester, Oklahoma.

keep everything to herself and not let anyone know of her health. She not only felt she was jeopardizing her own life, but the lives of her husband and three children.

Their ship arrived in New York at night. For a young girl and the many others who were from a small village in Italy, the sight of New York City at night, with all its lights and tall buildings was divine. One respondent, Giovanna Massaro said “I thought we had arrived in heaven.” Seeing the statue of liberty, and all the lights reminded her of what heaven must be like. The thought of seeing such a wonder was still written all over her face close to 90 years later. She said that people were all invited on deck, both men and women. All night long people were singing and dancing waiting for the morning to come. Everyone was happy they had finally made it to their new home.

The Family in Oklahoma

Once in Indian Territory and Oklahoma, Italian miners, after having decided to stay would need to marry. Many of the miners married non-Italians, while many married women from their home villages in Italy. Initial divisions based on regional differences of Italians kept most Italians marrying people from the same regions if they were to marry an Italian⁷⁶. The time and money it cost to bring women over from Italy often led to Italian men marrying non-Italians. For the most part, Italians preferred to marry women from their own village. The tale is similar to most immigrant stories. The male would come to America to make money. Once having made enough money, he would then travel to Italy to find himself a bride in the village where he grew up. Beyond that the social class structure and family histories narrowed his selection down even more.

⁷⁶ Interview with Nick Finamore, May, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

Inevitably the choice of whom to marry was a simple one. As a gentleman said when answering the question of why he married the woman he did, he said “she wore a pretty ribbon in her hair⁷⁷.” Many other individuals talked of how their grandfathers, or fathers chose their grandmothers or mothers simply by either seeing a photo of her or learning about her from a friend or family member. The women on the other hand, would typically never turn down an opportunity to come to America nor go against what their family suggested. If a man traveled to Italy, he would typically develop a short courtship followed by a return to the coal counties and correspond with the woman he planned to marry. He would return to Italy at a later date to marry her. If the woman came to the coal counties before marriage, she would typically stay with friends or family she knew from her home village in Italy. There would be a short courtship followed by a wedding. If they married in the United States without one of the spouses meeting the other’s family, they often would take a trip to the village in Italy to meet family members.

Neolocal residence was typical after marriage and the nuclear family was predominant. Neighborhoods developed similar to those in Italy by being composed of small colonies of Italians with a life experience much like that in Italy. Couples would marry and live next door and/or nearby other family or friends.. Sometimes couples would live with family members long enough to save money to buy property and a home. One couple lived with her parents for 12 years before saving enough money to buy their own home⁷⁸. In the coal counties there were no strict rules for property dispenement to

⁷⁷ Interview with Anthony Yohe, August, 1998, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

⁷⁸ Interview with Ernestine and Nick Finamore, June, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

children as had been the case in Italy. Italians typically followed the pattern of Americans by sharing property with their children and allowing their children to decide what to do with the inheritance afterwards.

Daily life involved the husband getting up and going the mines either by train or foot. The wife's role was to keep the house in order, prepare the food, wash the clothes, take care of the children, and invest and buy consumables as needed. Wives had tremendous amounts of autonomy because husbands gave it to them. Italian men married women who were physically strong so they could easily bear children and take care of the daily chores in the house. They married women who were intellectually strong enough to rear children, prepare for times of trouble, and not be swindled in the day to day business dealings.

Make no mistake about it, husbands were the bread-winners of the house and wives were inclined to accept their husbands authority. Several people interviewed indicated that women were little more than property, and that husbands would "slap their wives around" to keep them doing what the husband wanted. Although many second generation Italian-Americans said their mother's threatened their father's, rarely did anyone divorce. This was due to their religious beliefs. Though life was cruel to women, most said this was simply the way things were. One immigrant woman who was widowed twice to Italian miners said that her third husband, an American, treated her better than she had ever been treated, and she wished she would have met him earlier⁷⁹.

The daily life for the kids was to obey and respect their parents. Mothers were

⁷⁹ Anonymous interview, August, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

typically the main disciplinarian of the family. One gentleman talked about his immigrant mother who slapped him on the side of the head and said “I just-a came-a from-a confession, and-a you made-a me cuss⁸⁰.” If the children got out of hand and did not listen to their mother, the father would step in to discipline them. One gentleman used a form of discipline that would be considered excessive and criminal today. He would tie his sons to the clothes-line by their thumbs and let them hang there until he was certain the punishment was sufficient. Many times they would be there most of the day. This type of punishment, although excessive by today’s standards, was common in the coal counties of Oklahoma⁸¹. Fathers had the authority to do what they saw fit.

In one instance an older brother was so upset with his younger brother that he tied him up and dragged him around the neighborhood with a horse. When some of the neighbors saw what was occurring, they contacted the police. The police told the young Italian to stop what he was doing. His response was “Why? He’s my brother!” Family discipline was no one else’s business⁸².

The daily pattern of behavior assured that everyone was present for dinner. Emilia Palmeiri Askew said her father would always say to her: “I don’t care if you bring all your friends over, but when supper is on the table you are going to be here for the meal⁸³.” It was important for the Italian family to be there for the main meal. It provided

⁸⁰ Anonymous interview, August, 1998, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

⁸¹ Anonymous interview, October, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

⁸² Anonymous interview, August, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

⁸³ Interview, February, 1998, Wilburton, Oklahoma.

family solidarity and was symbolic of the battle of the family against the rest of the world. By making sure everyone was home for the main meal the father was able to enact the role of bread-winner and maintain control over the household at the same time.

Children were not always expected to marry an Italian even though that was preferred. This was a function of the small number of Italians available. By the time the immigration laws had changed in the United States, the coal fields had run their course. There was little work and finding a spouse was increasingly difficult as people continued to move away from the area. Dating rituals among Italians became increasingly more like the rest of the area population. When one woman asked her immigrant grandmother how she would know whether or not the person she thought of marrying was the right one, the response was “Do you love him? You can’t eat, you can’t sleep because you’re thinking about him? . . . You’ve got to marry him.”⁸⁴ Several second and third generation Italian-Americans stated they couldn’t marry an Italian because the only Italians around were relatives⁸⁵. One gentleman from Haileyville talked of how he began dating a young woman from Krebs who was Italian. He described her as beautiful, having all the stereotypical features associated with Italians such as olive skin, brown eyes, and hair. After about three dates he was telling his grandmother about the young lady and his grandmother told him he must stop seeing her because the young lady was his cousin⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ Anonymous interview, August, 1998, Haileyville, Oklahoma.

⁸⁵

One of the times when my wife came with me while doing interviews, she remarked “David, they’re all related.”

⁸⁶ Interview with Paul Mariano, July, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

While this dilemma pushed Italians to marry non-Italians, it also kept the family strong as a system of relationships developed in communities among people who were kin for generations dating back to Italy. This solidarity is representative in the statement by Tony Yohe when he described how his family operated with each other:

It was a family thing, *la famiglia*. If I needed \$1,000 I would go to Uncle Frank and he would give me \$1,000. . . . We wouldn't go to the banks. We didn't trust them⁸⁷.

Steve Carano, a fourth generation Italian-American who is trying to maintain the family traditions said, "I envy what my parents had." He said the family was much more strict than it is today. They did not know what divorce was. Every meal began with a prayer. No one was allowed to wear a hat into the house because that would show disrespect to the husband and wife⁸⁸.

Today families of Italians mirror the families that surround them. Intermarriage is now the rule, not the exception. Divorce is common. Although many say the most important thing is to marry a Catholic, many have married non-Italians and non-Catholics which leads to many new situations that never existed before, such as new traditions of types of foods to eat and when to eat them. Both husbands and wives now work outside the home. Families are relatively small. Because the economy is struggling in the coal counties, extended families have been splintered as siblings move to find employment elsewhere. Some said the only time they see their extended family is at weddings, and others point to the funeral as when they get together.

⁸⁷ Interview, August, 1998, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

⁸⁸ Interview, September, 1998, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Friendships in Oklahoma

Friendships inevitably tell the story of ingroup-outgroup relations when discussing ethnicity. They may in fact demonstrate the polarization of power relations (Merton, 1972) within a society where some collectivities of people, in this case ethnic groups find themselves in a constant struggle for acceptance in a larger milieu which does not recognize their validity. It is in this setting we find Italian immigrants arriving in Indian Territory and Oklahoma. As mentioned throughout this work, immigrants, specifically those from southern and eastern Europe were not wanted in the coal mines or the towns. Little kindness and generosity existed from those of English, Welsh, and Scottish descent to those who were Polish, Lithuanian, and Italian. These new immigrants were taking jobs from the experienced miners. They worked for less money and typically did what they were told to do. Evidence of this dislike for foreigners, can be found as the local union, the Knights of Labor were reluctant to have southern or eastern Europeans join (Van Horn, 1939). The different customs these immigrants had, the difference in languages, and their overall lower standards of living repelled the American and English miners (Ryan, 1935).

Because of these differences in type of living, language and customs, most immigrants would settle in areas where there were numbers of their former countryman. So we find in Hartshorne an Italian community mainly of people from Rocca Pia in the Abruzese region; but also Russians, Lithuanians, and Poles. In Wilburton, Italians were comprised mainly of Bolognesi, Abruzezi, and Siciliani. They kept to themselves with their own markets and businesses that catered specifically to Italians. However, even

Sicilians were not particularly wanted in the Wilburton area. Other towns such as Dow, Alderson, Bache, Richfield, and many others followed these same residential patterns.

In the latter third of the nineteenth century Krebs was populated mainly by Irish Catholics, with a few northern Italians. The southeastern and southwestern parts were comprised of Irish Catholics and other groups. There were a substantial number of Syrians living in Krebs who owned and worked at many of the small business establishments. As the twentieth century approached, more and more Italians began moving to Krebs. A strong Italian community developed with large enough numbers which allowed for a division of northern Italians from southern Italians. The former living on the south side of what is now Washington Avenue, the latter on the north side⁸⁹.

The area where the Italians lived in Krebs, considered and marketed by some to be Oklahoma's "Little Italy" was not originally part of Krebs. The area where the Italians lived was known as "11 ½." The main mine in Krebs was number 11. The Italians lived away from the other groups but worked in the same mine. Instead of walking into the main shaft of the mine they walked to the air shaft which was located near where St. Joseph's Church is now located. They would walk down the air shaft because it was shorter and easier to access the mine. Because so many of the miners used that air shaft, the shaft then became known as 11 ½. Eventually the area surrounding the entry also

⁸⁹ Interview with Rose Cattania, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

became known as 11 ½⁹⁰.

Therefore, what was found were small ethnic communities that developed into towns surrounding the mines. Dependable transportation was not available so it was important to live near where one worked. Because the miners settled in communities that were homogeneous, ethnic sub-cultures developed in these communities. Hence what developed are relationships and interactions that followed ethnic lines for long and short periods of time. In some areas, such as Krebs, ethnic friendships were consistent into the 1950s, while in other places, such as Hartshorne, Haileyville, Alderson, Wilburton and many others, friendships that were mainly founded on ethnic lines were largely gone by the late 1920s. When the mines began closing without new industries to take their place, many moved on. In fact some of those interviewed from the latter areas said that when going to school in the 1960s and 1970s they did not know of any others who were Italian except for relatives⁹¹.

It must be noted that these friendships which were founded upon ethnic lines were not necessarily a conscious choice. All of those interviewed said their friendships were with those who lived close by. Therefore, Italians were making friends with other Italians because they lived in the same neighborhood, went to the same schools, and went to the same church. However, initially these neighborhoods were organized along ethnic lines

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Interview with Angelo Scarpitti, Noah Rich, and Nick Finamore, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

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Interview with Anna Maria Sweet, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma. As well as many others.

due to the polarization mentioned above. Finding solitude in the familiarity of ones past is typical of all immigrants.

While there was an over-abundance of northern as opposed to southern Italians, what was evident was that in sheer numbers, Italians were a clear minority in the coal counties of Indian Territory and Oklahoma (See Table 6). Although the mining communities were considered to be peaceful (Ryan, 1935), they were nonetheless hostile when diverse groups would interact. What kept things at ease was the overall parameters of each ethnic neighborhood. When staying at home or among neighbors there were no troubles. In fact, Italian neighborhoods, were composed of people who spoke different languages that were lumped together as “Italian” but were kept together as they were joined by a common church.

Table 6
Numbers of Foreign Born Italians Living in Pittsburg, Latimer, and Coal Counties for Years, 1910 and 1920.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Pittsburg</u>	<u>Latimer</u>	<u>Coal</u>	<u>Total</u>
1910	1,398	321	443	2162
1920	912	353	353	1618

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 Census of the Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Oklahoma, and 1920 Census of the Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Oklahoma.

The close proximity of Italians to one another helped in the years when there were strikes and as the mining industry began to wane. Stories unfold of living conditions during the strike of 1898 - 1903 in which Edwin Lutlow of the Atoka Coal and Mining Company said “I shall make a dollar look as big as a wagon wheel” (Van Horn, 1939, p. 15). He was very successful at making his claim as striking mining families were

relegated to eating nothing but turnips and drinking water for months at a time. In those years many Italians went back to Italy or elsewhere within the United States waiting out the strike conditions.

In the years that followed and as Italian mining families bought homes, they also were able to create plots of land for growing crops as they did in their days in Italy⁹². By the time the 1920s came around, the large mines were on their way out. The strike of 1924 - 1927 added to the demise which sent many Italian families heading toward places such as Detroit, Chicago, and Akron. Those who stayed, stayed because they had land. Tony Yohe said that many of the old-timers would reach down and grab a handful of dirt and say “Do you know what this is? This is gold.” For those that came from a land and a time of absentee landlords, Italians would buy land the size of dining tables knowing it could be used for something⁹³.

Italians and most people in the mining areas will tell you that they were experiencing economic depression before the rest of the world. As Noah ‘Pug’ Rich said “we had our own Krebs ‘Grapes of Wrath’ before the rest of Oklahoma⁹⁴.” It was common to see businesses fail in the 1920s. As mentioned earlier, in Coalgate, four of the five banks failed in 1923. But the Italians who stayed did so because they owned land

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In the summer of 1998, one of the hottest and driest in Oklahoma history, I told one gentleman of Italian descent that I was able to keep my tomato plants producing throughout the summer. He quickly responded “You can’t help it. It’s in your genes. Your family has been living off the land for centuries.”

⁹³ Interview, August, 1998, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

⁹⁴ Interview, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

and had their ties to the area. A common sentiment from Italians was 'I own my own house, I have enough food for years, my clothing can last for two or three years, and if I don't get sick, and I have enough money to pay taxes, I can get along' (Ryan, 1935).

While the times were tough, for these Italians the one key difference between the hard times in Oklahoma and those in Italy was that this time they did own land and they were not going to give that up. The land was invaluable at that time. Italians would grow crops that would provide them enough food to last for as many as two years. As Ernestine Finamore stated:

In those days we didn't have no refrigerators. We had to grow things, can them, bottle them, place them in our cellars. Everyone would go from house to house bottling, canning, cooking and drying out the food; placing the sausage in vats or buried in the ground covered with lard. We had to rely on each other. If we didn't we wouldn't have made it. But that's the way it was then. And even though we didn't have no money, when people would come by asking for help, there was always something to give. You don't see that no more. And now we have money⁹⁵.

In fact, few people in the Italian communities were born in hospitals until the 1930s. One needed to rely on others for survival. It is my belief that the congeniality between neighbors was not based on common ancestry alone, nor the overall congeniality system thought to be common at the time. Instead, what appears to be the case is that the context was one of helping out of necessity. Because living conditions were harsh and the mining conditions were worse with nearly everyone having at least one relative who had died in the mines, it created a necessity to help each other out at any time. Therefore, this provided a situation in which gradually a more hospitable arrangement developed where

⁹⁵ Interview, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

people naturally helped each other. If everyone had plenty of money, food, and clothing, there would not have been a reason to assist others. Yet, this was a time where everyone was forced to help each other due to economic conditions. Their lives were at stake⁹⁶.

When the war years began, the economy improved and life diversified. People moved, communities became more heterogeneous, and many of the ties to the “old country” were weakening. Inter-marriage weakened ancestral and religious ties, and therefore, only those that stayed seemed to have the same friendships. The second-generation in many areas still maintain their friendships from when they were kids. Their children however have moved on, developed new networks, and the friendships along family ties, common ancestry have long been abandoned. One issue I was interested in getting a response to dealt with how these individuals got along with other people of Italian descent. Every person, except one said they usually got along better with Italians than ‘Americans’. As one individual said:

It’s like a special club. You know what I’m saying. People hear the name and begin talking as if I know exactly what they’re talking about. Strangely enough, I do. All the Italian guys at work tend to get along great. I usually will look out for

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I would suggest that the hospitality of the group under study towards each other was born out of five key factors: (1) economic necessity; (2) geographic location; (3) common ancestry; (4) similar ancestry; and (5) religious affiliation. In many areas of the coal counties there were not enough numbers of any one group to allow for clustering of an ethnic collective. Therefore they looked after each other due to the tough economic conditions in the area. The difficulties also in traveling forced them also to take care of the people in their own location. If numbers permitted, there were colonies of peoples of common and similar ancestry which facilitated hospitality due to familiarity. And common religious practices aided the facilitation of mutual trust. I feel these five factors greatly influenced the hospitality that was evident in those days comparatively to present conditions.

them⁹⁷.

Frank Cuzalina said:

There's usually some link-up immediately. It's usually like talking to a family member. At least it is for me⁹⁸.

The typical response mentioned feelings of family when talking with someone of Italian descent. Most of those interviewed stated that I reminded them of family or someone they grew-up with.

Discrimination

In the understanding of the types of relationships that exist or existed among Italians and their offspring in southeastern Oklahoma, it must be readily acknowledged that problems existed and continue to exist regarding discrimination based on race and/or ethnicity. These problems developed both in the business sector and the social sector. From the time anyone different began entering the mines as early as the 1870s, there were problems within the mining profession. As mentioned earlier, the first union, the Knights of Labor was organized for miners. Typically the Americans, English, Welsh, Scots and others did not want southern and eastern Europeans to join as they were mainly unskilled laborers (Ryan, 1935). However, they allegedly bore no ill feelings toward them otherwise. A strike that occurred in 1894 was seen by some to be an insurrection begun by foreigners, mainly southern and eastern Europeans. One unknown report stated (in

⁹⁷ Interview with Paul Mariano, July, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

⁹⁸ Interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

Van Horn, 1939) that “the majority of the miners who had struck were foreigners, and they either did not understand or did not respect, American law and American institutions, and preferred anarchy rather than a reign of law and order.” In fact, when mining companies removed striking miners’ families from their homes, they would place them onto trains for the Arkansas border. The then governor of Arkansas during the 1894 strike stated he did not want “undesirable characters” in the state. Most of the striking miners at that time were southern and eastern Europeans.

The strike of 1898 - 1903 gave some hope to race relations as common circumstance brought all miners together. And when working conditions improved, the demand for coal increased, the salaries went up, and the living conditions improved. Things began to calm down. However, again it must be noted that segregation was the rule, not the exception. Neighborhoods were still sectioned off, and women and children rarely came into contact with “Americans.” A quote from the United States 61st Congress on Bituminous Mining (See LoConto & LoConto, 1998) states the overall sentiments of the United States and the people of southeastern Oklahoma toward Italians:

The South Italians are slow in becoming Americanized and many in the coal regions who have been in this country from fifteen to twenty years are scarcely able to speak English. They live in colonies, have very little association with natives, and show little interest outside of their own immediate neighborhood. They are suspicious of Americans, do not trust their money to the banks, and trade at American shops as little as possible. They are making little progress toward Americanization. Each year the South Italians are investing more money in homes and real estate, and in becoming property owners, they are naturally led to take more interest in civic affairs. Even after the South Italian, however, has made his permanent home in the Southwest, he seems to make little effort to adopt American ways. He does not encourage his children in attending school but takes them away at an early age, thus preventing the second generation from having the opportunity of becoming assimilated. The children hear only Italian

spoken in the colony and in the home, and their only opportunity to learn English is at school. . . . The Poles, Slovaks, and Magyars are almost as backward as South Italians . . .

These sentiments were common for years to come, and in instances continue to manifest themselves. As mentioned above, due to Italians staying to themselves where population allowed for such conditions, women and children especially did not associate with others. Children were exposed to Americans normally only when they went to school. This was a source of hostility as children were ridiculed and called names for being Italian and Catholic. Some reported of Italians being called “niggers.” In the early years of statehood and before, many Italians did not finish school or went to schools predominantly comprised of Italians, which helped postpone racially hostile encounters. Many of those interviewed talked of how they stood up for themselves, family, and friends against the “Americans” when being called names such as “dago” or “wop.” The end result was typically a new found friend. By this I mean when Italian children would stand-up for themselves the other kids would typically learn to respect them and they would get along.

In addition, as adults, because Italians had the reputation of being good cooks and making excellent sausage, their markets were frequented by “Americans” for these delicacies. Several people interviewed in the various coal counties told stories of people coming in and asking for “dago bread.” The stories vary from one place to another but follow the same pattern reflected in the following:

I remember when Ornorina was working at a local market owned by her father, when a woman came in and asked for some “dago bread.” Ornorina, who was all

of about five feet tall, walked around the counter and decked the woman, saying: "here's your dago bread!"⁹⁹

Fights also occurred in the mines over racial issues. On January 10, 1914, Mike Satalia, an Italian timberman, got in an altercation with Charles Doyle during a race war at the Kali Inla Company coal mine in Cambria. Satalia died after suffering a blow to the head with a mine timber, leaving his wife and four children. Although these incidents did occur and the antagonisms that led to them were always slightly below the surface Italian workers were seen as valuable help. They were staunch supporters of the United Mine Workers Association and ready and willing to buy into the ideology of the Anglo-Saxon socialist leaders who were prevalent in the first two decades of the twentieth century in Oklahoma (Burbank, 1976; Miller, 1987; Ryan, 1935). Concern of the socialist leanings of Italians led to more distrust of them by "Americans" (Brown, 1980). However, this appears to be more of a justification for discriminatory behavior against Italians, as socialism was popular in Oklahoma, especially in the 1914 and 1916 elections in the coal counties (Burbank, 1976).

In the 1920s and 1930s Italian school-aged-children experienced discrimination when they would be bused to school in the city of McAlester. Niccolo Finamore tells the story of waiting for the school bus to take him from Krebs to McAlester:

I would be out there in the morning waiting for the bus to take me to school. The bus would pull up, the door would open, and the bus driver would say "Protestant or Catholic?" I would say "Catholic" and the bus driver would shut the door and leave. I would have to wait for a car to come and take me to school just because I

⁹⁹ Anonymous interview, July, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

was Catholic¹⁰⁰.

In addition, kids would go to school and find themselves being attacked verbally for being Catholic. Several people interviewed talked about being called “cat-lickers.” The actual statement was “cat-lickers, cat-lickers, kiss the cat’s ass¹⁰¹.” Not knowing how to respond, the Italian kids would yell back “pot-lickers¹⁰².” Also many of the people interviewed who were attending school during this same time period (1920s - 1950s) said that teachers would make-up new names for the Italian students because they (the teachers) would not pronounce their names correctly. One respondent said that her grandparents could not stand the sight of seeing her mother (an Italian) with her father (non-Italian). She said they could not stand the sight of her mother simply because she was Italian¹⁰³.

Italians were famous for making ‘choc beer’ and selling it to help make ends meet. At any hour, any day, “Americans” would come by to have some choc. This helped alleviate some problems associated with prejudice. Often times the police would call before they were going to raid a house to give the occupant time to hide enough ‘choc’ as possible. They would then leave enough for the police to find, destroy, and be able to report that they were successful in their endeavor to squelch the illegal activity at

¹⁰⁰ Interview, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹⁰² Interview Noah Rich, May, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

¹⁰³ Interview with Marilyn Pistocco, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

the home. Although this kind of agreement demonstrated a reducing of hostilities toward Italians, things would change. When World War II began and Italy became part of the Axis, justifications were made to address the Italians in the coal counties.

Italians had always encountered some opposition for being distant and untrustworthy of not only the American government, but government in general. Italians were the slowest in getting their naturalization papers, and even after several decades, many Italian immigrants had not received theirs¹⁰⁴. Although these immigrants had businesses, owned land, and had children and grandchildren in the United States military, many Oklahomans began to wonder about them. Theodora Giacomo, an elderly woman at the time, whose husband's family came to Oklahoma around 1880 was shocked to find police entering her home and taking weapons and radios¹⁰⁵. Pete Prichard, who was already famous for his restaurant, 'Pete's Place', had his home broken into by police and having weapons and radios removed¹⁰⁶. Frank and Eda Antonelli's home in Hartshorne was under surveillance¹⁰⁷. Rose Cattania who came to the United States shortly before the change in immigration laws remembers the police coming to her home:

My father used to love playing around with clocks. We had boxes of them. When

¹⁰⁴

Another semi-humorous finding came when looking through a history of coal county. Under the topic of immigration, there was a photo of 11 Italian immigrants getting their naturalization papers in the early 1940s. Most of them were quite old.

¹⁰⁵

Interview with Phyllis Testa Lambert, Bill Testa, and Vincenza Testa, March, 1998, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Roseanne Prichard, September, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Anthony Yohe, August, 1998, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

the war broke out, all of a sudden the police came to the door making their way in. They of course wanted all weapons and radios, however, they found this box of alarm clocks. They thought my father was building bombs. So they took them¹⁰⁸.

Probably the most sorrowful story was that of Angelo Bartolucci. Bartolucci was an immigrant who was outspoken regarding the war. This did not sit well with Oklahomans. One day, Bartolucci was forced to prove his allegiance to the flag and to America. Although Bartolucci did not belong to any subversive organizations, and although he did not write anti-American literature, he was forced to crawl up the steps of the courthouse building in McAlester, and kiss the American flag. By doing this he would show his allegiance¹⁰⁹.

But not all discrimination was aimed at those who were Italian. One woman interviewed whose mother was not Italian was shunned by the Italian side. She stated that:

Because I was not a 'brown baby' like the other Italian kids, I was not Italian. I was never treated like a family member by my dad's parents. Even when my grandmother was dying she would not accept me as hers¹¹⁰.

Many others stated there were differences between Americans and themselves. One woman said she and everyone should never trust Americans¹¹¹. Early on Italians did

¹⁰⁸ Interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁹

Interview with Frank Cuzalina, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma. Many others did say they knew about it, however only Frank and his cousin Anthony Yohe volunteered the information.

¹¹⁰ Anonymous interview, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

¹¹¹

Anonymous interview, July, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma. One other note to this. When

make distinctions between themselves and other Italians. In the 1920s and 1930s Sicilians were still viewed as suspect. One gentleman brought home a friend who was Sicilian, and his mother said “don’t you ever bring that Siciliano in my house again!” It was simply because the young man was Sicilian and nothing more¹¹².

In the postwar years discrimination seemed to be on the downswing. However, even the Pistocco’s who owned Foster’s Flowers, an existing business, kept the name of the shop the same. One reason was because they knew Foster’s had a good following and they did not want to change anyone’s views of the place. A second reason they kept the name was because they were afraid that if they changed the name to “Pistocco’s” that no one in the neighborhood would shop at an Italian flower shop¹¹³.

Fewer of the third generation mentioned being discriminated against. Few mentioned stories about peoples’ reactions if they dated non-Italians, stating that things were okay as long as they did not get serious with the person. If they did, the other person’s family would step in to stop the relationship¹¹⁴. Some stated that in the 1970s and 1980s while in school they were called ‘mobsters’, ‘niggers’, ‘dagos’, ‘ravioli’, ‘spaghetti winders’, and ‘helicopters’. Some were still harassed for being Catholic. One woman mentioned being told by classmates to “wash the dirt off” while referring to her

talking about discrimination, many people asked me to stop the tape player, and made statements such as “this is off the record.”

¹¹² Anonymous interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹¹³ Interview with Jim and Marilyn Pistocco, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹¹⁴ Anonymous interview, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

olive-colored skin¹¹⁵. In 1980, in a newspaper article in 'The Shawnee News-Star' on Oklahoma's Italian heritage, the question was asked Bill Prichard (son of Pete) if prejudice still exists in the area now. Bill Prichard's response was "Does the sun come up in the morning?"

In the 1990s there continues to be some discrimination, more subtle perhaps than obvious. James Pistocco said "there was an anti-Italian and anti-Catholic sentiment, and both of those are still pretty strong¹¹⁶." One gentleman talked of a discussion he had with a non-Italian recently: "He said to me, you know we refer to all of you as dagos. And I said yes I do, and you know that I refer to you as a bunch of semi-literate hillbillies." The second-generation Italians, now mostly over 65 years of age still talk about attitudes of those around them. Some remarks are as follows:

You must never underestimate in terms of business, in terms if you are in a profession. You must always be aware of the fact that this is an extremely strong Baptist area. It is the center of the Masonic life.

The antagonism is still here. We get along pretty well on a daily basis, but if we step on somebody's toes the antagonism comes to the surface. . . . They never forget where you came . . .

My family has been here since 1883, but unless my name is Green, Brown, or Jones you can't pronounce it because you're a bunch of uneducated hillbillies¹¹⁷.

Surprisingly, when talking to a nurse regarding an Italian woman with Alzheimer's

¹¹⁵ This last statement came from Emily Prichard, September, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

¹¹⁶ Interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹¹⁷

All remarks quoted here were asked to be kept confidential. They occurred in McAlester, Oklahoma, in June of 1998.

Disease who had forgotten how to speak English and could only speak Italian, she seemed delighted that I was doing research in southeastern Oklahoma. Then she added, “well, you know, they have their own dago day there. Of course we are not allowed to call them that, but they can call themselves dago.” While interviewing one gentleman, he stated that within the last two months (spring, 1998), that a gentleman was refused a teaching position. He was told privately by an alleged insider that it was because he was Italian, Catholic, and from the east. He went on to convey the story to me:

. . . recently, a man was not hired because he was an easterner, Catholic, an Italian. . . . They said to me, if you do anything to bring this to light in the newspaper, we will do everything we can. We will use all our power to hurt you and your people politically and economically¹¹⁸.

Therefore, there still appears to be some strong anti-Italian sentiment. The sign entering McAlester that reads: “Welcome to McAlester, Home of Cowboys and Italians” is a marketing ploy to bring money to the area. Italians have little or nothing to do with it. As I finished one particular interview early in the process, one gentleman gave me one stern warning: “Don’t get into certain areas when dealing with non-Italians.”

Nicknames

Due to this relationship of underlying discrimination and antagonism, Italians adjusted and adapted. In Italy it is common to this day to use nicknames. In the mezzogiorno specifically, or in impoverished areas throughout Italy, it is common and expected for townspeople to have nicknames (Cohen, 1977). There have been several explanations for such practices. Brogger (1970) in his study of a Calabresi village

¹¹⁸ Anonymous interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

concluded that nicknames emphasize the individual character of the people in their isolation from the rest of the communities around them. This theme is common throughout literature on southern European culture (Campbell, 1964; Lison-Tolosana, 1966; Wolf, 1969). Emphasizing the individual character of the individuals does not imply naming someone based on individual characteristics. Instead, the nicknames often have unknown meanings. Brandes (1975) suggests that usage of nicknames in smaller size communities of 500 to 3000, acts in part to designate a sense of moral unity, voluntary bonds of friendship, and informal methods of social control. Cohen (1977) argues against this in his study of a central Italian village where he argues that nicknames give the community a sense of socio-centrism called *campanilismo*. Cohen suggests there is more of a methodology designated by people in power who are able to nickname individuals. These nicknames are then internalized by everyone in the village as a means of identification. Others simply evolve over the course of early childhood and stick. However, there appears to be little consensus over the methods in which nicknaming occurs. The consensus is that nicknaming does provide some form of group unity against another force which may simply be the next village or town.

When looking at the Italians of southeastern Oklahoma, we find many nicknames for the inhabitants. In a sampling of 23 nicknames, 35% followed patterns of nicknaming due to personal characteristics, while others seem to have no rhyme or reason (See Table 7). There is little consistency with any one typology or formulation. However this act of nicknaming seems to have been more central in the early part of the century amongst the immigrants, and could arguably show an informal method of social control, and

community and group identity (To be discussed in the next chapter).

Table 7

Selected Nicknames of Italians in the Coal Counties of Oklahoma

<u>Descriptive</u>	<u>Non-Descriptive</u>
Pudgy - Someone who was fat	Bucci, Cubby, Cacci, Juggy,
Pug - The person has a flat face	Gummy, Buzzard, Qua Qua,
Socko - The person beat the hell out of everyone	Fanny, Yecci, Babe, P.P.,
Mariucci - Little Mary	Pickadou, Maria perdue
Traca Traca - Walked on the train tracks a lot	Cicci, Cucci
Shoe-peg - Had a wooden shoe	
Blazer - Walked fast through the forest	
Slick Dom - Fast and shifty talker	

Food

It is difficult to discuss Italians or Italian Americans without mentioning foods or food habits. Images in the United States of the big Italian mama encouraging everyone to “*mangia, mangia*” are found throughout American literature and advertisements. Indeed this was more the case of Italians in the early and mid twentieth century. Recently on a television talk show discussing eating disorders, one of the guests began talking about eating habits of his family and how all his family members were close to 50 pounds overweight. The host of the show quickly pointed out that 50 pounds for Italians was normal, and that Italians should not count when talking about eating disorders. Of course the host was kidding, but it was this stereotype of Italians based somewhat in truth that allowed for such a remark to be made.

In Italy, the soon to be immigrants were not heavy, nor were they able to eat much. As mentioned earlier, the choice in Italy was to stay and starve to death, or take a

chance and leave. In southern Italy, the diet consisted mainly of lentils, split peas, or fava beans (Mangione & Morreale, 1992). This was often made into soups with escarole or chicory. Minestrone was made with spinach. Pasta was typically only added on special occasions. What there was an abundance of was fruit, and the delicacy of choice was the fig. The mainstay was bread eaten with olive oil and salt and pepper. Meat may have only been eaten twice a year. What desserts there were consisted largely of some form of alcohol to spice up the food.

It was from this background that many an Italian arrived in America. Here, Italians could change their diets to encompass a variety of so-called Italian foods and other ethnic and American foods. The stiff bread as one respondent who had been to Italy said “tastes like shit”, was replaced with the new fluffy, rich bread. Soon many Italians were spending as much money on food as they were for rent. Soon meat became a staple for Italians with the availability of steak, meatballs, chicken dishes, and lamb. Italian stores became stocked with food items from the floor to the ceiling. As Mangione & Morreale said, “within a generation many a lean immigrant was to turn into a heavyweight” (p. 136).

It also must be remembered that the foods in Italy were diverse with regional differences abundant. The further one went south in Italy, the less meat one could find. Traditional meals often had beans, vegetables, and some pasta. Meat that was often eaten may typically be that of rabbit. For those without means, meat was a luxury that was unavailable.

In northern Italy there were more foods to be eaten, and they were much richer.

Hence, even today, people of Italian descent will make the distinction between “red and white” sauces; red being from the south, white being from the north.

Oklahoma

Upon arriving in what is now Oklahoma, Italian immigrants had to make do with what was available. Living in rural America, with few people of common descent in the area, food traditions were set aside and Italians ate the foods allotted them. In the early years, with most food stuffs provided by the company, Italian dishes were sparse. As more Italians populated the area, food stuffs became available catering to the specific diets of Italians. For most Italians and their offspring, foods were organized more along traditional eating habits, although highly Americanized as meat, and varieties of other foods were now intermixed or included with the typical diet. A common weekly menu went something like this:

Sunday: Macaroni with sauce, possibly some soup, a vegetable, salad and fruit.
Monday: Soup or a stew.
Tuesday: Meat or a vegetable combination with macaroni.
Wednesday: Meatless meal, macaroni, vegetable combination and or fish.
Thursday: Macaroni with sauce.
Friday: Fish or pasta e fagiole
Saturday: Soup or stew¹¹⁹.

Most of the meals were made with garlic and olive oil with red sauce. Frank Maisano

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This menu was adopted from Goode, J. G. Curtis, K., & Theophano, J. (1984). Mean formats, meal cycles, and menu negotiation in the maintenance of an Italian-American community. In Food in the social order: Studies of food and festivities in three American communities, Mary Douglas, (Ed.). New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Several of those interviewed agreed that their diet as children was similar to the one found above. Depending on the economic status of the family, especially in the 1920s and 30s, pasta e fagiole was eaten several times a week.

said:

As far as my grandmother was concerned, olive oil was the cure for everything. If I had a chest cold, she spread it on my chest; a fever, my forehead; and a stomach ache, my stomach. She even put it on my hair when combing it when I went to school. Strange thing about it, wherever she placed the olive oil, the pain went away¹²⁰.

Others would place garlic around their necks to ward off either spirits or colds. Wine was abundant as were many other alcoholic beverages, such as whiskey and choc beer.

Cheese became a staple. For those Italians in Oklahoma who were successful, dishes became much more Americanized with meat being eaten quite often, and traditional Italian dishes being left for more special occasions.

Some of these occasions were the holidays. A dish that one cook-book said was northern contadini food at its best, was Bagna Cauda, translated “warm bath.” The dish is actually a sauce in which to dip vegetables. Special terra cotta pots were made for this delicacy. However, since the sauce is comprised mainly of anchovies and garlic; for the non-Italian it can be quite a nose full. The dish was made on New Years Eve. The Piemontesi brought this tradition with them. Viewed much like black-eyed peas in the Midwest and the Southern United States, Bagna Cauda is eaten on New Years Eve to provide ‘good-luck’ in the coming year. As the years have gone by, this ritual is now practiced by most Italians that were interviewed regardless of where their families were from in Italy. Siciliani, Napolitani, Abruzezi, and Molisi alike eat this dish on New Years Eve, as well as throughout the year.

¹²⁰ Interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

On Christmas Day a traditional dish now served usually with American traditions is Baccala (Codfish). Baccala is typically salted and fried and eaten just once a year. Because of its rather bland taste, it is not a delicacy that most enjoy having. The people who mentioned eating it do for traditions' sake. Chestnuts were also normally eaten on Christmas¹²¹. Anchovies and spaghetti were typically eaten on Christmas Eve although this practice appear to no-longer exist. Boiled corn was a tradition for the Abruzeze and Molise peoples on New Year's Eve, but again no longer exists¹²².

Some, such as the Antonelli's, who owned bakeries and meat markets ate much more meat than the other Italians¹²³. Although Italian staples did make their way into their diet, the Antonelli's often enjoyed the spoils of meat. For most of the other Italians, meat was a luxury that one never turned down. If it was available it was to be eaten. Most of the meat came from hogs owned by each family. "If you didn't have hogs at the beginning of the winter you went through the winter without meat."¹²⁴

While the Piemontesi tended to eat more spaghetti and meatballs than anyone, most of the rest of the Italian population ate a lot of beans. "Pasta Fagiole and Polenta were hard times food" as Tony Yohe stated. Pasta e' fagiole (pasta and beans) became the food for peasants in America. It is a complete meal in and of itself. One could live on this meal for their entire life. One gentleman talked of how he hated "pasta fazhol."

¹²¹ Interview with Rosa Cattania and Lena Maffeo, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹²² Anonymous interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

¹²³ Interview with Minnie Appling, February, 1998, Wilburton, Oklahoma.

¹²⁴ Anonymous interview, June, 1998, McAlester, Oklahoma.

He said:

“Man when I was a kid that’s all I ever ate. Sometimes we’d eat that shit three times a day. I don’t ever want to eat that shit again.¹²⁵”

It was hard times food. Polenta was a food that both northern and southern Italians ate.

However, the Piemontesi made theirs more loose than the southerners did. The

southerners made it much more firm and were able to slice it. The Piemontesi and the

other northerners referred to it as polenta, while those from the south called it “much”

(pronounced muhck). Another dish that was common for most of the southerners was

called “sagna”. Sagna were simply ‘egg noodles’. This was the dish that was often eaten

alternating with pasta e’ fagiole and polenta. In addition, during the late summer when

the garden was in full operation, sausage and peppers were a delicacy. The most common

sauce used for the pasta was not the southern red sauce nor the northern white, but instead

was comprised simply of garlic and oil. One of the delicacies enjoyed by Italians was the

homemade bread. The Italian women would place the wood in the brick-oven and light

it. After a short time they would check to see if the heat was just right. They would do

this by opening the door to the oven, holding their hand in the oven, and saying a ‘Hail

Mary’. If their hand began to burn before they finished, the oven was too warm to make

the bread¹²⁶.

Different times of year would produce some treats for the Italians. The only time

ice cream was eaten was on the Fourth of July. On Christmas Eve there was a

¹²⁵ Anonymous interview, December, 1997, Krebs, Oklahoma.

¹²⁶ Everyone who was alive when the brick ovens were in use told this same story.

Presbyterian Church in Krebs that would hand out apples and oranges to the children. However the number one treat for Italians was their drink of choice - choc. Italians, especially those from the south, often used alcohol of some kind to add to food for desserts. They also grew up drinking alcoholic beverages. Upon coming to Oklahoma they had difficulties getting grapes to make wine. The Silva's would bring in the grapes, but there would not be enough to make wine sufficient for the entire year. Therefore, Italians had to find other avenues to satisfy their thirst for alcohol.

Whiskey was something they made, but the drink of choice became something that continues to this day. Choctaw Beer, named after an alleged recipe given to the Italians by the many Choctaw in the area, is a cloudy substance that was typically made in bathtubs of most Italians. Although the drink was and is illegal to sell, it has (as mentioned earlier) a long history of illegal distribution by Italians in the area. Recently at 'Pete's Place', Joe Prichard and Michael Lalli opened a micro-brewery and began making it under the legal limits. Also, Steve DeFrance has patented a similar version of it, though not calling it Choc. The home brew is by far the best and several people in the coal counties still make it. Alcohol levels range anywhere up to 20% and the home brew is smooth, fruity, and leaves no aftertaste. In the early half of the twentieth century it was a drink so common that one individual said "it was our soda-pop when we were kids¹²⁷." Some still drink it openly, and serve their children, boasting to me that they do not have alcohol problems in their family because they openly serve alcohol to their children from

¹²⁷ Interview with "Aunt" Mary Blisko, July, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

the time they are young¹²⁸. They feel it removes all of the stigma of alcohol, and therefore the kids do not grow up wanting to drink it. While others stated that choc was not allowed in their home, and many people drank themselves to early graves partaking of the brew.

As time moved on, intermarriage took place, and assimilation enhanced. Italian foods became less visible. Recipes were never much available. As the immigrants died, so too went their knowledge of the dishes of the alleged authenticity. Few ever wrote down how to make things. Several individuals mentioned meals they ate when they were younger, but did not know how to make such meals themselves. Gloria Ranallo Mattioda said that “even if they had the recipes, they still couldn’t make the food¹²⁹.” The passing on of the ritual of food-making has died off for many of the people of Italian descent. This has led to reliance on the four restaurants in the area for the continuance of Italian food. They are: Pete’s Place, Isle of Capri, GiaComo’s, and Roseanna’s. Pete’s Place and Roseanna’s are owned and operated by the grandchildren of Pete Prichard. Isle of Capri and GiaComo’s are owned and operated by the grandchildren of Dominic Giacomo. Other restaurants which existed over the past 125 years are no more. The first of the ‘big four’ began officially in 1925.

Pete Prichard, came to this country as Pietro Piegari. He, like nearly all the male Italians that came to Oklahoma came with his parents and expected to work in the mines. In 1916 he injured his leg making it impossible for him to work in the mines. He

¹²⁸ Anonymous interview, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

¹²⁹ Interview, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

eventually began to serve food out of his house. This developed into turning his home into a restaurant. Today it is the cornerstone of the four restaurants in the area. Its popularity is such that one gentleman I talked with, while traveling in Japan came into a conversation with a Japanese fellow. When asked where he was from, the gentleman said “Krebs, Oklahoma.” The Japanese fellow immediately asked him if he ate at Pete’s Place. The two restaurants owned by the Giacomo family have their origins in the 1950s. Their family is from the Castiglione and Carovilli area in the Molise region, however, none of the Giacomo’s consented to be interviewed.

Roseanna’s was opened by Pete Prichard’s oldest son, Frank. He had always wanted to own and operate an Italian carry-out restaurant and was able to do so in 1975. While it was Frank’s dream, the restaurant was approached as a family run business that would insure the solidarity of Frank’s family. The Prichard family, who continue to own and operate the restaurant, were candid about their business and the businesses around them. While most of the restaurants advertise Italian cuisine, the Prichard family are very open as to the type of food they cook. According to Vincent Prichard:

I hate it when people come from New Jersey or New York. They always say that “this isn’t ‘authentic’ Italian food.” I don’t even know what ‘authentic’ Italian food is. We don’t claim to sell Italian food. We sell food that is Italian-American. What’s more, it is our father’s Italian-American food. We make food the way our dad taught us to do. So we are making authentic Frank Prichard food¹³⁰.

The Prichard’s take great pride in keeping their family tradition alive. Nine children of Frank and Roseanne Prichard work in the restaurant, as well as numerous grandchildren.

¹³⁰ Interview, September, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

They boast of the fact that regardless of what day, month or year you arrive to eat there, whatever you order will be made by the same person who has been making it for years.

These restaurants are the life blood now of the remnants of the Italian immigrants. Interstate 69 runs through Krebs which allows for people to stop and eat. Here they eat foods that are reminiscent of times gone by. Much of the food has changed. For all the restaurants except for Roseanna's, several people make the dishes, which some suggest makes for less 'authentic' food, or more 'commercial' food. A common complaint of many of the people interviewed was that the food, except for Roseanna's was not authentic, and not like it used to be.

One last note regarding the eating of Italian food was the difference in interpretation of what "a lot" was. I asked everyone how often they ate Italian food. Most people said "a lot." When asked how often "a lot" was, their answers varied. One person said "once or twice a month." Another said "once a week." Others said as much as "four times a week." One woman of 100% Italian descent who is married to someone who is 100% of Italian descent said

Not as much as we used to or should. When we were younger we ate it everyday. Now we eat Italian food only about three to four times a week¹³¹.

The variety of interpretations of what "a lot" means adds credence to the discussion in the next chapter. What we have seen over the last two chapters are a variety of experiences that have occurred in diverse contexts. A discussion on the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity should address the issue of negotiation and the interpretive

¹³¹ Interview with Ernestine Finamore, January, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

value of the actors involved. In the next chapter I integrate several domains of interaction to demonstrate or explain the processes involved in the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The intent and purpose of this study was to address the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity of Italian-Americans in the coal counties of southeastern Oklahoma. This was to be accomplished by looking at the rituals, traditions and overall patterns of behavior in various domains of interaction/activity such as employment, organizations, religions, festivals, education, the family, friendships, and foods. This exploratory analysis will use in this chapter structural ritualization in conjunction with symbolic interactionist and social constructionist theories as frameworks for explanation. There were a total of eleven research questions to be addressed in this study which would bring to light the issues desired:

1. What is the history of the people of Italian descent in the three county area?
2. How has life changed since World War I for those of Italian descent?
3. What are the domains of interaction which frame the context of ethnic activity?
4. What are the most prevalent Ritualized Symbolic Practices (RSPs) in existence in this population?
5. How have these RSPs changed?
6. What RSPs have ended?
7. What RSPs are still the same?
8. What is the relationship of the RSPs of the Italian-American population to that of the larger milieu?
9. How can the four factors of: salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and RSP

resources be measured?

10. How is ethnic identification used as a device by an individual or group to establish a link with the past or country of origin?

11. How does ethnic identity define parameters of actions that create continuity between the past and present?

The first two research questions are seemingly independent of the theory itself, however, because they are based in history, their consideration is important for framing the data for further explanation on formation and maintenance of ethnic identity of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma. Nine research questions will be explained in the context of the theory of structural ritualization.

Historical Considerations

An earlier draft of the proposal placed much more emphasis on the historical aspect of this population, hence the first two research questions addressing historical considerations were carried over. This was based on ambiguous statements in a variety of documents on this population, and a brief history of Italians in Oklahoma which serves as the cornerstone of memorial for these people. The current work is not a historical piece and therefore history was only used as a means to aid in explaining changes that have occurred in the area and how these might help in understanding ethnic identity. Nevertheless, this study does bring to light many historical facts, situations, and circumstances that have not been documented in addressing Italians in Oklahoma.

Some of these facts, situations, and circumstances are such things as the overall conditions of the mines and the attitudes of the employers with which the workers had to

deal. This study also reaches a viable conclusion as to why people stayed and why people left the area. This is directly tied to the ownership of property and antecedents in Italy. I also provide more detail as to how people managed their everyday lives to make ends meet. In addition, the information on discrimination was both revealing and shocking. Many of the younger people interviewed had no knowledge of the very facts touched upon here.

The festivals, with the Italian Festival being very popular with 20,000 people attending, are detailed, showing a chronology of the beginnings of these festivals. I also discuss some of the politics that have and continue to occur with them. Friendships, something sometimes taken for granted by historians, are illuminated here addressing issues as to why they became friends and how they were maintained. Another new finding regarding this population was the use of nicknames. This is a practice still adhered to in Italy and was found to have existed to a large extent here. The discussion of foods brought to light the variation of the different Italian regions, and the changes that have occurred over the last 125 years. In all, what is established historically is the wide variety of experiences these individuals have had and the retaining of information that probably would have been lost otherwise.

Theoretical Considerations

The appeal of structural ritualization for this research was grounded in the fact that it addresses the impact of the larger milieu on embedded groups which could include ethnic groups. There seemed to be a natural fit for this theory and ethnic groups. This is qualified by Knottnerus' statement on structural ritualization:

To summarize, this paper focuses on the interactional sequence through which dominant structural features of an objectified social environment are internalized and externalized (in modified form) in a class of groups “nested” within this setting. These structural forms are then re-objectivated and reified in the embedded groups as enduring social patterns, hierarchies, and so forth. (p. 258)

When dealing with ethnic groups and the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity an argument could be made that if we look at the differences of domains of interactions and RSPs over time of the group, and compare them with the larger milieu, that indeed we could have results that would supply researchers with needed information that would suggest a disappearance, strengthening, or maintenance of ethnic identity. In addition, the negotiation aspect included on how ethnic groups engage the larger milieu would aid in explaining various factors that could encourage or discourage ethnic identity such as sanctions, benefits, or opportunities. This view would eliminate some of the arguments suggested by Barth (1969), that focusing mainly on cultural traits was far too simplistic.

As Barth states:

Given the emphasis on the culture-bearing aspect, the classification of persons and local groups as members of an ethnic group must depend on their exhibiting the particular traits of the culture. . . . Differences between groups become differences in trait inventories; the attention is drawn to the analysis of cultures, not of ethnic organization. (p. 12)

What Barth continues to say is these traits are irrelevant without understanding factors involved in ethnic groups and their place in American society. He sees ethnic groups as a form of social organization. He focuses on the category of ascription, both by the individual and others toward him/herself. By doing this it removes two conceptual difficulties:

1. When defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change - yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content.

2. Social relevant factors alone become diagnostic for membership, not the overt, 'objective' differences which are generated by other factors. It makes no difference how dissimilar members may be in their overt behavior - if they say they are A, in contrast to another cognate category B, they are willing to be treated and let their own behaviour be interpreted and judged as A's and not as B's; in other words, they declare their allegiance to the shared culture of A's. The effects of this, as compared to other factors influencing actual behaviour, can then be made the object of investigation. (p. 15)

Therefore what is apparent in Barth's work is the influence of adaptation, adjustment, and negotiation of the ethnic group and individuals who deem themselves as part of this collective and how they are defined both by themselves and others. So although Barth argues against "trait inventories," their use in examining boundaries should be essential in understanding the adaptation, adjustment, and negotiation that ethnic groups, ethnic individuals, and those members of the larger milieu engage in throughout their everyday lives. Therefore I see structural ritualization being adaptive in utilizing domains of interaction, ritualized symbolic practices, and negotiation in terms of understanding or explaining the acts of ethnic formation and maintenance. Utilizing structural ritualization, it naturally recognizes markers or boundaries which could be in the form of RSPs, such as foods eaten, religion practiced, or work-ethic, and the domains in which they occur. To establish this boundary maintenance one also has to identify some stable inter-ethnic contexts which allow for the maintenance of ethnicity, and also RSPs which

would allow for people to be in this case, Italian. The negotiation aspect would address the intra-ethnic aspect of relations with the larger milieu which would allow for interactions, negotiations between groups which facilitate consistency in interactions and the meanings attached to different behaviors, and also the transformations of these relationships. Therefore this allows for both change, and status quo processes.

Research Question: *What are the domains of interaction which frame the context of ethnic identity?*

Meta-Domains of Interaction

In the initial identification of domains of interaction, eight were deemed essential in understanding the ethnic identity of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma (1) employment; (2) organizations; (3) religion; (4) festivals; (5) education; (6) family; (7) friendships; (8) food. These were classified into two larger domains: (1) Institutional; and (2) Structured informal. However, the analysis of ethnic identity should reflect the complexity of human behavior by taking a multi-level approach. Therefore, I have identified eight levels which could be viewed as meta-level domains, where the domains of interaction result. They are as follows:

1. The meta-domain. This domain is the overarching context which we typically identify as 'society'. In this domain are identified the various societal norms, values, attitudes, and expectations of human behavior in a geographic location such as the United States. In the theory of structural ritualization this is identified as 'the larger milieu'. For those

who came to the coal counties of Oklahoma from Italy, they were greeted with various cultural differences such as language, foods, and religions among other things. While many Italians adjusted by moving to colonies of other Italians where they may have spoke Italian, and recreated life similar to where they were from in Italy, there was always the overarching influence that this was not Italy, but America. Therefore, any interactions that occurred always contained the element of the forces of the larger milieu. Italians living in the Italian colonies knew that outside their colony was an imposing figure of the United States. To venture outside their colony would force the Italians to adapt by using the English language. In addition, because they were employed in America with good wages, they were allowed the luxury of eating a wider variety of foods, especially meat.

2. The historical/traditional domain. This domain acknowledges the structural forces humans deal with continuously, that is, their past. From Mead's statements, humans are influenced everyday by their past, as without it, there would be no direction. This domain provides the answers to the questions of "why?" we do things. For Italians coming to Oklahoma and Indian Territory, history was something they carried with them. This domain can be viewed almost as antithetical to the meta-domain. Here we can see a battle occurring as history and tradition of one culture vie for dominance against the overarching influences of the new culture. Hence the many traditions as the celebrations of saints, the eating of certain foods, and the fraternal organizations orchestrate examples of history and tradition acting as influences for these Italians. These traditions reflect a negotiation by the Italians with the world around them utilizing their history and traditions as a means of adaptation, while still maintaining their ethnic identity.

3. The institutional domain. This domain contains the domains of interaction identified for this study in Chapter Four, that is, employment, organizations, religion, festivals, and education. These domains differ from the historical/traditional domains by the type of analyses used to explain the interaction. This is more micro than the domain above it. In this domain we can examine status positions as miners, club members, and owners of restaurants operating in specific positions which are guided by regimented regulations. Individuals would be included in ethnic maintenance by the status positions that were in these different domains. By attending church, participating in the festivals, being miners, they would be viewed as belonging to these ethnic identities by the larger milieu and those around them.

4. The structured and informal domain. These are structured, yet more informal types of interactions where one would find family relationships, contexts of friendships, and food preparation. Though similar to the institutional level, the actions of the individuals here are less regimented. Actual types of behavior, that is types of family ties, the type of discipline, and how the spouse was treated all had general rules of behavior associated with them, yet varied from home to home. Therefore, food preparation indicated domains of interaction where specific RSPs such as the making of traditional dishes of sagna, polenta and pasta e fagiole were ways of maintaining ethnic identity in a smaller, more personal manner.

5. Interpersonal domain. The interpersonal domain is a sub-context of the prior two domains. In the institutionalized, and structured informal domains, there are domains of interactions that may have insider-outsider meanings attached to them within the group.

They could serve hierarchical functions within communities where certain individuals will be the 'elders' of a community who serve to create meanings and definitions, stating what is ethnic and what is not. At the same time other small groups of individuals who are members of the community may not buy into these meanings and definitions, thereby creating different definitions of their behavior.

In this study, there appeared to be several interpersonal domains. One such domain included four people in Krebs, that is, Angelo Scarpitti, Noah Rich, and Nick and Ernestine Finamore. In their relationship as part of the structured informal domain (friendships), they became a domain unto themselves by identifying themselves as the official carriers or holders of knowledge regarding Italians in Oklahoma. Mentioning of others was often met with a look of disgust, or statements such as "I don't know what he could tell you."¹³² In addition, there were other domains as some of the restaurant and food people of Krebs tended to interact with each other seeing themselves as the carriers of the torch. Off comment remarks were often made about others in the food industry which suggested more ingroup-outgroup relations. Therefore, in this domain, what is found are relationships that are sub-cultures so-to-speak of the two larger domains above it, as individuals group themselves within these larger domains and set-up unofficial domains of interaction in which they view themselves as the authorities over others.

Other groups could organize unofficially and support each other in contrast to these other domains. So the negotiation factor comes into play as actors may view themselves as Italian discussing with others the way they see the world compared to some

¹³² Interview with Noah Rich, March, 1998, Krebs, Oklahoma.

of the others. For instance, several people made complaints about the food that was sold commercially, saying that it was not Italian. They felt they made much better food that was authentic Italian. Then there were the Prichard's from Roseanna's Italian restaurant who felt they were not making authentic Italian food, but their father's food.

This domain, from a systematic point of view, would most likely be the most diverse domain of interaction as researchers would need to identify the many interpersonal domains that occur within the larger domains. For each of the larger domains, there could be a variety of smaller sub-cultural groups which would organize and be small domains of interaction. The ways they could organize would be endless. However, when researching ethnic groups using structural ritualization, it would seem imperative to focus more on these smaller groups in order to then see the organizational aspect that both Barth (1969) and Nagel (1994, 1996) lean towards. This should aid in adapting to the multiplicity of ethnic groups.

6. Interview domain. This domain is where the relationship of the researcher and the respondents is occurring. At this moment in time RSPs are acted out which are automatically defined in terms of ethnic identity as the interviewer has already identified these individuals as Italian just by the researcher's presence. Behaviors are automatically identified as being Italian here simply by the act of the interview¹³³.

In addition, there is another aspect of the interview domain which addresses

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I remember an interview, with Anna Maria Sweet, who did not view herself as Italian, but during the interview process, any similarity she could make with what I stated were Italian "things" she would immediately find as something she did, therefore she began identifying herself as Italian. Interview, July, 1998, Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

methodological issues. In this research there is no denying the impact I had on the subjects. As mentioned in Chapter Three, one issue that was important was my knowledge of my own family history. By being informed of my own family history I was allowed greater access to information. There was an atmosphere of authenticity to my being an Italian doing research on my fellow Italians. I was someone who had stereotypical Italian looks who was knowledgeable of my family history and traditions. In addition, because 'family' is an important indicator of stereotypical Italian ethnic identity, the accompaniment of my wife with me was important in demonstrating responsibility and authenticity to the individuals I interviewed and whom I came into contact. If I arrived alone, one of the first questions I encountered was "Where's your wife?"

What appears evident in this research is that I was allowed easier access by my background and approach. I walked a fence not fitting the typical researcher mold, but neither was I completely native. In postmodernist literature sociologists often discuss aspects of subjectivity and objectivity (See Seidman, 1991). Value neutrality is not something believed to be possible. Instead, what is advocated is the position that researchers cannot know a complete picture of a people. Researchers find pieces of puzzles of particular social contexts or phenomena. In this light, my impact created opportunities for data that would not have been there if I were not as willing to become 'part of the scene'. Did my actions produce different data? Absolutely. However, what I uncovered was data that adds to the body of knowledge regarding this population. A more quantitative approach, with a mail-out questionnaire would produce still other

information. Together they produce a greater body of knowledge. So while my approach may be questioned by more positivistic researchers who advocate value free neutrality, I feel satisfied that my presence and approach provided material evidenced by the body of knowledge here that is important in understanding the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma.

7. The cognitive domain. The cognitive domain includes the interactions that occur within the individual. Often thought of as 'self-talk', in this domain an individual is conducting an interaction with him/herself and reaching separate, individual conclusions regarding different ideas such as their own ethnic identity. One particular example of this has to do with food eaten. While interviewing the Mattioda family, three generations were at the dinner table. Their responses varied as to how often they ate Italian food. While the amount of times they ate Italian food varied, their interpretations of what 'a lot' meant also varied. Mary Mattioda thought a lot was once a month. Her sister Vicki Angeli felt that once a week was often. Their parents ate Italian food four times a week, but said they did not eat it as much. Their interpretations varied even though part of the same family. Although they were in a group context, their cognitive domain of interaction reached differing conclusions of what a lot of Italian food was.

8. The interpretive domain. This domain is where the researcher observes the data, reflects, and draws conclusions on the population understudy. Although similar to the cognitive domain, it differs by the point of emphasis of the individual involved. In the cognitive domain, the respondents are addressing ethnic identity as it applies to them as individuals. In the interpretive domain, the researcher is making conclusions regarding

others, and explaining these phenomena to still others. Therefore, the researcher always explains things from the outside looking in, regardless of his/her relationship with the group. The interpretation will be biased to some degree along a continuum of subjectivity and objectivity. Nevertheless, their interpretation is from a position farther away than those who live within these domains.

In these meta-domains, negotiation is occurring between all levels and within levels continuously. This provides a framework which allows for social patterns to continually be in a state of flux while still allowing definitions of behavior to be constant or similar. Therefore, we have varieties of behavior being defined by some as Italian in this area, while in other areas there is no knowledge of this same behavior. The influences in one region may be different from those in other regions, as well as the specific make-up of the immigrants etc. The end result would be different starting points of ethnic groups, and therefore inevitable growth directionally away from others of the same ethnic group within the United States.

This is true regarding the making and drinking of choc. This is an RSP that developed in southeastern Oklahoma and has spread through migration to Scottsdale, Arizona, Akron, Ohio, Chicago, Illinois, and Detroit, Michigan. However, the larger domain, which suggests that alcohol is an accepted drink for Italians may still be constant across the country.

Research Questions: *What is the relationship of the ritualized symbolic practices (RSPs) of the Italian-American population to that of the larger milieu?*

This research question adequately combines research questions 4-7 together. So by answering the above question, the others will be addressed. As has been advocated in this research, it is necessary to acknowledge actors as active agents participating in the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity. In this case, adaptation, adjustment, and negotiation are integral parts of any explanation of such an endeavor. In ethnic group research one aspect of dialogue that occurs is the insider-outsider dichotomy. This immediately creates a situation that distinguishes the ethnic group from the larger milieu. In this case, the different regional peoples of Italy arrived in Oklahoma as Piemontesi, Abruzzi, and Siciliani. They set up organizations that demonstrated that identity through fraternal organizations and the celebrations of saints. However, the larger milieu, and more dominant one defined them as Italian. The RSPs they had in Italy already changed by the time they stepped on to the ship to come to the United States. They had already made their first steps toward being Italian. So the pressures from the people of Oklahoma created a context that allowed for a convolution of RSPs of regional Italians taking on different RSPs of other regional Italians such as celebrating Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, and others eating different foods such as bagna cauda.

The mines served a useful purpose in that they allowed for stable inter-ethnic contexts, working for a common goal, bringing together 'union brothers', but also providing situations in which Italians could live in the same neighborhoods and keep their families away from the influence of the larger milieu. Let us not forget the differences also between the northern and southern Italian. After centuries of foreign rule and being taken advantage of by the larger milieu, southern Italians were skeptical at best of any

institution. The northerners were more apt to be willing to accept the offerings of their new nation and would strive to be like the rest of Americans. The southerners would not readily do so. Early friction between northern and southern Italians gave way to animosity toward everyone else. Yet, at the same time all the Italians were quickly buying as much land as they possibly could. Again this was a response to their conditions in Italy. They opened up markets catering to Italian needs, but incorporating American products into the daily life. Italians were eating much more meat than they ever did in Italy. They opened feed stores for their animals, became directors of banks that catered to Italians. They opened bakeries, meat shops, and gas stations. All of these mainly catered to Italians, but they were adapting to the milieu around them, changing, adapting, adjusting, all through a continual negotiation with the world around them.

We saw socially that discrimination was a haunting reminder of where they came from, being called 'dago', 'wop', and a host of other names. Because they spoke a different language, wore different clothes, ate different foods, and practiced a different religion they were defined as outcasts by the larger milieu. Gradually these negotiated adaptations would change their very lives, but also the lives of the people in the larger milieu. We see over a period of 125 years that virtually every RSP has changed. In fact I must conclude that RSPs are continually in a state of flux. We saw that southern Italians began to marry northern Italians, or Sicilians. Eventually they married non-Italians, and then non-Catholics. Their children incorporated different RSPs into their lives as southern Italians ate bagna cauda, gnocchi, steak, and ham. Northerners ate more meat and celebrated the southern saints. Friendships were born from five key factors:

(1) economic necessity; (2) geographic location; (3) common ancestry; (4) similar ancestry; and (5) religious affiliation. Italians became more involved with their church, then gradually broke away.

Businesses changed, types of work changed, people moved away, but we find in places like Krebs that the businesses are marketed in the colors of the Italian flag. The Italian festival marks the impact of Italians in the area, yet, few Italians attend. The larger milieu has taken the dollar value of such an event and marketed it, forgetting the people who set it up.

Nowadays, people are Italian yet, do little in the ways of things one might consider to be "Italian." The drinking of choc, is in fact an RSP that signifies being Italian. Yet, there are no Italians in Boston or New York who would know of such a drink. The people do not speak the language, they do not eat the foods, they do not know how to cook the foods, and they do not practice the same religion, and still they see themselves as Italian. When they come across someone with an Italian name they treat them like family, telling stories, adjusting, attributing different qualities of human behavior to being Italian such as: the obligation of loyalty to family and friends; the emphasis on domesticity, the dominant role of the male; the importance of making a difference; the importance of a hard day's work; overflowing hospitality; the passion for good food and drink; and the respect for authority figures.

I mentioned in the methods section how I had to think of all I was taught when younger so I would know how to act when around these Italians. Something as simple as

talking with my hands, being on time¹³⁴, following directions, being polite, having a sarcastic sense of humor, and soaking up the red sauce with the Italian bread were viewed as symbols of my belonging to 'the club'. These elements show how behavior is viewed and defined differently by people who want to believe something regarding ethnicity. As Tony Yohe said to me while trying to explain how Italian people interacted, "You're Italian, you understand." The simple question of "how often do you eat Italian food?" was met with various answers showing that "a lot" for some people is once every two weeks, while others four times a week is not very often.

What is evident here is that people who are of Italian descent have been bombarded with influences by the larger milieu which helped and hindered ethnic maintenance. Today many of these features still exist. Yet, the traditions, and the RSPs have not remained constant. They have continued to change since before the Italians ever arrived in Oklahoma. A feature worth mentioning of structural ritualization is the importance of the concept of salience in the theory. These RSPs change in time and space regarding their salience. Salience needs to be addressed more clearly in terms of negotiation with the larger milieu.

Research Questions: *How is ethnic identification used as a device by an individual or group to establish a link with the past or country of origin?*

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One gentleman I interviewed was waiting outside for me for my 1:00 appointment. I drove up with about 30 seconds to spare. His first words were "Dagos know how to be on time."

How does ethnic identity define parameters of actions that create continuity between the past and present?

We see through the festivals, and the marketing of ethnicity in Krebs how individuals and groups organize to recreate their histories, and their identities. Krebs and McAlester are the two cities or towns in the coal counties that continue to manifest ethnic identity. This is done through capitalistic ventures. In McAlester, the Italian Festival brings in over 20,000 people every Memorial Day Weekend. In Krebs, there is the only Italian market and Italian deli in Oklahoma. Three of the four Italian restaurants are in Krebs. Other businesses are draped in the colors of the Italian flag, and apartments are named after the town where many of the immigrants were originally from. Sam Lovera answered my question of why they were marketing ethnicity in the economy by saying “what else is there?” The economy is economically depressed in the coal counties. The use of ethnicity to bring in business has worked. The use of ethnicity has produced a link with the past as a means to create economic stability in the present¹³⁵.

In addition, it has provided the beacon by which others of Italian descent in the coal counties look toward. They see the businesses as maintaining some continuity with the past, as the owners of the businesses are the children or grandchildren of the immigrants. If someone of Italian descent opens a business, others who know the name

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This does not suggest that there is a positive view of Italians by the larger milieu. The comments on discrimination by the individuals interviewed suggests the larger milieu only accepts Italians as long as they do not create problems.

of the family will pay their respects to the past by conducting business with them. The many memorials to miners, and towns demonstrate a link with the past. The impact of capitalist ventures has opened my eyes to the possibilities of ethnic emphasis in business impacting ethnic identity. However, it must be acknowledged that Italian ethnicity is the only ethnicity emphasized throughout the coal counties. This appears odd considering the small percentage of the population that was and is Italian.

The Prevalence of Italian Ethnic Identity

This phenomena of Italian ethnic identity is a phenomena that is not only occurring in southeastern Oklahoma. It is a phenomena that should be addressed because it could aid in explaining the relationship of the individual to society and society to the individual. This impact could aid in explaining why there is even research on Italian-Americans. Why are Italians such a prominent and prestigious ethnic group to belong to whose maintenance of ethnic identity has surprised the likes of Richard Alba? Let me consider a few points.

First of all is the impact of the larger milieu on Italian-Americans. In the later half of the twentieth century Italians have been associated with organized crime. In the 1950s and 1960s this was seen as a negative by both the larger milieu and Italians. However, Americans have a fascination with crime. When a struggling Italian-American author named Mario Puzo was having troubles having people buy his books, his editor suggested he write about the mafia. A few years later the book *The Godfather* was to become one of the best movies of all time. At a critical point in American history, mafiosi were then seen as human beings, who stressed family, loyalty, and tradition. . . .things Americans

value. Soon mafia movies became big business, and the average Italian came to embrace the mafia¹³⁶. The Italian ethnic identity is now shown on TV and movies with 67% of Italian characters shown as mafiosi. The Italian ethnic identity has higher status now. This is also possibly shown in personal ads which feature many people identifying themselves as Italian (Tricarico, 1994). The Italian identity seems to amplify the positive features and diminishes the negative.

However, a scenario that I believe may play a more key role in the maintenance of ethnic identity by Italians throughout the world contains a much more historical slant. As stated early in this piece, what is now Italy has been the victim of invasion since the neolithic period. The results of this can be found in the various architectural differences around the country and the times in which they occurred. In addition the various foods, the languages spoken, the physical features etc. show a continual influx which makes Italy a true 'melting pot'. However, one thing that stands out for Italians is their knowledge of their past and their home histories. I am suggesting here that the prevalence of Italian ethnic identity is due in great part to millennia of foreign invasion which has forced the Italian people to continually adapt to change. By doing so they have still kept their identities by adapting, adjusting, and negotiating. They have taken on different customs and traditions while still maintaining a strong sense of who they are. The end result was that upon arriving both here in the United States and around the globe

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Several of the people I interviewed mentioned the mafia, or 'the black hand'. The relevance of the mafia to the coal counties is negligible. There were no mafiosi in the coal counties doing business. Yet, the high and now legendary status of mafiosi make for interesting topics that unfortunately Italians feel they are supposed to be proud of.

Italians have developed values and have established behavioral patterns which give them a sense of where they came from. Hence we see Italians or people of Italian descent throughout the globe at some level defying assimilation by having a strong sense of why they are (Tomasi, Gastaldo, & Row, 1994).

Limitations and Future Research

It is difficult to talk of limitations when finishing a project. Although with that said, this project is far from finished. I am reminded of some comments that David Maines said in the beginning of a book written by Herbert Blumer (1990). He was talking about how Blumer would never view any of his work as finished. This was a perfect introduction since the book published posthumously by Blumer was based on research he had done in the 1950s. Therefore, as I think of limitations to this research, I can only say it is a photo of a small piece of a large and diverse puzzle. This research addresses many fascinating facts and issues in the lives of people of Italian descent in southeastern Oklahoma. However, it does not address all aspects. Of the hundreds of people who listed Italian as their ethnicity in the 1990 census, only 58 were officially interviewed. Conclusions that I have reached do little to touch their thoughts about their lives.

In addition, I did want to find a way to measure the four factors of salience (Research question 9), repetitiveness, homologousness, and RSP resources, however, I did not. The variety of meanings attached to these four factors by actors left me perplexed as to why I would attempt such a venture. How can one measure something that has diverse meanings? This is a problem that should be addressed however, as

mainstream sociology wants something easy, straightforward and positivistic to view so they can understand it better. Qualitative research is too big, diverse, and convoluted to summarize nicely. In fact, the problems of qualitative research in general are also the limitations of this piece. It is too time consuming to place in a nutshell¹³⁷.

In addition, although there were photos used in this study, the use of visual methods was greatly under-estimated. When using visual methods the researcher must not only understand the art of capturing social phenomena in a single frame, but also, and as important, the researcher must understand the technology needed for such an endeavor. My visual methods suffered from lack of both hardware and software to sufficiently carry-out this methodology. Effective hardware would have been a printer which could print photos clearly. In addition, a digital camera would have greatly facilitated this project. The software I was using was made in 1993, and could not accommodate the photos that were scanned. If I had the funding for newer software, I could have condensed many photos into one disk, and had them copied directly from the disk onto a copy machine. This would have allowed both crystal imaging and would allowed for photos to be included into the text part of the dissertation. However, this did not happen. While I have photos, they are not included in this document.

With that said however, I must say that this research brings human beings to life. They are not numbers. This is a tale of real people who lived and are still living in

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More so with this research than any other, I have found myself drowning in data. I was told to “bank” data for use in the early years of a tenure-track job to use for publications. With qualitative data I feel this ‘bank’ will yield quite a bit of interest, with many withdrawals.

Oklahoma. It is difficult to think of the people I have met these past several months, and realize that already some have passed away. Nevertheless, this research was aimed at identifying how ethnic identity is maintained using the rituals and traditions as a means of recognizing such. The research, while much information was gathered, still lacks the defining characteristics of being a fine piece of work. However, early on this work was posited as an exploratory analysis. In this sense, it has exemplified all the benefits and problems of an exploratory analysis, that is, it is more creative than some, taking chances looking at some areas that may not have been looked into. However, it suffers from a lack of the very thing that has made it a contribution to the literature, that being, crystallized direction. I would like to think that this is a starting point from which much more research could be started.

Some areas that might be addressed would be to reformulate structural ritualization toward a more conflictual formulation. In its present form the theory looks for isomorphic tendencies or similarities between the embedded group and the larger milieu. It would seem that in the case of ethnic groups, by definition, they are different, and in Mach's (1993) views in some state of antagonism with the larger milieu. Therefore a more conflictual approach, addressing competition, conflict, and dissimilarities could prove to be beneficial.

In discussions with David Knottnerus, he makes a distinction of an 'embedded group' with an 'embedded community'. It is unclear at this time the distinction he is making, however, if there is some legitimacy to this distinction it could lead to areas that relate to what Knottnerus refers to as 'strategic ritualization':

... while ritualization often involves people engaging in routinized actions in a nonreflective manner, such practices are sometimes carried out in a deliberate and calculating fashion. Agents can strategically engage in ritualized practices and actively foster the reproduction or transformation of social structures for various purposes including self-aggrandizement. Such “strategic ritualization,” in which actors utilize or manipulate a system of ritualized practices in order to realize certain outcomes, can have profound consequences for members of society. This also attests to the fact that social rituals can be “invented” or changed and can play an integral role in power and politics. For these reasons, future work would benefit from a more focused analysis of this aspect of the dynamics of ritualization. p. 275

If we take to mean that embedded communities are more adept at “manipulating a system of ritualized practices in order to realize certain outcomes” than are embedded groups, there could be a connection regarding the formation of festivals and the food industry in the coal counties as a means to making money, and in a latent manner, continuing ethnicity. We do see in the coal counties that some individuals, both Italian and non-Italian, are using the Italian label as a means for profit. In turn, there continues to be a maintenance factor involved in ethnicity of other Italians as they look toward these businesses and events as a reminder of their past.

Lastly, unlike past studies, this research does use the actual peoples names and the towns in which they live. The statements of confidentiality allowed for such. Sociology has spent too much time trying to act under the guise of value neutrality and moral ambiguity. I agree with Steven Seidman (1991) who said that sociology was originally designed to help humankind. I do not see the purpose of fictionalizing people and towns when trying to explore the human process. The type of research conducted here, although exploratory was done in the spirit of trying to find ways why some ethnic and/or racial

groups have not and cannot be accepted into American society. Eventually I hope that sociologists will find the way to analyze humans enough to go back to the legislators and explain how we can have an egalitarian society.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ITALIANS IN OKLAHOMA

Directions: “Hello, my name is David LoConto, and I am conducting research on the Italian-American community in southeastern Oklahoma. My goal is to tell the story of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma in as complete a fashion as possible, not only addressing the history, but comparing the past with the present to assess what traditions, rituals, and aspects of everyday life are being used in the maintenance of ethnic identity. Types of questions will revolve around issues such as the family, types of employment, festivals, organizations, foods, religion, education and friendships, and how these have changed from the past for people of Italian descent.”

“All aspects of this interview are voluntary. You may refuse all or parts of this interview without me trying to persuade you to answer. Because of the historical nature of the research, I am asking if it is okay to mention you and your family name in the research. If I ask questions that you deem as sensitive, do not feel pressured to answer. If there are parts of family history that you do not want as part of a public record, you may refuse to answer. In all, what I am saying, is that I am very happy you have agreed to answer questions for me regarding your knowledge of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma. If you desire anonymity, I will guarantee it through the use of the Statement of Confidentiality provided (At this point, give them the Statement of Confidentiality to read and sign).”

“Please understand that if you do not know the answer to a question, that is okay. Any information, even if you feel it is trivial is a value to this research.”

(After reading and signing the State of Confidentiality):

“Okay, before we begin, may I use a tape recorder?”

Make sure to address these 5 points:

1. This research is interested in the rituals and traditions as they apply to Italian-Americans in this area and how they differ from the rituals and traditions from the turn of the century.
2. State that to not have an answer to a question is okay, and that gives further information regarding the salience of certain rituals and traditions.
3. Explain that the research is also interested in finding out the personal histories of their families as they made their way to America, and also made a way for themselves in Oklahoma.
4. Explain also that any information they may have is helpful, even if it may seem trivial.
5. And ask them if they know of anyone who might be willing to also talk with me.

Questions regarding Structural Ritualization:

Family:

1. How do the families of Italian-Americans in this area (Latimer, and Pittsburg Counties) differ from Italian/Italian-American families in the early part of the century?
2. Is the family as important today as it was earlier this century? Why/why not?
3. Does your family do things together? What kinds of things? How do these differ from the past activities of your family?
4. Does the family help to maintain Italian identity and traditions here in Oklahoma?

How so?

5. How important is the family for Italian-Americans? In what ways?
6. Is there emphasis placed on Italian-Americans marrying other Italian-Americans?
7. Is there a large availability of Italian-Americans to marry other Italian-Americans?
8. Were and are families with Italian-American members different than other families within this area?
9. How important is the family now for Italian-Americans especially in comparison to the past?

Employment:

1. What were the early Italians/Italian-Americans employed as?
2. What do most Italians work as now?
3. How did these changes come about? What were the reasons for these changes?
4. What did the early Italian/Italian-American women do?
5. What are they doing now?
6. What types of employment are available in this area?
7. How have the types of employment impacted the Italian community?
8. Did/do the types of employment help to preserve Italian identity and traditions?
9. How were/are the types of employment of Italians/Italian-Americans different than the rest of the community?

Festivals:

1. What Italian festas were practiced over the last 100 years?
 - 1a. What kinds of activities occurred in them?
2. How does the current festa differ from those of the past?

3. What is/was the significance of these festas to you as an Italian-American?
4. What purpose did/do these festas serve in the Italian community?
5. What do you foresee as the future of the festas?
6. How do the festas promote Italian identity and traditions?
7. Was/is there resistance from non-Italians to allow these festas? (To determine if there is or has been discrimination, which may serve as a point to either maintain ethnicity or do away with it.

Organizations:

1. What organizations existed that were all or predominantly Italian?
2. How often did/do they meet?
3. Do these organizations still exist?
4. Are there similar organizations now?
5. What purpose did/do these organizations serve in the Italian community?
6. How did/do they help in preserving or changing Italian identity and tradition?
7. Were there other organizations that did not accept Italians/Italian-Americans?
8. Did other ethnic groups have their own organizations?

Religion:

1. What is the most common religion for Italian-Americans in this area?
2. Have there been changes for Italians/Italian-Americans regarding their church of preference?
3. How often do you go to church?
4. Do both men and women attend church?

5. How does the church function as a means to promote or hinder Italian identity and tradition?
6. What activities are conducted in church that may influence Italian ethnic identity?
7. What is the most common religion in this area? Are there problems with these differences?
8. Did Italians/Italian-Americans experience discrimination for their religion?

Foods:

1. What foods did the early Italians/Italian-Americans eat?
2. How that differ from today? What do you attribute to these differences?
3. Was the food eaten different than the surrounding community choice of foods?
4. Did/do the foods act as a means of promoting Italian tradition?
5. How often do you eat Italian food?
6. What kinds of food do you eat?
7. Who does the cooking? And is this consistent with the past?
8. What purpose do all the Italian restaurants serve in promoting Italian identity and tradition in this area?
9. Is it important to eat foods considered to be Italian?
10. Did the early Italians make wine?
11. What other beverages are used by Italians/Italian-Americans?
12. Do the beverages serve as a means to promote Italian identity and tradition? How so?
13. What foods did the rest of this area eat in comparison to Italians/Italian-Americans?

14. Was there or are there practices that occur socially that have to do with the eating of a meal? That is, is there more of a familial feeling eating a meal now versus the past?

How are things different?

Education:

1. How do the education levels differ of Italians/Italian-Americans from the early part of the century to the present?
2. What do you account for these differences?
3. Does education serve to promote Italian identity and tradition? Why/why not?
4. How was/is education levels different from the larger community?
5. Were there any clubs in schools that were specifically for Italians/Italian-Americans?

Friendships:

1. How many Italian/Italian-American friends do you have?
2. How often do you see them?
3. Do these friendships, or lack of, influence your Italian identity and traditions? How so?
4. Are there differences in the nature of the relationships with friends who are of Italian descent? Is it the same now as in the past? How so?
5. Is it important that to have many Italian/Italian-American friends?
6. Is there discrimination against Italians/Italian-Americans in his area?

Demographic information:

Name (optional) _____

Age (list family members and their ages)

Place of birth

Italian descent: Only for person/s being interviewed

1. First generation (born in Italy) _____
2. Second generation (parents from Italy) _____
3. Third generation (grandparents from Italy) _____
4. Fourth generation (great-grandparents from Italy) _____
5. Fifth generation (great-great-grandparents from Italy) _____

Percentage of Italian descent:

1. 100%
2. 75%
3. 50%
4. 25%
5. Less than 25%

APPENDIX 2

LETTER SOLICITING PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH

Hello, my name is David LoConto, and currently I am doing research on the Italian-American population in southeastern Oklahoma. I have interviewed several people both formally and informally such as Nick and Ernestine Finamore, Angelo Scarpitti, Noah Rich, Jenny Massaro and Sara Testa to name a few. However, I am interested in talking to as many of the people of Italian descent in southeastern Oklahoma as I possibly can. My goal is to tell the story of Italians in southeastern Oklahoma in as complete a fashion as possible, not only addressing the history, but telling what everyone is doing today. My emphasis is on how many of the traditions have changed, how the family differs today compared to the past, the types of foods eaten, types of employment, church affiliation, attitudes on what being "Italian" means, etc.

I was hoping you could help me, and by doing so, help put on record a more detailed story than has been told. I would like to set-up a time in which I could come and interview you and/or your family in a nice relaxed atmosphere (anonymity is guaranteed if you desire). If you prefer to have friends present to help tell the story, that would be great too. Typically the interviews last between an hour and two hours, and I find myself becoming friends with many of the people, and tend to stop and visit every time I'm in the area. I would like to be able to talk with all generations, and not just those who have been around the longest. I want to find out what the younger generations are doing too.

If you are interested in talking with me please mail back the self-addressed

envelope enclosed stating your name, a telephone number you can be reached at, and the best time to contact you. I will contact you to set-up an appointment.

I have published on a variety of topics including Italian-Americans. But I really want this work here to be something special, about a special people, who have endured and created a life for themselves in Oklahoma.

I thank you for your time, and I look forward to meeting you.

Thank you,

David LoConto

(My father's family is from about 30 miles east of Napoli. My mother's side is from Lecce).

APPENDIX 3

RECIPE

Pasta e Fagiole - Pasta and Beans
a.k.a. Pasta Fagiole, Pasta Fazool

Pasta e Fagiole was a staple for many poor Italians in both Italy and around the world. A very simple dish, many Italians ate this several times a week, but especially on Fridays when we couldn't eat meat. It is one of the more healthy dishes one can eat. In fact, Pasta e Fagiole is about as complete a meal as one can eat.

Ingredients:

4 cloves of garlic (although I like more)

1 stalk of celery

16 oz. can of peeled Roma tomatoes (fresh if you've got them)

A little bit of olive oil for the pan (I like more these days)

16 oz. can of great northern beans (cannalini beans)

8 oz. of a short pasta, although I like the small shells

1 carrot (maybe two)

Some tomato paste

Some oregano

Some red pepper

Directions: Dice up the garlic and saute it with the red pepper. Chop up the celery and carrot and add to pan. Once garlic is light brown or golden color, add the tomatoes with paste, add oregano, and beans. Cook pasta (real pasta) for about 6-8 minutes then drain.

Add the contents from the pan to the pasta and stir. Let sit on low heat for about 10 minutes, covered, to let food 'marry'.

Serve al dente.

APPENDIX 4

RESPONSE FORM

Name _____ Phone _____

Best time for me to contact you _____

APPENDIX 5

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

“I _____, hereby authorize David G. LoConto to perform the following procedure:

To interview myself through means that are most comfortable for me, that is, by telephone, by Fax, or in person. The topic material will be restricted to my knowledge of the Italian-American community in Pittsburg, Coal, and Latimer Counties. It is understood that my name will be kept confidential unless otherwise authorized by myself.”

“I understand that this study is tentatively entitled ‘The Maintenance of Ethnicity: Italian-Americans in Southeastern Oklahoma’. I understand this study is being conducted to aid in explaining some of the rituals and traditions of the Italian-American community, and how they help facilitate the maintenance of ethnicity. There is no danger to myself, my family, or those in the three county area. I may also request a copy of the said study upon completion. I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate in full or in part, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project **ANY TIME** without penalty after notifying David G. LoConto, or George E. Arquitt, Ph.D., project advisor in person, by telephone, mail, or Fax. I may contact both David G. LoConto, George E. Arquitt, Ph.D., or Gay Clarkson should I wish further information about the research.”

“I have read and fully understand the statement of confidentiality. I sign it freely and

voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.”

Date: _____ Time: _____ (a.m./p.m.)

Please print name here: _____

Signed: _____

“I hereby authorize David G. LoConto to use my name in this study.”

Signed: _____

“I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject before requesting the subject to sign it.”

Signed: _____ Date: _____

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APPENDIX 6

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

VITA

David Gerard Loconto

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: THE MAINTENANCE OF ETHNICITY: ITALIAN-AMERICANS IN
SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, April 14, 1960, the son of Marino Emilio and Palma Calo Loconto.

Education: Graduated from Western High School, Anaheim, California in June, 1978. Received Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology with a minor in Ethnic Studies from Humboldt State University, Arcata, California, May, 1993. Received a Master of Science degree in Sociology from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, July, 1995. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Sociology at Oklahoma State University in May, 1999.

Experience: Born and raised in Italian neighborhoods on the east and west coast. I worked as a research assistant on three different grants. I conducted research on people having dreams. In addition I have taught at the University level from 1995 to the present.

Professional Memberships: American Sociological Association, Southwestern Social Science Association, Mid-South Sociological Association, Midwest Sociological Society, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, National Italian American Association.