

**To Work and Live:
Brickyard Laborers, Immigration and Assimilation in an Ohio Town, 1890-1925**

Martha I. Pallante
Youngstown State University

Historians generally agree that at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries immigration to the United States, particularly that from Southern and Eastern Europe, played an important role in reshaping the fabric of America life. These waves of humanity flooded American cities joining the laboring masses, and in the process forever changed the character and the composition of American cities. For the most part, historians and the others who have studied this phenomenon have concentrated on the largest masses of that movement--those who went to large urban areas or to the major industrial complexes that acted as magnets for the many immigrant groups.

This study approaches the problem differently. It focuses on a relatively small group of Italian immigrants from the Italian province of Avelino, who arrived in Niles, Ohio between 1890 and the mid 1920s when changes in immigrations laws stemmed their flow. Their origins did little to distinguish them from more mainstream immigration experiences either to east coast or mid-western metropolitan areas. These immigrants came from small Italian towns and villages in the Mezzogiorno plagued by poverty and under employment. The village from which most of the earliest ventured was Bagnoli-Irpino, a mountain hamlet located east of Naples. Neither the place nor the people were in any way extraordinary. It was their experiences in the United States that were exceptional. In many ways, this particular group of Italian immigrants differed significantly from their counterparts in larger, more densely developed areas. They placed a premium on the rapid acquisition of property, education, and citizenship. Where Italian-Americans in most places found it difficult to leave behind the traditional values of Southern Italy, this group made significant changes in a single generation.

This particular group of immigrants, their interactions in the work place, and their adaptation and assimilation into their large community constitutes an interesting case study. The extraordinarily rich documentary records left behind by the Niles Fire Brick Company

(NFB) provide a unique window into the work and lives of an Italian-American community in a small mid-western town. The experiences of workers at the NFB stand in contrast against those in larger cities and at larger industrial complexes.¹ The evidence revealed by the records of the NFB strongly suggests that the generalizations do not hold true for those that found themselves operating within smaller communities and labored in family-owned, industrial workplaces. At least in one place -- Niles, Ohio -- and working for one company -- The Niles Fire Brick -- Italian-Americans behaved differently than their counterparts in major metropolitan areas. While Italian immigrants employed by the NFB do more closely adhere to models suggested by Daniel Nelson in *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest*, Gunther Peck in *Reinventing Free Labor*, and Hal Barron in *Mixed Harvests: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North*, some discrepancies exist.² Italians in Niles tended to be less manipulated and to have greater free agency.

The company, for which these Italian immigrants labored, The Niles Fire Brick Company, opened for business in 1872 on Langley Street in Niles, Ohio, and manufactured high quality firebrick for the steel and iron industries. This firebrick, also known as refractory brick, lined furnaces used to smelt iron and steel. John Rhys Thomas, a recent Welsh immigrant, owned and operated the firm until his death in 1898 when his son, Thomas E. Thomas replaced him.³ The Thomases and their manufacturing concern filled an important niche in the growing industrial community in the Mahoning Valley.

The original plant was a wooden structure and it produced hand-molded, high quality brick in regular rectangular forms and in special shapes. Although destroyed by fire three times between 1872 and 1903, the plant continued to produce regular refractory brick until its production ceased in the early 1940s.⁴ In spite of major technological changes in the surrounding industrial complexes the techniques for making refractory bricks changed little from the end of the nineteenth century through the end of World War II.

In 1905 company management, faced with a growing demand as well as the need for a new type of refractory brick made of silica, built a second plant on East Park Avenue. The operation of this plant doubled the size of the work force and the amount of product manufactured. The owners modernized the plant during the 1940s by electrifying plant operations and switching from coal to natural gas to fire the kilns. The innovations and changes through the years resulted in a growth in production from 500,000 hand-made bricks per year in 1872 to 25,000,000 in 1953.⁵ The company remained family owned and operated until the late 1940s when it was sold to Mexico Refractories of Mexico, Missouri. In 1953, Kaiser Refractories purchased the operation. In that year Kaiser completely closed the Number One Plant on Langley Street which had been used for storage since the 1940s; it was demolished in 1961. The Number Two works continued to operate in a limited capacity through the late 1960s but it gradually became obsolete. The owners eventually turned the property over to the city and it was torn down in 1972.⁶ At this juncture the developing technologies for the manufacturing of

steel finally caught up with the NFB. Oxygen-induced furnaces called for a new type of refractory material, periclase ceramics, and the Niles facilities lacked the space for the necessary conversions.

The NFB, however, flourished for nearly one hundred years because of the effectiveness of its leadership and the abilities of its work force. The company's labor pool grew from between seventeen to twenty employees during the 1870s and 1880s to an all time high of nearly three hundred during World War II.⁷ This growth occurred in stages and reflected the expansion of the company's markets. The first major growth of the work force occurred during the late 1890s, culminating with the construction of the Number Two Plant in 1905. The development of the local steel industry and the move to open-hearth furnaces created the demand that spurred this growth. A slower expansion of the labor pool reflected the company's increasing production of silica brick during World War I. A second period of rapid growth occurred in conjunction with the steel boom of the 1920s. Unlike most other industrial concerns, the NFB generally maintained its work force through the Great Depression. With the demands of World War II, the work force grew to its largest. Ultimately it was changes in the larger steel industry that caused the decline in the size of the labor force engaged in firebrick manufacturing at the NFB. As the steel industry switched to oxygen-induction furnaces in the 1950s, the demand for regular and silica fire bricks decreased. In order to withstand the increased temperature produced during this process, the steel manufacturers switched to periclase brick, a new type of refractory material. A lack of space at the two existing Niles sites resulted in the construction of a new plant located in Columbiana County.⁸

Three divisions of workers existed at the Niles Fire Brick Company. These categories included management, skilled labor, and unskilled labor. From its foundation the Niles Fire Brick Company acted as a magnet for labor. The owners and the management actively recruited workers that came from at least three areas: the Thomases' native Wales (1872-1899), the Italian province of Avelino (1895-1924), and the Appalachian regions surrounding Olive Hill, Kentucky (1924-1949). Added to the lures cast by the company were the reports of earlier recruits of relatively high pay and stable employment.⁹ These workers came seeking job security, general prosperity and greater opportunities for their families.

Immigrant laborers and their families from all three regions had a profound impact on the community. Those who secured permanent employment with the Niles Fire Brick Company quickly moved out of rented or company housing, becoming property owners with a vested interest in the community.¹⁰ Many lived in ethnic enclaves such as "Little Italy," which developed on the city's east side in the shadows of the company's factories. Migrants from Olive Hill established their presence within walking distance of the plant on the south side of Niles in what was vernacularly known as "Goat Hill."

These immigrants also established a number of ethnic organizations and churches to serve their needs and interests. Among the most visible contributions were those of Italian

immigrants. By 1906 Italian workers and their families established a Roman Catholic parish for Italian-Americans, and later dedicated their newly constructed church building in 1924. Among the self-help associations developed by this group were the Bagnoli Club, established to promote literacy and citizenship among its members, and the San Filippo Neri Club, a self-insurance association. The long standing local emphasis on education in the old Western Reserve and the Niles Fire Brick's tendency to promote literate workers also encouraged employees to educate themselves and their children. In addition to sending their children in significant numbers to local public and parochial schools, many adults attended classes sponsored by local self-help associations such as the San Filippo Neri Club and Bagnoli Club.¹¹ A closer examination of this group of Italian immigrants' and their offsprings' activities between 1890 and the advent of the United States' entry into World War I clearly illustrates these developments. The records of the NFB contain a wealth of information concerning their work lives and economic status. When these documents are supplemented by city directors and oral histories a clear picture emerges focusing on the depth of their experiences.

The earliest payrolls reveal that by 1893, three of the NFB's two dozen employees came from the southern Italian mountain town, Bagnoli-Irpino. Their appearance in the record signaled the start of a trend that continued until the implementation of quota legislation in the 1920s. While the majority of the Italian recruits used the NFB as a temporary, first employer, a significant number (between one-quarter and one-third) established a more permanent working relationship with the firm. By 1900 this group of immigrants represented a small but significant portion of the labor cohort at the brickyard. Whereas in 1893 these Italians constituted about twelve percent of the work force, their share in the labor pool grew, albeit unevenly, to twenty percent by 1900.¹² Although some of the increase represented temporary or transient labor, there existed a core of permanent, skilled employees; for example, Carmel Laborial, Michael Infante and Lorenzo Pallante remained fully employed throughout the period.¹³ The only exceptions to this occurred when Infante and Pallante left Niles in order to visit family and friends abroad. Payrolls and oral histories indicate that the men made return trips to seek out family members, and then returned to the United States and the NFB.¹⁴ Upon their return to Niles they found their jobs at their previous skilled-ratings waiting for them.

The NFB hired all their laborers, with the exception of the plant manager and the foremen, on a daily basis. The number of employees changed daily according to the work at hand. The potential labor pool gathered at the plant gates early each morning to see who would work that day. While the plant superintendent, Patrick J. Sheehan,¹⁵ set the total number of workers, individual crew bosses or foremen appeared to have selected their gangs independently. By 1907, approximately one-third of the regular shift managers were Italians and their crews reflected their origins.¹⁶

In or around 1905, when Italian immigration to the United States reached its peak, Italian workers at the NFB comprised approximately fifty-five percent of the employees.

Between 1906 and 1915 the percentage of Italian laborers at the NFB ranged from a low of thirty-seven to a high of fifty-eight percent. The average rate of employees hovered around forty-five percent.¹⁷ Although the majority of these workers remained only briefly employed by the NFB, a substantial minority found long term security with the company. Data collected from the payrolls from 1893 through 1915 indicates that while many of the Italian immigrants worked less than six months for the operation, a significant number held more permanent positions.¹⁸ Whereas virtually all of the transient laborers worked in unskilled positions, the majority of those who became long-term employees were paid at skilled or semi-skilled rates. In 1905, when Italians represented twenty-five of the forty general and skilled laborers combined, Italian immigrants held nine of the eighteen skilled positions.¹⁹ By 1910, when Italian immigrants constituted thirty-nine percent of the total work force, they held forty-five percent of the skilled positions and one-third of the plant foremen (three of nine).²⁰ These skilled laborers constituted the core group of the Italian immigrant community in Niles. The Thomases aggressively recruited them and recognized their contributions. The workers, in turn, acted as a magnet for their compatriots abroad and as a stabilizing force within their ethnic enclave.

The evidence from the payrolls also reveals that contrary to the usual pattern, Italian laborers also took home a representative portion of the available wages paid out by the NFB. In most places, Italian-Americans filled the lowest level of occupations and received the lowest wages.²¹ Arriving from Italy, most came from rural, peasant communities and were unfamiliar with urban or industrial settings. They remained, for the most part, marginal employees.²² At the NFB in 1893, however, Italians made up thirteen percent (3:24) of the work force and garnered seventeen percent of the wages.²³ By 1900, with the introduction of a partially transient work force they represented twenty-six percent of the labor and received twenty percent of the funds disbursed to workers.²⁴ As the number of temporary workers decreased and the Italian work force at the NFB stabilized, their percentage of the wages also reached near parity. In 1910 and 1915, respectively, Italian workers composed thirty-nine (54:139) and forty-four (62:140) percent of the workers at the NFB and earned better than thirty-seven and forty-two percent of the wages.²⁵ This represents a significant deviation from the earning patterns of Italian immigrants in large cities and workplaces.

It also appears that the company and the immigrants benefited from the practices of nepotism and preferential hiring. At least six of the regular employees during the period before 1900 were joined at the NFB by one or more relatives.²⁶ Lorenzo Pallante became the most proficient at this practice. Between January, 1894 and December, 1896 three close relatives, a son (Joseph) and two cousins (Rafael and James) joined him at the brickyard. Oral evidence confirmed by the payroll records indicates that he carried these efforts a step further. An entry in the December 15, 1896 payroll stated that Pallante and his son received an additional two weeks and that they were set to leave for Italy. Six months after his departure for Italy in late

December of 1896 or early January, 1897, eight new Italian laborers appeared on the company payroll. By the end of the year, a significant number of immigrants with ties to Bagnoli-Irpino--Onero Deliso, Aniello and Tony Chimney (sic--Simini), Thomas and Sam Infante, Joseph Quacci, Jim Brutz, James Marsico, and Dominic Ross--joined the NFB work force. A number of them cited Pallante's reports of employment opportunities at the NFB as the major factor in their decisions to emigrate to the United States.²⁷ There also exists evidence that confirms ties to Italian communities located near Sao Paolo, Brazil and that Pallante recruited among a Bagnolesi expatriate community located in Belem de Pasqua. In 1903, two brothers, Aniello and Dominic Clemente, journeyed with their sister and Joseph Pallante's wife, Lucia, to Niles to work at the NFB.²⁸ The wages offered by the Thomases at the NFB often exceeded that available elsewhere for Italian immigrants and provided a powerful lure.

In addition to paying well, word-of-mouth communications substantiated the fact that the NFB retained a relatively neutral stance on ethnicity. Management at the NFB promoted Italian immigrants with special skills at rates similar to their native-born American or Welsh counterparts. By 1905 these immigrants had broken into the ranks of lower management. The company listed Joseph Pallante as working at least a portion of time as a shift foreman in the drying sheds.²⁹ The NFB tended to reward and promote capable and qualified personnel with little regard to their ethnic origins.

Pallante's success at the NFB relates to another unusual characteristic of this group of immigrants. In the large urban areas where historians have conducted the majority of their studies of immigrants to the United States, the evidence suggests that Italian immigrants placed a low value on formal education for their American-born offspring. The reasons are two-fold: parents considered children as economic factors, and they believed education to be superfluous to daily life. Adults regarded their children as income-producing resources whose purpose was to enrich the family. Laboring children had little or no time or energy for formal schooling. Second, most Italian immigrants hailed from rural, peasant communities in southern Italy and saw education as aristocratic, and therefore, an impractical activity.³⁰ Italian parents passed this disdain for formal education on to their American-born offspring as well. First generation Americans continued to honor the belief fostered by their parents and, "Did not make their children better than themselves."³¹ This contempt retarded upward mobility for several generations.

However, at the NFB, Joseph Pallante, who was literate in Italian and in English, found his employers receptive to his ambitions. Although Pallante first appears in the ledgers as a "boy" in 1894 at age 14 years, he had the equivalent of a grammar school education. Additionally, by 1910, Sandy Rose, Dan Mozie, and Pallante (all of whom could read and write) worked steadily as plant foremen or managers until their retirements in the 1930's and 1940s. The NFB rewarded literacy in spite of ethnicity. T.E. Thomas, following this line of thought, suggested in a letter to the city schools in 1912 that young men would be better served by

remaining in school; and that if truly needy Thomas would provide them with part-time employment after classes and on the weekends.³² This action did not go unnoticed in the community-at-large. In Niles, the children of Italian immigrants in general, and employees of the NFB in particular, attended school well beyond the legislated limits. By the end of World War I, a significant number of their offspring graduated from the local high school.³³ Similarly, few of the NFB's Italian employees had children who followed their fathers as permanent employees of the NFB.³⁴ These workers, contrary to national trends, wanted something better for their children.

Another way in which this group differed significantly from the norm was their readiness to form and to join associations and then to undertake collective action. Nationally, Italian immigrants generally exhibited a disdain for outside affiliations and bureaucracies. This tendency negated movements aimed at developing social consciousness and mutual aid associations, and impeded their ability to form self-help societies.³⁵ Italian immigrants in Niles often acted contrary to this pattern. In less than two decades after their arrival, Italian Catholics in Niles began petitioning Bishop Frederick Horstmann of the Diocese of Cleveland for a separate congregation. Although Niles' Roman Catholic population remained small and one parish, St. Stephen, could adequately serve the community, the Italian population expressed a preference for a church of their own, rather than one dominated by Irish Catholics. In 1906 the bishop granted their wishes and appointed Father Vito Franco to organize a parish, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, for Italians in Niles.³⁶ While this collective action was not unprecedented it foreshadowed a predisposition toward joining and organizing that became more evident in other area of the immigrants' lives.

By the 1930s there existed three fraternal organizations within this immigrant community. In addition to a chapter of the Sons of Italy established in the 1920s, members of this group participated in two locally formed organizations. During the end of the first decade of Italian immigration to Niles, residents of the small but growing ethnic community surrounding the NFB organized themselves into a small, self-held association, the San Filippo Neri Club. Open to any male of Italian descent, the club served as a gathering spot where members could socialize and participate in a variety of games such as *Morra*, *Tresette*, and *Bocce*. In conjunction with their local parish the group formally celebrated the feast day of their patron saint, Filippo Neri, with attendance at mass and an all-day party featuring free food and drink for family and friends. Their dues also provided a death benefit for members and their families. The "insurance" covered the costs of a modest funeral for any paid member and his immediate family.³⁷ The establishment of the Bagnoli Club in 1923 represented an equally significant movement within this community. Loosely affiliated until 1932, the group formerly organized and purchased from the Thomases a building on Mason Street in Niles. The structure served as their headquarters and a community gathering place. Nick Alfiero, Rocco Gargano and Lawrence Toriello, all tracing their descent from Bagnoli-Irpino and the NFB, established the

Bagnoli-Fraternal Order organization in the midst of the Great Depression as a buffer against the economic problems that plagued the community at large.³⁸ In addition to the more social functions of the group, the Bagnoli Club provided informal educational services. More established members of the club taught classes where newer immigrants could learn English and prepare for citizenship exams. Advanced offerings featured courses that improved literacy.³⁹ While not unique within the Italian-American experience, this relatively small group of immigrants displayed an unusual tendency toward “joining.” Immigrants not only associated across parochial Italian barriers, they did so very early in their American lives. They also organized to make progress toward goals that encouraged their assimilation into the American mainstream more rapidly than their counterparts in larger metropolitan areas.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of their willingness to associate and adapt came in their resistance to the activities of the Ku Klux Klan during the mid-1920s. Faced with a major Klan anti-Catholic demonstration in November 1924, Italian-Americans in Niles rallied to prevent a planned march through town. Irish-Americans joined with their Italian counterparts in acting as vigilantes to thwart the efforts of the Ku Klux Klan.⁴⁰ Many in this group believed that the march and the Klan members ignored their attempts at becoming good citizens. While those involved in organizing the resistance to the march had ties to local boot-legging operations, the Italian and Irish communities’ overwhelming support of the action derived from a sense of betrayal. Most Italian-Americans in the community deplored the violence but deemed it necessary for their defense.⁴¹ In their judgment, Italian-Americans assumed equality on the basis of education, home-ownership and citizenship.

Even when this group appeared to conform to the experiences of their Italian immigrants some very real differences became apparent. For example, although a substantial number did follow patterns of re-immigration and return to Italy, they did so with a difference. In many cases their journeys did not follow a path straight to and from Italy, but instead were triangular in nature with points in south-central Italy, in Niles, Ohio and in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Many of these immigrants leaving Italy in the 1880s and 1890s found Brazil and Argentina more to their needs than the United States. In Brazil, particularly, they found the opportunities for land acquisition offered by the government to be intriguing.⁴² This movement tended to precede the move toward the NFB by about a decade and indicated a preference for a more rural existence.⁴³ These families were already scattered on three continents; the movement to the United States simply extended that process a bit farther.

The NFB’s use of Italian workers as recruiters also conformed to the established patterns of chain migration and employment. It was not, however, the highly exploitive “bossism” or *padroni* system that operated in many large eastern and midwestern cities or through brokering agencies.⁴⁴ Most of the laborers fit into networks composed of immediate, extended, and fictive family members and were recruited by company representatives, family members or both. It also appears from the evidence supplied by the payrolls that the majority of those recruited

stayed with the NFB for less than half a year. This is particularly true of those who were without skills valued by the management. Many, for example, used familial connections to work for a few weeks while they searched for more congenial employment at facilities such as the Thomas Furnace.⁴⁵ Thus the NFB provided a way station on their way to other employment; jobs at the yard supplied an immediate and temporary respite, not permanent security, for some employees.

Although much further study is needed in order to explain these anomalies, several conclusions can be inferred. The Italian immigrant employees of the NFB acted differently from their counterparts because they found themselves in conditions distinct from those created in big cities or by large corporations. An earlier ethnographic study of Bagnoli-Irpino's sister city, Bagnoli del Trigno, indicates that those that left Italy between 1880 and 1915 were typical for their time and place; that there was little to make them distinct or react differently.⁴⁶ When immigrants from Bagnoli-Irpino joined other Italians in communities in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Orange, New Jersey they behaved in typical, predictable ways. This implies, therefore, that it was conditions they encountered in Niles, Ohio that caused or created the differences in their reactions and adaptations.

First, one must consider the size of the community that they joined. With a population of less than 4000 in 1880, Niles qualified as a small town. Its industries reflected that size as well; the largest, the Coleman, Shields and Company had 165 workers while the NFB employed nineteen.⁴⁷ Second, these Italian immigrants represented the only significant body of Southern or Eastern Europeans to join the community during this period. Perhaps this gave immigrants a greater sense of security. There were no groups similar to themselves with which they had to compete. They worked with men at the NFB that were American-born or earlier immigrants from the British Isles and were treated equitably by the management.

In addition, some of the conditions created at the Niles Fire Brick and by the Thomases were unique. The Italian immigrants at the NFB represented a valuable source of labor that the company could not locally replace. Two factors contributed to this situation. First, refractory brick making, while using relatively low technology, required skilled workers with experience. Learning brick making techniques often meant years of on-the-job training and no local source provided that experience. Second, work in a brickyard was difficult and often hazardous. The extreme heat required by the firing process took kilns heated to 2600°F and created an ambient temperature of about 100°F. Burns and crushed body parts were constant dangers. There were also a variety of environmental risks for the worker; NFB employees cited tuberculosis and "black lung" as long term consequences of their employment.

The Thomases recognized and rewarded their workers as a result of these factors. Their wages, particularly at the skilled levels, were about ten percent higher than those paid by others involved in heavy industry in the local area.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Italian workers had equitable access to those wages. The management at the NFB also encouraged and promoted members of

the Italian workforce very quickly into positions of lower management. This allowed Italian immigrants at the NFB to engage in activities beyond those necessary for survival. They had some expendable income that could be saved. As a consequence of this, city directories and Sanborn Insurance Maps reveal that they moved rapidly out of rented housing and into homes of their own. Substantial incomes also meant that most workers employed at the NFB had the luxury of deciding whether or not their children should work. It became a matter of preference rather than necessity, and as consequence most families opted to keep their children in school longer than their counterparts in other communities. Oral histories suggest that Italians in this community took this a step farther and sought college education for at least their male offspring.⁴⁹

Although some of the nation's larger prejudices, exemplified by their clash with the Klan in the 1920s, hampered Italian immigrants in Niles, their adaptations to and their integration into the community was relatively rapid. Their offspring regularly became professionals, held elected offices, and served as community leaders. By and large, by 1915 Italian laborers at the NFB had reached a level of economic and social prosperity not equaled by their counterparts until the advent of World War II.

Notes

¹Some of the works which provided background and the insight necessary for this study include the work of Humbert Nelli, *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); and two anthologies *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variation* (New York: Elseview, 1988) and *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). Lance Liebman's and Norman Yetman's more general works *Ethnic Relations in America* (Edgewood Cliffs, N.J.: prentice-Hall, 1982) and *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991) added considerably to my understanding of this subject. The bibliographic work done by James S. Olson in *The Ethnic Dimension in America History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) did much to enlighten my scope of the literature. Finally two classic works, Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) and Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic and Jew* (Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1955) enriched my study. The historiographic context of this study was considerably broader. The works of the consensus, neo-Whig Historians of the 1950s and their discussions of the American melting pot have given way to works of broader vision. Theories of assimilation have given way to notions of cultural pluralism. The sense of hopelessness typified by Oscar Handlin in *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migration that Made the American People* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, Publishers, 1951) have yielded to revisionists works such as Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Works by Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (1982), and Donna Grabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (1984) suggest that while Italian immigrants faced real prejudice and hardship in their new surrounding they exerted some control over that environment and carved out unique niches for themselves. Additional works such as Michael LaSorte, *La Merica: Images of Italian Greenhorn Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985) and Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) look at this experience from the immigrants' point-of-view.

²Daniel Nelson, *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in North America, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Hal Barron in *Mixed Harvests: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

³John Thomas died January 25, 1898. "Letter from Thomas E. Thomas to Horace W, Power," NFB Correspondence Book #4, Archives of the Museum of Industry and Labor, Ohio Historical Society, Youngstown Ohio, 295.

⁴"General Summary," 10.

⁵"General Summary," 1.

⁶"Niles Fire Brick had National Name," *Niles Daily Times: Niles Sesquicentennial Souvenir Edition* (August 7, 1984), 7.

⁷Niles Fire Brick, Payroll, Volumes 1-12. The payroll ledgers contain entries which list employees, wage rates and amounts earned recorded every two weeks from June, 15, 1893 through March 15, 1940. Volume 2, April 1900 to January 15, 1903 is missing, presumably destroyed in the fire in 1902 which reduced the Number One Plant to cinders in 1902.

⁸*Niles Daily Times: Niles Sesquicentennial Souvenir Edition* (August 1984) 7.

⁹Nelson, *Farm and Factory*, 24 -28 & 174, speaks to the issue of transatlantic chain immigration (1880-1920) and the later migration from the Upper South.

¹⁰ NFB Payroll, Volume 3-7, frequently list deduction taken by the company for rent. A "Rental Inventory," 1919, list thirteen houses owned by the company and rented to employees for \$6.00 to \$12.00 per month. Oral Histories confirm the rental practices, Beatrice Parker, "Niles Fire Brick Project," by Marcelle Wilson, Niles, Ohio, October 18, 1994. Niles City directories, 1908-1924, highlight move to owner occupied housing.

¹¹*Niles Daily Times: Niles Sesquicentennial Souvenir Edition* (August 1984) 28, 48.

¹²Niles Fire Brick Payroll, Volume 1, June 1893 to April 15, 1900.

¹³I found the payroll listings somewhat frustrating; the spelling of ethnic names changed with great frequency. In the original listings Laborial = Gaborial; Infante = Infanti; Pallante = Polanti.

¹⁴See NFB Payroll, Volume 1, 8-9, 74, 91.; and Michael Patrone, Oral History by James Allgren, October 26, 1993, Youngstown State University Oral History Collection.; Michael Patrone, Oral History by June Ladd, December 14, 1993, Youngstown State University Oral History Collection; Mary Bernard, Oral Interview by Chuck Sheetz, August 10, 1985, Youngstown State University Oral History Collection; Margaret Pallante, Oral History by Daniel Pallante, July 11, 1989; Youngstown State University Oral History Collection; and Margaret Pallante, Oral History by Marcelle Wilson, October 24, 1994; Youngstown State University Oral History Collection.

¹⁵Sheehan began working for the company in 1880, became the plant's general foreman

in 1890 and continued as plant superintendent through the depression of the 1930s. Grace Sheehan, Oral History by James Allgren, February 22, 1993, Youngstown State University Oral History Collection.

¹⁶NFB Payroll, Volume 2.

¹⁷See table #1.

¹⁸NFB Payroll data.

¹⁹NFB Payroll, Volume 2, 179-82. This excludes those listed as boys (7/16) and foremen.

²⁰NFB Payroll, Volume 3, 411-414.

²¹See Kessner, Chapter III, "Immigrant Occupational Distribution," 44-70.

²²Leonard Dinnerstein and David Reimers, *Ethnic Americans*, 50-53, suggests that Italian families in large cities made only two-thirds of the wages necessary to keep them above the poverty line.

²³NFB Payroll, Volume 1, 2-3.

²⁴NFB Payroll, Volume 1, 200-201.

²⁵NFB Payroll, Volume 3, 374-378; NFB Payroll, Volume 5, 86-91.

²⁶NFB Payroll, Volume 1.

²⁷NFB Payroll, Volume 1, 68-118. Although more Italians than those listed show up in the records, ties to Bagnoli-Irpino for this group were confirmed by oral interviews and the membership roles of the Bagnoli Club, Niles Ohio.

²⁸Immigration papers of Lucia Clemente Pallante, issued in Belem de Pasqua, August, 1903, in the private papers of Lucia Clemente Pallante.

²⁹NFB Payroll, Volume 2, 171-174.

³⁰On the value of education see Mindel, 119.

³¹Dinnerstein and Reimers, 55, support their contention with data from St. Louis, Missouri. They state that few Italian immigrants were graduated from high school or attended college prior to World War II. For example, in 1940 only one percent finished high school, and

that by 1970 that number had risen only to eighteen percent.

³²NFB Payroll, Volume 3, Letter from T.E. Thomas to Niles City Schools, Correspondence Book 26, May 24, 1912 to February 15, 1913.

³³See Niles High Year Books, from 1918-1928.

³⁴Patrone, Margaret Pallante., Lawrence Pallante, Oral History by James Allgren, Youngstown State University Oral History Collection.

³⁵Mindel, 50-53.

³⁶*Niles Sesquicentennial Edition*, 45.

³⁷*Niles Daily Times: Niles Sesquicentennial Souvenir Edition* (August 1984) 28; Michael Patrone, Oral History.

³⁸*Niles Daily Times: Niles Sesquicentennial Souvenir Edition* (August 1984), 48; Michael Patrone, Oral History.

³⁹Michael Patrone, Oral History; Margaret Pallante, Oral History.

⁴⁰Joseph Jennings, Jr., Oral History by Stephen Papalas, Youngstown State University Oral History Collection, August 20, 1982.

⁴¹Michael Patrone, Lawrence Pallante, and Margaret Pallante; William Jenkins, "The Niles Riot," *The Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989) discusses this group's response to the Klan activity in their town.

⁴²See Nelli, 3-4; Leonard Moss and Stephen Cappinari, "The Black Madonna: An Example of Cultural Borrowing," *Scientific Monthly* LXXVI, June 1953; Ruth Crawford "Half of Niles Population Linked to Same Italian Village," *Tribune Chronicle* (1976).

⁴³Margaret Pallante.

⁴⁴Peck, 49-81: Nelson, 27.

⁴⁵Michael Patrone, and Donald Pallante, Oral History by James Allgren, October 26, 1993, Youngstown State University Oral History Collection; also in the Niles Fire Brick Collection (now housed at the Museum of Industry and Labor, Youngstown, Ohio) are some of the records of the Thomas Furnace Company. Their payroll ledger, 1896-1898, reveals that

many of those who passed through the NFB found more permanent employment at the iron furnace. Both were owned by the Thomases, but beyond that there is no clear understanding of how separately they operated.

⁴⁶Moss and Cappannari.

⁴⁷*Historical Collections of Ohio: An Encyclopedia of the State*, Volume II, The Centennial Edition (Cincinnati, Ohio: C.J. Krehbiel and Company, 1888) 677.

⁴⁸Thomas Furnace Company. Payroll Ledger, 1896-1898.

⁴⁹Sanborn Insurance Maps, City of Niles, 1927; Niles Project Oral Histories; Niles City Directories, 1908-1924.