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THE PADRONE, THE SOJOURNERS, AND THE SETTLERS
A PREFACE TO THE "LITTLE ITALIES" OF MAINE

Although Italian explorers were among the earliest Europeans to view Maine, approximately four hundred years elapsed before another enterprising lot of Italians lured thousands of their countrymen to Maine in quest of jobs. To many of the Italian male peasants fleeing poverty, overcrowding, and other harsh conditions in their native villages, the *padroni* ("patrons") or labor agents, appeared to be economic saviors who promised great wealth by Italian standards. Between 1880 and 1920, the *padroni* found jobs for millions of sojourning peasants as laborers in Maine and other parts of North America.

The *padroni*, however, were not without their detractors — especially in the Maine labor community and sometimes in the Italian immigrant community itself. The harshest critics viewed the flourishing symbiotic relationship between *padroni* and sojourners as unhealthy: The *padroni*, they felt, were slave traders and thieves who preyed on poor, bewildered Italian peasants. Critics cited the often absolute dependency of the non-English-speaking peasant laborers, who relied on their *padroni* as travel agents, with fees reimbursed from pay checks; as landlords, even of shacks and boxcars; as storekeepers, often on exorbitant credit; and as bankers.

Despite some abuses, most Italian emigrants reached out to the *padroni* for economic salvation, considering them either as godsenders or simply necessary evils. Were the *padroni* truly benefactors, or were they merely slave traders and swindlers? Were their labor recruitment skills essential to the development of Maine's industrial infrastructure, or were the *padroni*, as Maine labor organizations saw them, self-serving strike breakers?

Regardless of ethical assessments, the importance of the *padrone* system itself to introducing a new ethnic minority into Maine remains unquestioned. Unsettled economic and political conditions in Italy and an extreme labor shortage in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries



Maine's industrial development, especially its railroads, paper mills, and granite quarries, owes much to Italian immigrant construction crews and the *padroni* who organized them. Above, Italian workers cut their way through rock rubble on the Somerset Railroad extension near Bingham shortly after the turn of the century.

Gregory Baker Collection, University of Maine Special Collections Department.

created the opportunity for a massive migration of Italians to North America. The ambitious *padroni* seized that opportunity, facilitating emigration. Although Maine served as the migratory terminus for only a small percentage of the millions of Italian emigres, *padroni* provided the laborers so necessary to construct Maine's railroads, water works, and paper mills, and sometimes the Italian stone workers to quarry Maine granite, often during labor disputes.

The Italians whom the *padroni* lured to Maine generally possessed no intentions whatsoever of settling there, or, for that matter, of settling permanently anywhere else outside of Italy. These emigrating Italians, considered sojourners, or "birds of passage," thought Maine merely a job site at which they might earn enough money to improve their lives upon their return to Italy. Nonetheless, because *padroni* customarily provided the initial catalyst for sojourners to emigrate to Maine, and because *padroni* frequently arranged for family members and fellow

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villagers to work together at one job site in Maine, they served as a major force in the eventual settlement of thousands of Italians in Maine between 1880 and 1920, and in the development of "Little Italies" in Portland, Millinocket, Rumford, and other Maine communities.

Before this mass migration, few Italians had come to Maine. The first arrived as explorers, including (by some accounts) Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) in 1497 or 1498¹ and (more certainly) Giovanni da Verrazzano in 1524.² Yet the Maine that Verrazzano so richly described in his narrative to King Francis I apparently encouraged few, if any, Italian visitors.

When Italians began filtering into Maine during the first half of the nineteenth century, they often brought a rich heritage of music, art, and education. Nationwide, the earliest documented nineteenth-century Italian immigrants "were importers of fruit, political exiles, musicians, singers, painters, sculptors, priests and missionaries."³ That trend was evident in Maine. The Italian contribution to music in Maine began in Portland in the 1820s with violinist-conductor Louis Ostinelli⁴ and continued with his Maine-born daughter, Elise Biscaccianti, "the first Italian-American opera singer."⁵ In the mid-nineteenth century, Italian Jesuits, such as Fathers Anthony Ciampi and Eugenio Vetromile, joined the missionary work in Maine when Jesuits were compelled to leave Italy about the time of the Italian Revolution of 1848.⁶ These occasional arrivals generally migrated from the more affluent, well educated population of northern Italy. Following in their footsteps, however, came a wave of agrarian southern Italian emigres escaping the poverty and social disarray of a newly unified Italy.

To comprehend what prompted this exodus of millions of southern Italians to North and South America and parts of Europe between 1880 and 1920, one must understand four things: the Italian history that provoked the mass migration; the concept of *campanilismo*; the intertwined interests of the *padroni* and the sojourners; and the relative lack of interest on the part of Italians in actually settling in the United States, at least initially.

The beginnings of national consciousness in Italy go back to the eleventh century, but unity eluded the city-states as long as commercial and cultural rivalry flourished in the North, and while foreign nations dominated the region's politics. In the nineteenth century, a movement called *Risorgimento*, the resurgence or reawakening, exploded in Italy. Attempts at revolution failed in the 1820s and 1830s, and again in 1848, but finally in 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi and Camille Cavour helped precipitate Italian unification, which was completed by 1870.

Italian unification and independence failed to free the southern Italian *contadini* from the bonds of poverty, overpopulation, governmental subjugation, and social discrimination. By this time the soils of southern Italy had been exhausted by centuries of farming. Also, the region had failed to share with northern Italy the earlier accumulation of capital and wealth through contact with industrialization. Higher cultural and educational standards dating from the Renaissance prompted northern Italians to consider themselves superior to southerners. Faced with these obstacles, almost nine million Italians fled the unrest and intensified economic hardships that persisted in Italy.⁷

Because the *contadini* had been hardened by centuries of oppression, poverty, and natural calamities, they developed a profound distrust of anyone outside the immediate family. Thus was formed the close family bond that exists among most Italians. However, out of the necessity to cooperate with neighbors for the family's survival, *contadini* did place limited trust in fellow villagers, in those people who lived within the sound of the village church bell, which is called the *campanile*. This limited trust became known as *campanilismo*. To the *contadini*, peasants from other towns, even those from across the valley, were *forestieri* (strangers), to be viewed suspiciously. Consequently, when Italians finally did migrate to the United States, chain migration frequently brought family members and fellow villagers together in clusters in cities like Boston, New York, and Chicago, and in the "Little Italies" of smaller communities such as Portland, Millinocket, and Rumford, Maine.

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Many of these southern Italian emigrants were illiterate individuals with only limited agrarian job skills. They emigrated solely to earn enough money to buy a small parcel of land that would provide the family some economic independence and security. The fact that three in every four of the foreign-born Italians in Maine in 1910 were men without families reflects this strategy.⁸ These “birds of passage” considered Maine and other states a means to improve their lives and their status upon return to Italy. Most sojourners emigrated to the United States more than once, often seasonally. Some crossed the Atlantic dozens of times.⁹ Intertwined with the sojourners was a powerful group of men called the *padroni*.

Although critics often disdained them for preying on naive *contadini*, the *padroni* did provide the necessary link between sojourners, who sought work, and employers, such as railroad and mill contractors, who frequently demanded immediate, large, unskilled labor pools. In 1897 *padroni* controlled two-thirds of Italian labor in New York City.¹⁰ Although no similar figures exist for Maine, evidence strongly indicates the percentage was as high. As an Italian labor agent, the *padrone* frequently found employment for the *contadini* of his own village — following the concept of *campanilismo*. In return, the *padrone* received a one- to ten-dollar commission per man, paid by the employer, in addition to a fee paid by the laborer.

Critics considered the laborers essentially slaves to the *padrone*, who generally assessed the costs of passage from Italy and the job fee out of the laborers’ first wages. In addition, many *padroni* apparently required laborers to live in *padroni*-run boarding houses and to shop exclusively at *padroni*-owned stores, often at inflated prices. Gabriel A. Iamurri, in his autobiographical account of his immigration to Maine as a railroad laborer, described labor agents in Massachusetts as “scum of the Italian race.”¹¹ Iamurri at one point detailed several methods used to cheat and extort Italian men who bought items on credit in their stores. Some unscrupulous *padroni* charged unsuspecting laborers first-class rail fares to job sites, even when the employer



A labor boss and his work crew pose at a camp on the Bangor and Aroostook's Lagrange cutoff. Critics of the system claimed that workers were little more than slaves, bonded to their work by ties of debt and patronage. Yet the *padroni* played a vital role in providing crews for large-scale construction projects and jobs for unskilled immigrant workers. Photo from the Vincent Cuzzo Collection, University of Maine Special Collections Department.

provided free transportation. As Iamurri recalls, "It goes without saying, that if he [the *padrone*] paid \$10 for fare for each one of us he had to collect \$15 if not more from everyone."¹² Employers often gave the laborers' paychecks directly to the *padrone*. The *padrone* then forwarded to the laborers what little remained after deductions for job fees, transportation, rent, and store purchases on credit.

From these meager monthly paychecks most Italian sojourners were able to send some money back to their families in Italy. Often they accomplished this by living in makeshift dwellings and by demanding their own kitchens at job sites, so they could eat more cheaply. In fact, "From a monthly salary of \$35, the Italian could save \$25 or more."¹³

The period of the *padrone* began in 1864, with passage of a federal law that allowed the recruitment of immigrant labor under contract. It ended in 1911, when an Immigration Commission Report stated that the *padrone* system, for all practical purposes, was dead. After 1911, vestiges, however, still re-



Work on the Lagrange cutoff, 1906. "In Maine as elsewhere, the *padrone*'s stock-in-trade was hand labor for railroads and construction work."

mained in small communities such as Millinocket. In Maine as elsewhere, "the *padrone*'s stock-in-trade was hand labor for railroads and construction work."¹⁴ Occasionally *padroni* provided mill workers or stone cutters, and rarely they provided skilled workers such as masons and carpenters.

Some historians believe the *padrone* system overall served a necessary function: "As depressing as conditions were in *padrone* camps, they were not as bad as the situation which the laborers had left behind in Southern Italy."¹⁵ Besides, the *padroni* rendered a useful service. They linked labor-intensive capitalistic ventures such as the burgeoning railroads and paper mills of Maine and the uneducated yet strong-backed Italian immigrants desirous of earning as much money as possible. In addition, the *padroni* provided the laborers with needed services in an alien land, including food, room and board, banking, intermediation in dealings with the employer, a translator, and a person to write or read the illiterate laborers' letters.

In Maine, the *padrone* system operated to the fullest. It channeled large numbers of Italians into Maine to build rail-

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roads, construct dams and mills, and cut granite, often amid labor unrest. The New York Italian Labor Company, for instance, which contracted a large Italian work force in Maine, distributed a circular in 1886 that advertised the “advantages of Italian labor” under *padrone* control:

Cash Capital \$25,000

1. Intelligent agent will represent the company in looking after the men, and, from their responsibility to the Company, will be of great assistance to the employer.
2. Contractors and employers will also find the great authority of this company over the men of special advantage in all reasonable arrangements and other dealings which they may have with the men.¹⁶

After 1911 the system was used largely in the pulp and paper mill towns. By then, many Italians were bringing their families and settling in the state.

Complications arose because the *padrone* system was occasionally exploitative or because the system competed with organized labor in Maine. Some Italians were stranded in Maine when the promised work failed to materialize or when the work was completed and the *padrone* neglected to provide transportation back to Boston or New York. On other occasions contractors failed to pay, or attempted not to pay, the laborers. Such incidents triggered labor unrest, strikes, and threats of violence. Several times, in fact, Italian crews took railroad or construction company officials hostage until wages were paid. And sometimes the stranded Italian laborers resorted to theft and panhandling or placed financial burdens on communities. In December 1887, the population of the alms house in Bangor was swelled by fifty-eight stranded Italians who had walked in from the Canadian Pacific Railway, having been recruited in New York under “false pretenses [sic].¹⁷ In 1894, more than six hundred Italians became wards of Waterville because the *padrone*, who had hired

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them to construct the Wiscasset and Quebec Railroad, "left them without bread or money."¹⁸ In a third incident, generous Farmington citizens paid passage back to Boston for destitute Italian laborers in 1897, sparing Farmington the expense.¹⁹

Overlooking these occasional pitfalls and despite charges of greed, cruelty, and deception against *padroni*, the system as a general rule provided sufficiently well-paying jobs and needed services to Italian laborers in Maine. Oftentimes the *padrone* exhibited a paternalistic attitude. George Cuozzo, a major supplier of Italian labor for eastern and northern Maine railroad construction, frequently expressed feelings of "responsibility to see that the men were taken care of and fed, and assumed responsibility for the welfare of the men in his care."²⁰ An open letter advertising his construction and labor contracting business states: "I have found by treating men with respect and square treatment that there has been no ill feeling and after completing my contracts the men have always been ready to come at my notice for work the next season."²¹

Before considering the Italian contribution to specific Maine industries, it is helpful to view some broader immigration trends of Italians to Maine. Over the years, Italian immigration to Maine essentially paralleled the overall flow of Italians into the United States, although on a far lesser scale.

Foreign-Born Italian Population in Maine, 1850-1980

	For.-Born Italians In Maine	Total Maine Popul.	Italian Percent of Pop.	Total Foreign Born	Italian Percent For. Brn
1860	49	628,279	0.008	37,453	0.130
1870	48	626,915	0.008	48,881	0.098
1880	90	648,936	0.014	58,883	0.153
1890	253	661,086	0.038	78,961	0.320
1900	1,334	694,466	0.192	93,330	1.429
1910	3,468	742,371	0.467	110,562	3.137
1920	2,797	768,014	0.364	107,814	2.594
1930	2,359	797,423	0.296	100,728	2.342
1940	2,268	847,226	0.268	83,641	2.712
1980	671	1,224,660	0.055	43,402	1.544

Source: U.S. Census Office reports.

In Maine, the 20 foreign-born Italians enumerated in the 1850 census constituted an insignificant percentage of Maine's general population. Although this number doubled in the decades preceding both the 1860 and 1880 censuses, and tripled in the decade preceding the 1890 census, the 253 Italians listed in 1890 remained an insignificant proportion of the Maine population. Between 1890 and 1900 the number of Italian immigrants increased sixfold to 1,334, and it almost tripled in the next decade to a peak of 3,468 in 1910. That 1910 figure constituted about half of one percent of Maine's general population and slightly more than 3 percent of Maine's total immigrant population, which was overwhelmingly French-Canadian. By including 1,120 Maine-born children of Italians, Maine's Italian community numbered 4,588 in 1910. Most came from southern Italy — from Abruzzi, Sicily, Sardinia, Apulia, Calabria.

Despite the geometric growth of Italian immigrants between 1880 and 1910, the fact remains that substantial numbers of the Italian immigrants returned to Italy after working in the United States. Nationally, this phenomenon fluctuated between 10 percent and 70 percent in the years between 1887 and 1915. Further, 41 percent of Italians who had repatriated between 1897 and 1906 re-emigrated at least once. Some went back and forth dozens of times.²² Repatriation figures for Italian immigrants in Maine are unavailable, but a similar trend may be assumed, since many were working in groups, unaccompanied by spouses and families, in isolated locations, and on short-term railroad and public works construction projects. Many others worked in the granite industry, which also relied heavily on seasonal workers. This suggests that Italians emigrated to Maine essentially for economic reasons. Of 3,212 Italian-born individuals culled from the 1910 Maine census, 80 percent were males. Most took advantage of job opportunities created by construction of the railroads, dams, roads, water works, and mills in Maine.

Frequently chain migration brought families and neighbors from the same villages together in enclaves in larger cities like New York, Boston, Chicago, and Providence, where they pre-

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served the territorial and provincial subcultures of the *campanilismo*. In Maine, the distribution of Italians statewide followed this national trend, but in Maine Italian laborers settled in much smaller communities.

Proportion of Italians in Selected Maine Cities, 1910

	For.-Born Italians	Total Popul.	Prc. Ital.	Foreign Born	Prc. Ital.
Auburn	113	15,064	0.75	5,558	2.00
Augusta	43	13,211	0.33	4,957	0.87
Bangor	71	24,803	0.28	10,068	0.70
Biddeford	60	17,079	.35	12,720	0.47
Hallowell	69	2,864	2.41	309	22.33
Lewiston	25	26,247	0.10	9,418	0.27
Millinocket	199	3,368	5.81	1,411	14.10
Portland	783	58,571	1.34	12,078	6.48
Rockland	107	8,174	1.31	821	13.03
Waterville	12	11,458	0.10	6,212	0.19
State Total	3,468	742,371	0.47	110,562	3.14

Source: U.S. Census Office reports.

Naturally, the largest number of Maine Italians settled in Maine's largest city, but smaller industrial centers like Millinocket and Pittsfield developed their own "Little Italies," which drew *contadini* from the Abruzzi Province, especially from the neighboring villages of Sulmona and Palena.²³

Under some circumstances, the Italian population of Maine has displayed a much more rural character than the Italian population at large in the United States. Much of this was only temporary; the Italian population fluctuated in communities such as Frankfort and Hurricane Island during the boom-and-bust days of the granite industry. Other Italian "communities" centered briefly around boxcars on railroad sidings or around shanties in isolated townships for the duration of railroad and dam construction. Nevertheless, some independent-minded Italians settled in the smaller communities, often as fruit dealers. A few became farmers.

Wherever Italians settled in Maine, they constituted a small minority of the overall population — or even of the foreign-born population. Although almost 23 percent of Italian immigrants lived in Portland at the time of the 1910 census, the heaviest densities were in the “Little Italy” of Maine’s newest city, Millinocket. In 1910, the 199 Italian immigrants in Millinocket accounted for 5.8 percent of the city’s overall population and 14.1 percent of its immigrants. In Hallowell, the 69 Italian immigrants in the granite industry comprised 2.4 percent of the general population and 22.3 percent of the city’s 309 immigrants.

The railroad and stone quarrying industries together employed about one-half (46.8 percent) of the Italian workers in Maine in 1910. Non-railroad construction and the pulp and paper industry combined for 24 percent of Italian workers. Just less than 10 percent worked as owners of, or employees in small retail stores. Many of these were fruit dealers who frequently lived as the only Italians in isolated communities.

The mass migration of Italians into the state through the *padrone* system was precipitated by construction of Maine’s railroad network. The Maine Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics reported to investigators from the U.S. Industrial Commission in 1900 that “It would be a difficult thing at the present time to build a railroad of any considerable length without Italian labor.”²⁴

Undocumented historical sources associate Italian laborers with railroad construction in the Portland area as early as the late 1830s, but the bulk of them arrived between 1880 and 1915.²⁵ Mid-nineteenth-century railroads in Maine were more often built by Irish and French Canadian workers. For instance, Irish laborers worked for one dollar a day in 1846 on construction of the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad, and most of the 600 laborers working on the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad in 1869 were French Canadians.²⁶ Maine, however, experienced a definite influx of Italian railroad laborers after 1869. Italians were



Italian work crews were most active in the state between 1880 and 1915 on railroad extensions into the western and northern regions.

employed in substantial numbers in railroad construction on the Boston and Maine, the Bangor and Piscataquis extension, the Moosehead and Mt. Desert, the Megantic Railroad and the Canadian Pacific Railroad in the vicinity of Greenville, the Phillips and Rangeley Railroad, the Portland and Rumford Falls Railroad, the Bangor and Aroostook, the Georges Valley Railroad from Warren to Union, the Wiscasset and Quebec Railroad, and the Oxford Central Electric Railway.²⁷

Searching through the histories of various Maine railroads and through old newspapers confirms the presence of thousands of Italians in Maine, and their disappearance after construction was completed verifies that these were sojourners. Frequent mention of specific *padroni* further confirms their significance in this labor system.

When railroad contractors required an army of laborers in Maine on short notice, they frequently contacted an Italian *padrone*. For instance, when construction began on the Maine Shore Line between Bangor and Mount Desert Ferry in May

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Job Profile of Maine Italians in 1910
(Italian-born and Italian Parentage)

	Men	Women	Total	Percent
Railroad	628	0	628	24.2
Stone Workers	584	0	584	22.6
Construction	282	0	282	10.9
Pulp and Paper	337	3	340	13.1
Odd Jobs	249	0	249	9.6
Merchants	215	28	243	9.4
Textiles	61	19	80	3.1
Wood workers	26	0	26	1.0
Metal Workers	47	0	47	1.8
Farmers	26	0	26	1.0
Miscellaneous	85	14	99	3.3
Total	2540	64	2604	100.0

Source: U.S. Census Office reports.

1883, they hoped to find the necessary laborers in towns along the route. But delays in the annual log drive “compelled” contractors to send for 500 Italians from Boston and New York.²⁸ Contractors of the narrow-gauge Franklin and Megantic Railroad between Strong and Kingfield, fearing that snow and frozen ground would increase construction costs, “moved in a gang of Italian laborers and the grade walked steadily north.”²⁹

The most extensive recorded accounts of Italian rail laborers occurred in northern and eastern Maine after 1890, especially during construction of the Bangor and Aroostook, and the Washington County railroads. One *padrone* alone, George Cuozzo, who advertised that he maintained “a vast calling of men and can furnish any number at short notice,” provided more than 3,150 Italian laborers between 1893 and 1907.³⁰ In 1893, when the Bangor and Aroostook was grading its line from Brownville to Houlton, Cuozzo provided 600 Italian laborers after railroad officials, expecting to employ about 1,000 mostly local men, recruited only a meager crew of 150.³¹ Eventually, “gangs of Italian laborers set to work northward, felling trees, removing boulders, filling valleys, and knocking the tops off hills,”³² a feat described as “truly a story of rugged deeds

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performed by rugged men.”³³ When grading of the B and A’s Fish River extension began in 1902, “crews comprised mostly of Italian workers fanned out the length of the proposed line to blast ledges, fill in swamps, and construct masonry foundations for culverts and bridges.”³⁴ George Cuozzo again provided 600 Italian laborers at \$1.50 for a ten-hour day, with foremen receiving \$2.50 a day. Cuozzo provided another 600 men in 1905 and 400 in 1906 to build the Northern Maine Seaport Railroad, linking Searsport and South LaGrange. The Maine Railroad Commissioners commented in their annual report: “No more thorough construction has been put into operation in this state.”³⁵ In 1906 and 1907 Cuozzo provided 800 Italian laborers to build the B and A’s Medford Cutoff near LaGrange.

When work began on the Washington County Railroad in 1897, *The Machias Union* reported that “every day brings a number of Italians to this city” to work, apparently happy to take the pick-and-shovel jobs that many Maine men considered beneath them.³⁶ One hundred Italian laborers from New York under contractor Joseph Orlando immediately created a shantytown at Charlotte, which swelled to 200 men. With hundreds of Italian laborers at his command, contractor Salvini completed a section of roadbed across Carlows Island; contractor W.P. Drisco did grading through Jonesboro; and on a twenty-three-mile stretch between Machias and Cherryfield, contractor Murray completed a trestle bridge over Little River. Despite its Irish ring, Murray was the surname of four brothers, all *padroni*, originally named Marino. Working for about a dollar a day, the Italians put the Washington County Railroad through, legend says, “living on beer, bread, and rabbits.”³⁷

Italian rail laborers built a primitive type of housing for themselves during construction of the Somerset Railroad extension from Bingham to Rockwood between 1903 and 1906. The workers, some of them under contract with Dominick Susi, “were housed in huts constructed of poles covered with sod and for the most part did their own cooking, although an out-door brick oven was built at one spot which baked bread for several



Housing for immigrant work crews was often haphazard. The photo above shows a sod hut built by workers on the Somerset Railroad extension from Bingham to Rockwood between 1903 and 1906.

crews.”³⁸ The Italians here were contracted to make the rough grades for the Somerset roadbed in the steep-sided Austin Stream Valley that rises 660 feet in the eight miles from Bingham to Deadwater and then across fairly level ground to Lake Moxie. They moved the earth using only picks, shovels, and two-wheeled, one-horse carts.

Almost on a par with Italian involvement in railroad construction in Maine was the construction of reservoirs and pulp and paper mills. As with railroad construction, scarcity of records makes it almost impossible to assess the total number of Italians who worked in Maine on these developments. Census enumeration years did not always coincide with heavy construction projects.

Several Maine town histories make brief references to Italian construction crews working on municipal projects. For instance, Italians worked “in the construction of water works in Norway, Houlton, Old Orchard, Skowhegan, Munjoy Hill in Portland, Calais, Woolwich, Newport, and Whitneyville.”³⁹ The Italian participation in constructing the Norway water works in

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1885-1886 brought rumblings among organized labor. The Knights of Labor in Norway formally protested the Italian work force to Governor Frederick Robie and publicized the issue through broadsides such as one headed, "Daily Exhibition! Italian slavery on exhibition daily at Norway, Maine."40 The Knights argued that the New York Italian Company dominated the Italian laborers as slaves under the *padrone*. The *Maine State Press*, which reported complaints of Italians being hired "to the

DAILY EXHIBITION!

ITALIAN SLAVERY

IS NOW

On Exhibition Daily at Norway, Maine, CRUSH AND STARVE

BEASTS OF BURDEN

STREET PARADE DAILY.

LABOR CHEAP.

A Gang of Slaves in Maine, Being Made Beasts of Burden.

C. E. BROWN.

Rescued Into Slavery! An Eye Opened!

Courtesy Charles A. Scontras

exclusion of needy laboring men," wrote that Governor Robie was "understood to be strongly in sympathy with the anti-Italian movement."⁴¹ The Governor's Council referred the matter to Maine's attorney general, who apparently felt no laws had been violated.⁴²

Italian construction gangs were indispensable in the construction of many of the mills in Maine's burgeoning pulp and paper centers around the turn of the century. Italians helped erect the Rumford Falls Paper Company and Rumford Falls Sulphite Company mills in the 1890s, the Oxford Paper Company mill in Rumford in 1900-1901, and the Great Northern Paper Company mills in what is now Millinocket and East Millinocket beginning in 1899. The ten-cent-an-hour wage offered by contractors building the Rumford mills enticed large numbers of Italians, along with Polish, Scottish, Lithuanian, Irish, Canadian, and French-Canadian laborers. During these same years New England textile mills were paying only five to seven cents an hour for ten- or even twelve-hour days.⁴³ Even though railroad construction paid as high as fifteen cents an hour, ten cents an hour obviously was enticing enough for some Italians, for on July 21, 1901, *The Rumford Falls Times* announced: "Train Number Six brought up another carload of Italians, fifty-seven in number, Tuesday noon." As with most construction jobs employing Italians, a *padrone*, James Dellino, directed the work. At first, many "lived in wooden shacks or in huts with walls of sod."⁴⁴ In Millinocket, the difficult hand labor needed to build the mill is evident from this commentary:

The work that the men are now called on to do is rude and difficult, consisting of blasting, moving of frozen earth and rocks and the sinking of caissons for the dam and the foundations of the great mills. It is therefore an army in motley that is tackling the work. Many of the laborers are from the provinces, some are lumber-men such as may be secured from Bangor, but the most are foreign laborers that were picked up in the cities.⁴⁵

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Before beginning the mill, the general contractors spent a day inspecting the site. With them was a *padrone* from Boston, "who went to look things over preparatory to sending a big gang of Italians to Millinocket." Although Poles, Finns, and Hungarians would be included in the work force, the mill contractor apparently preferred Italians because they would stay until the work is done.⁴⁶ The 1900 census lists 430 Italian-born males and 1 Italian wife in Indian Township No. 3, out of which Millinocket grew. The initial *padrone* of record on the Great Northern construction job was Marco Lavonia. In time, Ferdinando "Fred" Peluso, previously a railroad construction laborer, became the major *padrone* in Millinocket. Peluso and Thomas Viola in Orono were just two of five *padroni* established by an even bigger *padrone*, possibly Lavonia. Dominic Moscone was the primary *padrone* in East Millinocket.⁴⁷ The 1910 Maine census listed several other labor contractors, or *padroni*: Antonio Amelio of Lewiston, Giuseppe Marcicilli of Jay, and Joseph Mosconi of East Millinocket.

Perhaps a *padrone* network existed in Maine, as Dominic Pasquine of Millinocket later recalled, under Marco Lavonia, but confirmation is lacking. Information concerning one other Maine *padrone*, however, lends additional support for such a network. Dominic M. Susi actively recruited Italians in 1903 to build the Burnham Dam in Pittsfield after completing the Seabasticook and Moosehead Railroad extension with an Italian crew.⁴⁸ A grandnephew of Susi's, Kenneth Cianchette, said that Susi then sent back to Sulmona, Italy, for friends and relatives to come to Maine when he contracted to build a section of railroad near Millinocket.⁴⁹ Sulmona links Susi of Pittsfield with Dominic and Joseph Moscone in East Millinocket, since all three had migrated from there. In addition, Fred Peluso, the major *padrone* in Millinocket, was born in the neighboring village of Palena, and the Cianchette family, members of which later became contracting magnates in Pittsfield, were relatives of Susi, also from Sulmona. Despite these geographic connections and several other clues from the 1900 and 1910 census reports, an organized *padrone* network has yet to be confirmed, since the



Smaller *padroni* contracted with others operating on a larger scale, sometimes creating a hierarchical network of labor bosses and recruiters that spanned entire regions. *Padrone* Ralph Murray, pictured above left, worked for A.E. Trites, the primary contractor on the Lagrange cutoff.

villages of origination for some other *padroni* in Maine and for most Italian immigrant laborers yet remain unrecorded.

Besides railroad and general construction, *padroni* also were responsible for luring Italians to Maine's granite industry. Many skilled and highly paid northern Italian granite cutters began arriving as birds of passage at Maine quarries in the 1870s and 1880s without the aid of *padroni*. Although these immigrant stone cutters were castigated by American union members as scabs and strikebreakers, *The Granite Cutters' Journal* presents no stories before 1891 of Italian strikebreakers, even though scabbing was a common practice among Scotch, French-Canadian, and English stone workers. In fact, most Italians joined the Granite Cutters' Union and remained faithful members. Some even became officers of union locals, and a column written in Italian appeared regularly in *The Granite Cutters' Journal*. This situation changed, however, at the end of the century. Despite pro-union sentiment among the northern Italian granite cutters, quarry managers found that less-skilled southern Italian immi-

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grants were useful pawns during labor unrest. This was especially true because a *padrone* usually could provide rapid delivery of a large work force.⁵⁰

In 1891 Neelon and Shields, a Canadian granite firm operating on Deer Isle, locked out American stone cutters and brought in eighty cheap Italian laborers "under convoy of a *padrone*."⁵¹ Likewise in other quarries, when tension between union members and quarry management over contract terms increased, hundreds of Italians recruited by *padroni* accepted employment as scabs and strikebreakers in Maine quarries.

When the Granite Manufacturers Association of New England locked out all union labor in May 1892, ten Italian scabs were hired in an effort to displace union men on Hurricane Island. Striking workers reacted immediately by paying the Italians' fares back to Philadelphia. Union cutters then repeated the action for thirty-eight Italian scabs who arrived soon after on the Boston boat. Nine other Italians, sent by night train from New York to Rockland and then by hired tug to Hurricane Island, proved to be typical scabs, exhibiting inferior workmanship.⁵² Italians, however, were not the only aliens used as scabs during the 1892 lockout. The Bodwell Granite Company on nearby Vinalhaven used scab crews of Swedes and Finns.⁵³

In 1899 Italians were brought from New York as scabs during labor unrest at Mount Waldo in Frankfort. Everett Sanborn, superintendent of the Waldo Granite Company, found the scab cutters, hired at sub-union wages of \$2.70 a day (\$.90 below the going rate), unsatisfactory. They "can't cut a pumpkin," he reported to the Bangor *Whig and Courier*; the Italian scab blacksmiths "can't sharpen harrow teeth for plowed ground." Brought to Mount Waldo on a one-month trial basis, the Italian scabs drifted back to New York when the company refused to agree to the *padrone*'s demand of a year's guaranteed work plus other wage guarantees.⁵⁴

When stone cutters formed a union local at Stonington in 1902, Ryan and Parker Construction Company feared a strike at its paving stone quarry. The firm immediately shipped in 74 Italians from New York. Before long, 250 Italians had replaced striking union cutters at John J. Goss, M.G. Ryan and Company,

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and Ryan and Parker.⁵⁵ By 1905 two-fifths of the 600 men working permanently in Stonington's six quarries were Italians or Spaniards, although by now these immigrants had joined the union. Several hundred Italians were brought to Hall Quarry on Mount Desert Island in 1905 as scabs during a strike. James Grant remembered it this way:

They brought in a man by the name of Marino. He brought in all these men. The company paid this man, and he paid the men. He was getting a dollar a day out of each of 'em [especially in the store]. In this store part, he brought in all the groceries. He brought in these great tables and fed the men there. They slept upstairs in the hall but down there, oh, there'd be two, three hundred of them.⁵⁶

Unlike the southern Italian stone cutters, the railroad crews, and the general construction laborers, the Italian merchant class, especially the fruit merchants, did not arrive under the wing of a *padrone* and did not follow a chain migration. These independent-minded Italians usually settled permanently with their families in small communities in which few, if any other, Italians were to be found. Sixty-eight Italian fruit merchants and thirty-two fruit store clerks appear in the 1910 census, along with nine merchants or clerks in candy and tobacco businesses. The census definitely reflects the higher rate at which merchants were born in the United States or became U.S. citizens, with almost half meeting those criteria.

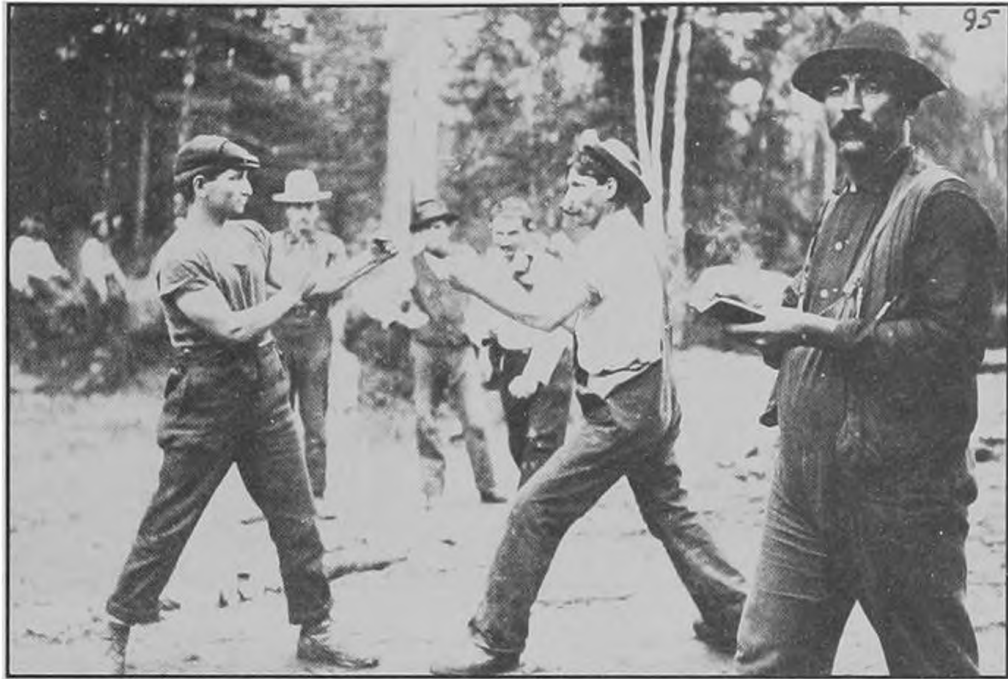
In time, even some of the sojourners brought by *padroni* from Italian villages elected to stay in Maine. Thus, by the 1980 census, 13,516 Maine individuals (1.2 percent of the statewide population) considered themselves of strictly Italian ancestry. Another 18,399 considered themselves a mixture of Italian and one or more other ancestral groups. That means 31,915 persons, or 2.84 percent of the statewide population in 1980 considered themselves at least partly Italian. Despite some blemishes in the *padrone* system, many of today's Maine Italian-Americans can credit their presence here to *padroni*, who provided jobs for sojourners, some of whom eventually settled in the state.

Padrone George Cuozzo's scrapbook of photographs, taken by Clement and Son of Milo, Maine, in 1906, now located in the G. Vincent Cuozzo collection, University of Maine Special Collections Department, document the part Italian laborers played in building the Medford Cutoff railroad.



One photograph (above) shows Cuozzo's bakery outfit at South LaGrange, which according to an interview with G. Vincent Cuozzo (July 13, 1988), based on stories passed on by his father, George Cuozzo, "was credited with baking one thousand loaves of bread a week while work was in full operation." Foreman Luigi Guiseppe, "reputed to be a troublesome character," is pictured below standing with one of the numerous one-horse carts used to move the earth.





In another photograph, he referees a boxing match between workers. *Padrone* George Cuozzo appears astride his horse Firewater, which he rode daily up and down the rail bed route to supervise his crews.





In the photograph above Cuozzo stands decked out in a suit, with railroad officials, waiting to ride the train to Bangor to pick up the monthly payroll. Cuozzo's Italian camp of converted box cars pictured at Goss Brook during the Fish River construction in 1902 appears similar to one near Ashland housing nineteen men per car in 1895, as described in Gabriel A. Iamurri's autobiography, *The True Story of an Immigrant* (page 45), and another in St. John Plantation noted in the margin of a 1910 census enumeration sheet by the census taker: "Following live on a track in a train of five cars," citing forty-four Italian laborers working under "boss" Carlo Peluso.



NOTES

¹For instance, Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 193, discounts James A. Williamson's theory giving Cabot a Maine landfall.

²Morison, *European Discovery of America*, pp. 287-308; Wayne Moquin and Charles Van Doren, editors, *A Documentary History of the Italian Americans* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 17.

³Giovanni E. Schiavo, *The Italians in America Before the Civil War* (New York: Vigo Press, 1934), p. 204.

⁴George Thornton Edwards, *Music and Musicians of Maine: Being a History of the Progress of Music in the Territory Which Has Come to be Known as the State of Maine from 1604 to 1928* (Portland: Southworth Press, 1928), p. 47, says Ostinelli was "recognized as one of the leaders in advancing the cause of music not only in Boston but in America."

⁵Schiavo, *Italians in America Before the Civil War*, p. 239.

⁶William Leo Lucey, *The Catholic Church in Maine* (Francistown, New Hampshire: Marshall Jones, 1957), pp. 136, 169; Hubbard Winslow Bryant, "Rev. Eugene Vetromile: A Brief Sketch of His Life and Philologist Labors," *Collections and Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society*, 2nd ser., vol. 1 (Portland, 1890), pp. 309-12.

⁷Sources on Italian history and causes for mass migration from Erik Amfitheatrof, *The Children of Columbus: An Informal History of the Italians in the New World* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), pp. 65-94; Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian-Americans* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), pp. 17-20; Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919).

⁸13th U.S. Census: 1910. Maine census sheets. Microfilm.

⁹Foerster, *Italian Emigration of Our Times*, p. 36.

¹⁰Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1963), p. 190.

¹¹Gabriel A. Iamurri, *The True Story of an Immigrant* (Boston: Christopher Publishing, 1945), p. 40.

¹²Ibid., p. 43.

¹³Iorizzo, "Padrone and Immigrant Distribution," p. 57.

¹⁴Humbert S. Nelli, "The Italian Padrone System in the United States," *Labor History* 5 (1964): 156.

¹⁵Nelli, "Italian Padrone System in the United States," p. 167. For other views on the *padrone* system, see Marie Lipari, "The Padrone System: An Aspect of American Economic History," *Italian-American Monthly* 2 (April 1935): 4-10; John Koren, "The Padrone System and Padrone Banks," *U.S. Department of Labor Bulletin* no. 9 (March 1897): 113-25; Wayne Moquin and Charles Van Doren, "Enslavement of Italian Immigrants" and "The Padrone System: A

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Federal View," *A Documentary History of the Italian Americans* (New York: Praeger, 1974); and the 1911 U.S. Senate *Reports of the Immigration System*.

¹⁶*Lewiston Evening Journal*, July 3, 1886; and Charles A. Scontras, *Two Decades of Organized Labor and Labor Politics in Maine, 1880-1900* (Orono: University of Maine Bureau of Labor Education, 1969), p. 19.

¹⁷*Daily Eastern Argus*, December 24, 1887.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, August 25, 1894.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, September 20, 1897.

²⁰G. Vincent Cuozzo interview, July 13, 1988, concerning his father, George Cuozzo, a leading *padrone* in Maine.

²¹George Cuozzo, Advertisement letter of George Cuozzo, general contractor, unpublished manuscript, 1907.

²²Foerster, *Italian Emigration of Our Times*, pp. 32, 36.

²³Based on interviews and occasional printed records.

²⁴Foerster, *Italian Emigration of Our Times*, p. 358. ²⁵Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration, *Portland City Guide* (Portland: Forest City Printing, 1940), p. 60; Albert F. Barnes, editor, *Greater Portland Celebration 350: A Commemorative Edition* (Portland: Guy Gannett, 1984), p. 113. Neither of these sources document their claims.

²⁶David B. Pillsbury, "The History of the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad Company," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1958, p. 81; Perham Littlefield Amsden, "A History of the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1949, p. 30.

²⁷Scontras, *Two Decades of Organized Labor and Labor Politics in Maine*, p. 19.

²⁸*Ellsworth American*, June 7, 1883.

²⁹H. Temple Crittenden, *The Maine Scenic Route: A History of the Sandy River and Rangeley Lakes Railroad* (Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Printing, 1966), p. 48.

³⁰Figures based on advertisement letter of George Cuozzo, general contractor (unpublished manuscript, 1907); George Cuozzo labor contracts with A.E. Trites (April 25, 1902, and March 8, 1905); and G. Vincent Cuozzo, "Resume for George Cuozzo" (unpublished manuscript, 1979).

³¹John William White, "The Bangor and Aroostook Railroad, the County It Serves, and the People Who Built it," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1952, p. 62.

³²Cora M. Putnam, *The Story of Houlton* (Portland: House of Falmouth, 1958), p. 236.

³³Carlton J. Corliss, "Railway developments in Maine" (Houlton: address at Ricker Classical Institute, June 8, 1953), p. 16.

³⁴Jerry Angier and Herb Cleaves, *Bangor and Aroostook: The Maine Railroad* (Littleton, Mass.: Flying Yankee Enterprises, 1986), p. 28.

³⁵Quoted in Rexford B. Sherman, "The Bangor and Aroostook Railroad and the Development of the Port of Searsport," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1967), p. 58.

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³⁶*Machias Union*, November 16, December 14, 21, 1897.

³⁷Michael W. Zimmerman, *The Sunrise Route: A History of the Railroads of Washington County, Maine* (Brewer: Cay-Bel, 1985), pp. 106, 153.

³⁸Gregory Baker, "Notes to Accompany Photographs of the Construction of the Somerset Branch of the Maine Central Railroad in Moscow, Maine" (1973), with photographs by his father, Elmer A. Baker (c. 1905), Baker Collection, Fogler Library, University of Maine (file 6).

³⁹Scontras, *Two Decades of Organized Labor and Labor Politics in Maine*, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁰Reproduced in Scontras, *Organized Labor in Maine: Twentieth Century Origins* (Orono: University of Maine Bureau of Labor Education, 1985), p. 66.

⁴¹*Maine State Press*, June 24, 1886.

⁴²Scontras, *Two Decades of Organized Labor and Labor Politics in Maine*, p. 20, surmises that no state action was taken, since Italian crews continued to work in Maine through the turn of the century.

⁴³John J. Leane, *A History of Rumford, Maine, 1774-1972* (Rumford: Rumford Publishing, 1972), p. 42.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁵*Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, April 1, 1899.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, May 2, 1899.

⁴⁷Interviews with Dominic Pasquine (July 4, 1985) and Peter Gaetani (April 8, 1985).

⁴⁸Sanger Mills Cook, *Pittsfield...on the Seabacoock* (Bangor: Furbish-Roberts, 1966), p. 91.

⁴⁹*Maine Times*, December 19, 1980.

⁵⁰Roger L. Grindle, *Tombstones and Paving Blocks: The History of the Maine Granite Industry* (Rockland: Courier-Gazette, 1977); Edwin Fenton, "Italian Workers in the Stoneworkers' Union," *Labor History* 3 (Spring 1962), pp. 188-207; *Granite Cutters' Journal* (1877-1910).

⁵¹*Ellsworth American*, May 7, 1891.

⁵²Grindle, *Tombstones and Paving Blocks*, p. 127.

⁵³Grindle, "Bodwell Blue: The Story of Vinalhaven's Granite Industry," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly*, 16 (Fall 1976): 84.

⁵⁴Grindle, *Tombstones and Paving Blocks*, p. 138; *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, May 29, 1899, and July 11, 1899.

⁵⁵*Weekly Kennebec Journal*, June 4, 1902.

⁵⁶Susan O'Neill, "Hall Quarry: The Little Town That Isn't There," unpublished manuscript, p. 16, Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History, University of Maine, Orono.