

[Shoe Machinery Worker, Beverly #1]

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INTERVIEW

with

Roland Damiani

364 Cabot St.,

Beverly, Mass.

Employee at United Shoe Machinery Co.

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by

Merton R. Lovett

. . . .

“As well as remembered.”

INTERVIEW WITH ROLAND DAMIANI

by Merton R. Lovett

. . .

(from memory)

“I wish you could see, Mr. Lovett, the town where I lived in Italy. It was called Cartoceto. It was builded on the top of a high hill. All around was a stone wall. Once upon a time this wall protected the town from bandits, from pirates and other enemies.

“You have heard of Carthage? For many years Carthage and Rome were the great rivals. Sometimes Rome was badly beaten. Sometimes the Romans were successful. Finally Hannibal, he was the great general, was completely defeated. The Africans ran away. At Cartoceto, where I was born, they made their last stand. Behind the walls they fired arrows and spears at the Romans. For months they put up a great fight.

“Why should I not know history? In Italy I attended the good schools. In this country I have studied much.

“Thank you, Mr. Lovett. If I did not get a good education would I be the officer in your evening schools? And my fellow Italians have elected me to many positions, because they appreciate learning and wish themselves to become true Americans.

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“You are right. The children of Italian immigrants wish most of all to become Americans. They make haste to adopt the American customs and speech. In fact they worry and grieve their parents, who cannot understand or keep pace with them. It is not a little tragic sometimes, — this conflict between the children and their elders.

“Yes, that is true. But a price must be paid for progress. In this case it is the parents that pay. They adapt themselves slowly to new and strange conditions. That is why we have emphasized adult education. It prevents misunderstanding. Too often the Italian youth seem cruel and disrespectful. The elders appear tyrants and kill-joys to their children.

“We lived first in Portsmouth, N. H. My father worked at the Navy Yard. The next year we moved to Beverly, where the United Shoe Machinery plant was under construction. Already my uncle, Emilo, was a boss there. He was a graduate from an Italian college and had charge of Shantyville. That was the rough village, where the Italian workmen then lived.

“I think I inherited mechanical skill. My grandfather was a smart man and successful. His name was Zefferino Clini, a metal worker. I remember the shop. He made many wagons. He cut his own lumber, which he seasoned for from five 3 to twenty years. He made his own axels, rims and screws. His wagons were made by hand and would last a life time.

“As a boy, I played games outside of the walls of Cartoceto. It was a lovely town. From it you could see the blue ocean eight miles distant. I was only eight when I came here to live.

“My father, in 1905, was a boss carpenter. He worked for the Aberthaw Construction Company. I think Tomasello did the excavating and cement work.

“Sure, I was acquainted with Shantyville. My family did not live there. Mostly the residents were single men. The shanties were built of boards. The roof was covered with tarpaper.

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They were not plastered inside, but they were clean. They were kept neat and they were comfortable.

“My Uncle, the boss, made many rules for the benefit of the men in Shantyville. Every man must make his bed in the bunk, before breakfast. They must wash their clothes and take turns scrubbing the floors. Always the camp was neat as an American home. Always it was healthful and sanitary.

“Yes, the work was hard but the Italians were very 4 tough. Each man cooked his own supper on the big stove. Sometimes two or three joined together. After supper they played games, made jokes, sang songs. Many of the men had mandolins, guitars, or violins. A visitor to Shantyville heard a lot of fine music.

“Sunday was wash day. The clothes were cleaned. Everywhere on the grass and the trees shirts and blankets were dried.

“No. there was little disturbance. The Italians are not quarrelsome. There was noise, yes; sometimes what you call horse play. These men were young, they had no family ties.

“There was hardly ever any drunkenness. Certainly they drank a little wine. They had some beer. It was against the rules to bring whiskey into camp. Nor do Italians often like intoxicating liquor.

“Perhaps some day I can tell you some interesting stories of Shantytown. I must first exercise my memory.

“The people here in Beverly never did understand the Italians of those days. Very, very slowly, their ignorance is being destroyed. In 1905 they imagined that terrible things were done in Shantyville. The police were given orders 5 to watch closely. People thought the Wops or Dagos, as they called them, were dangerous. They thought they were always ready to draw a knife or stick someone with a stiletto. Perhaps they considered the Italians

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reckless, bloodthirsty and dishonest. If so it was because they read stories of the American shanty towns in California and the West. Compared to them, the camp in Beverly was like a Sunday School. A child or woman could visit there night or day with perfect safety. It is ignorance that causes suspicion and prejudice. It is still ignorance, that makes it hard for Italians to take their proper and natural position in the community. Thank God, conditions are getting better each year.”