[Italian Shoe Machine Worker, Beverly #2]

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Interview with

Roland Dammiani

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by

Merton R. Lovett

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“As well as remembered ...”

INTERVIEW WITH ROLAND DAMMIANI

by Merton R. Lovett

. . . .

(from memory)

“I don't know how many men of Italian blood work at the United Shoe Machinery Company. It is difficult. Let me think.

“Well, there are surely three hundred. Maybe there are four hundred. Shall we say three hundred and fifty?

“No, the Italian workers are pretty well scattered. They work inside and out of the plant, on nearly every job.

“Perhaps there are a greater number in the maintenance department. These men are janitors, cleaners, yard men, gardeners, and repair men. A good many are carpenters, painters, electricians, etc.

“In the foundry there are several Italians. In the crop forge plant, there are, let me see . . . five.

“The others they work mostly on machines — drills, lathes, millers, planers.

“How many man are now employed at the United Shoe? There are on the rolls of the Relief Association, 3000. Practically everyone is a member. So you see, 3000 would be about right.

“Yes, that means that approximately one man in eight is an Italian American. In Beverly there are 29,000 people. Thirty five hundred may be called Italians. The percentage of Italians in Beverly would be, let me see, about eight and one half percent.

“I should say that the Italians were good mechanics. The bosses will tell you that. But of course they did not want man who could not understand English good.

“In the old country there were not many machine shops. But many men were fine mechanics. They made things by hand. They were experts with hand tools. With very little training they can run machines.

“Yes, the requirements here for machinists are changed. There is little need now for the all round machinists, except in the experimental department, perhaps. You yourself could learn to run a machine very quickly.

“That makes no matter. The foreman would show you how to place the casting on the machine. He would show you which lever to pull. You could do it at once. Of course, you might spoil some pieces, but not long. We engineers plan everything to be fool proof.

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“Sure, I work in the Engineering Department. I have had many promotions.

“The day I was hired, I was put to work on an automatic machine, a drill. Later I went to evening school. I studied to read blue prints. In time, I was moved to the Experimental Department.

“Well, I studied drafting in Boston, design and shop mathematics. I was ambitious. Now I am one of the engineers. Most of those are college men, from Technology usually.

“It is like this. The Super says to us, ‘We want to make ten thousand parts like this. We want to make them better and cheaper.’ Perhaps I will be given the task. I will sketch and

draw to scale the machine jigs which hold the parts during production. I will make them foolproof and as near automatic as possible. I will consider the workman's safety also.

“Some other engineer will decide what metal to use and of what composition and hardness. That depends on many things; the strains, the heat generated, etc.

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“Let me show you, Mr. Lovett, samples of my drawings. This one here is for a new outsole stitcher.

“Perhaps you do not read blueprints. Well, the inventor said he wanted to manufacture some parts which would give to the needle a certain motion. He made for me a rough sketch. Then I must figure some method to secure the results he desired.

“Yes, you are right, you could cause the needle to move so by a cam. But you could perhaps get better results by several levers. The levers would work this way. I must make the decision and draft my plans accordingly.

“Always the United Shoe is making improvements. They hire forty or fifty inventors. Each inventor has many assistants. The new machines or parts are made. They are turned over for experiment. They may be redesigned. In the end they are sometimes put into production. More often they are placed in the company's museum. There they remain until they are needed, if ever.

“Sure, I enjoy my work. It is very interesting. The pay is good. The work is steady. Never do I lose any pay.

“The less skilled men are usually contented also. At the United Shoe the work is steady. Sometimes the men work but four days per week. But there is very little what is called labor turnover.

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“No, the pay, it is not large sometimes. For four days it may be eighteen to twenty-eight dollars. Much of it is piece work. When the work week drops to three days, it is hard. But that has been very seldom.

“If a man does his work well, he need not worry about being fired. The foreman are not unreasonable. Of course, sometimes a man is foolish. He is drunk perhaps every Monday. That is just too bad for him in the end.

“One Italian was a great joker. He was always teasing the other men. One day a man at a nearby automatic machine stood up from his chair. The Italian pulled his chair away from its place. Then the workman sat down. He sat on nothing so he fell. His head hit the machine behind. He was badly hurt. He was in the hospital for six weeks. The joker got fired. I think he had only himself to blame, don't you?

“That's rights Mr. Lovett, there are many Italian boys in the Cooperative Industrial School. You signed the diplomas. All of those graduates are guarrenteed guarenteed jobs at the United Shoe. Sometimes the best get as must as one dollar per hour.

“In Italy we had the apprentice system. A boy must work for five years at his trade. He must learn it thoroughly before he gets a mechanic's license.

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“In this country most boys are trained for nothing. It is too bad. Many college graduates must work in gas stations. Some dig ditches. If they trained for some particular job, it would not happen.

“Yes, there should be more trade and industrial schools. Most boys should be fitted for a job when they leave high school. Don't you think so?”