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Angeline Palazzolo Memoir

P173A. Palazzolo, Angeline b. 1921

Interview and memoir

1 tape, 10 mins., 7 pp.

ITALIAN-AMERICANS PROJECT

Angeline Palazzolo recalls the Italian community of Springfield.

Interview by John Bucari, 1972

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Preface

This manuscript is the product of a tape recorded interview conducted by John Buccari for the Oral History Office on October 28, 1972.

Angeline Palazzolo was born July 12, 1921 in Springfield, Illinois. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Campobello di Mazara, Sicily in 1911. They settled in Auburn, Illinois. Mrs. Palazzolo was employed at the International Shoe Factory in Springfield.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Angeline Palazzolo, October 28, 1972, Springfield, Illinois.

John Buccari, Interviewer.

Q: Now, Mrs. Palazzolo, on this interview we'd like to find out where your family originally came from, in Italy.

A: My mother and father originally came from Campobello di Mazara, Sicily.

Q: And about what year did they come here to the United States?

A: In 1911.

Q: What was the reason? Did they ever tell you the reasons why they moved to the United States?

A: To make more money.

Q: It was, the streets were paved with gold, was that it?

A: They thought.

Q: Now did your father come here first and send money back?

A: No, they both came together.

Q: And do you remember if they had a brother over here?

A: My mother had a brother here and he was in Auburn. That's where they first landed.

Q: Auburn, Illinois is a big place. (laughter) So once they moved to Auburn, your father was employed in which way?

A: As a coal miner.

Q: And your mother as a housewife?

A: She was just a housewife. She never did work.

Q: Did they learn English while they were at Auburn?

A: They tried.

Q: Did your mother learn English?

A: Very, very well.

Q: What was her daily life then, if she was at home?

A: She was just a normal housewife. She did all the washing, ironing, and the cooking.

Q: I imagine it was a hard life.

A: From the way she talks it was.

Q: Was it a predominately Italian neighborhood?

A: In Auburn, I don't know whether it was or not. I really don't know.

Q: Did you move to Springfield when you became married? Did your family, when you were a small girl, move to Springfield?

A: Oh no, they moved to Springfield after about a year that they were in Auburn. They moved to Springfield. And they moved--I believe at the time there was quite a few Italians where they did move. Of course they were all coal miners. And they all understood each other.

Q: It seemed to be a necessity for many Italians, I find, to live together because they couldn't speak English. There was security in the numbers of them. They would feel much safer, I should say, so that they were more relaxed with their own people. When they moved to Springfield, was your father still a coal miner?

A: Yes, he was always a coal miner.

Q: What were some of the stores? Do you remember the family stores that used to do business?

A: Yes. Then they moved on Washington Street. There was a store right at the corner--she didn't even have to cross the street--by the name of Vespa's Market.

Q: Was that downtown Washington?

A: Fifteenth and Washington.

Q: Do you remember any of the other stores that might have been used somewhat?

A: Well, downtown there was one she used to go to by the name of Dicenso's.

Q: Oh, yes.

A: Well, she was also Italian, and she could go in there and buy whatever she wanted. They had fish, more or less Italian food.

Q: I know Dicenso's and Vespa's was a large area of that neighborhood. Many of the Italians would move in there. There was also the Italian-American store on Sixth Street.

A: She would occasionally go there. They could understand her.

Q: What about the churches? Was there ever a church here for the Italians?

A: No, but they said they were going to build one, which they never did.

Q: Do you remember the name of what that was supposed to have been?

A: No.

Q: What was the story about the church they were supposed to build? Did they come around the Italians and . . .

A: Yes. They would come asking for a donation which, of course, some of them donated to. But the church was never built.

Q: I know it must have been hard on some of the Italian women who couldn't speak English.

A: That's right. They could never go to confession or anything. They didn't even care to go to mass, being that they didn't understand it.

Q: It was a sad situation.

A: They just didn't go.

Q: Did they ever bring any Italian priests in during any of the holidays?

A: Not to my knowledge.

Q: Do you remember any stories about the discrimination against Italians at sometime?

A: To my knowledge, there never was any discrimination. In fact, when I was hired, they called in six girls. I was the only Italian, and being that I was Italian, I got hired.

Q: Where was this?

A: At the International Shoe Factory.

Q: They thought the Italians were better with their hands?

A: Better workers and hard workers.

Q: They stayed on the job longer. So then this is just the opposite. There was not a lot of discrimination.

A: Not to my knowledge. I could never see it if there was.

Q: When your mother went into seamstress work, did she take in work from other ladies, or was it just for the family?

A: No, just for the family. She was a seamstress in Italy, but here in America she never did it. She used to sew for me and for her family, that's all.

Q: I was wondering if you remembered the company your father was a miner for.

A: At the Mine B Coal Company.

Q: Was that a Peabody Mine company, do you remember?

A: No, I don't. All I know is it was Mine B.

Q: The reason I was getting to this is I know at that time there was some union trouble here in town, and I wondered if your father might have been in any trouble because of the union?

A: No, he never was in any trouble. He never really was in any trouble that I know of. In fact, I would have known if there ever had been. At first, he belonged to the Progressive, and then he ended up with the United Mine Workers.

Q: He was just the other way around. I just have another question here, about the movies. Do you remember any movies being brought in for the Italians, such as films that were in Italian?

A: No, not in my time. There may have been earlier, I really don't know. I never saw any.

Q: I find that many of the Italians didn't have much recreation here in town.

A: No, not that I can remember. We more or less stuck around the relations and that was it.

Q: It just seems to be that the Italians used to congregate with the family, or they'd make Italian friends, and they'd have intermarriage. There doesn't seem to be much else because what we're interested in in this interview is just a daily life of the people, how it might have differed in some way from other nationalities in Springfield, such as the Jewish or the German. But the Italians seemed to have not been completely isolated, would you agree to that?

A: Yes, I would.

Q: Was there any great difference?

A: Because the children--like for instance, like we went to the regular schools and we just mingled with the rest of the people . . .

Q: Let me ask you this. Did you learn Italian first or English first?

A: I learned Italian first. I was raised under it, of course. My mother and father talked Italian.

Q: You didn't have any problem with your studies at school?

A: No, no, it just came natural.

Q: Thank you very much.

End of Tape