

CHAPTER TEN

COMMUNITY SERVICE

AND MEMBERSHIPS



ANGELO MONTRONE
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Chapter 10: Community Service and Memberships

Introduction

It is well known that Italian immigrants to the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had an extremely difficult time being accepted into American society. As described in Chapter 3, they were considered low class, ignorant, even mobsters, and were mostly relegated to low paying, rough jobs like coal mining.

As time went on, however, Italian American generations two and three were able to merge into the melting pot and achieve the American Dream. This was certainly the case with the Montrone and Gaudenzi families from the Scranton, PA area.

Whether promoting Americanization or celebrating Italian heritage, Italian Americans have a long history of helping each other. Since Italy did not offer government relief benefits until the late 20th century, Italian immigrants in the

United States did not embrace the idea of government welfare. At the same time, American workplaces for these immigrants generally did not provide benefits in case of injury or other difficulties. To meet their own needs, Italian Americans instead joined groups designed to provide financial and social assistance: mutual aid societies, fraternal orders, and trade unions.

Mutual Aid and Fraternal Groups

During the height of immigration, mutual aid societies emerged, with members paying monthly fees so that the society would support the member or the beneficiaries in times of need; essentially, the aid societies served as insurance. Often these smaller local societies merged with national fraternal orders, especially toward the middle of the twentieth century.

The fraternal orders also focused on social interactions such as gatherings of those of Italian descent to learn American

ways or to appreciate Italian culture. They promoted civic participation in a way that brought the Italian Americans in closer contact with their non-Italian neighbors. These neighbors were usually coworkers who often sought the same benefits Italian Americans wanted on the job. The immigrants were often criticized for not joining unions, but in actuality, the Italian Americans were selective and joined the unions most likely to have bargaining power.¹

Italian immigrants in Scranton established many fraternal societies. By 1910, Scranton hosted 598 such groups. An estimated 12 percent of these were unions, and 22 percent were large federations.² One of these was the Italian Catholic Society, formed in 1898 to provide benefits to members in case of sickness or death.³

According to a history of Scranton's Hyde Park neighborhood (home of the Montrone family) that was written in the 1950s, the still-active Italian mutual aid societies included St. Rocco's, Riccotti Garibaldi, Sant'

Angelo dei Lombardi and the Victor Alfieri Literary Society. The last one was founded in 1911 “to help Italian men meet fellow immigrants, to help each other find jobs and to adjust to American ways”.⁴

While it was typical for small, local mutual aid societies to restrict membership to certain *paesani*, the larger, national groups had fewer restrictions on membership and on those receiving aid. One such national group was UNICO which was founded on the principle of “service to the community before and above fraternity. . .” Its sole purpose was to unite all Italian Americans and motivate them to become more “civic minded.”

Although evoking the word “unique,” UNICO is actually an acronym for “Unity, Neighborliness, Integrity, Charity, and Opportunity.” The Scranton chapter, one of the largest in the U.S., was established in 1955.⁵

Another mutual aid society, Order Sons of Italy (OSIA),

grew out of its 1905 New York City beginnings to become “the largest and oldest national organization for men and women of Italian heritage in the United States.” OSIA’s original purpose was to help immigrants become citizens and assimilate as well as providing insurance benefits and educational opportunities. Although today’s order still donates to educational programs among other things, its aim has focused more on promoting Italian culture.⁶

The early generations of the Montrone and Gaudenzi families were very active in many social and civic organizations tied to Italian Americans, as well as their broader community and the nation. Their descendants have likewise continued to strive to help others through many organizations.

According to Tony (G3 - M) Montrone, the Victor Alfieri Literary Society played an important part in the lives of the Montrone and Giancini families. Angelo (G2 - M) Montrone

served a term as President, and his brothers, Albert (G2 – M) and Victor (G2 – M) and brother-in-law Dominick (G2 – M) Giancini, all served as officers during different periods. Dominick, the last surviving male of his generation, remained active until shortly before his death in 2006. The Victor Alfieri Hall, which was on the second floor of a commercial building on Main Ave in West Scranton, served as the venue for many of the family celebrations for both the Montrone and Giancini families.⁷

Antonio (G1 - M) Montrone also belonged to the Victor Alfieri Literary Society and the Columbus Club in Scranton. His daughter Helen (G2 – M) (Montrone) Mastro only knew that “he used to go up to Victor’s a lot with the men and have a drink and play cards. . . You know, he liked participating in different activities.”⁸

Francesco (G1 - G) Gaudenzi, was affiliated with a different organization: the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania in the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA). In Scranton this was

the Nuova Giuseppe Mazzini Lodge which Francesco joined on November 30, 1916. In August 1950, he passed away and his wife, Mary (G2 - G), as beneficiary, received from the Lodge what amounted to a life insurance payment of \$400 one month after his death.

The Scranton UNICO counted Sandra's parents, Jerome (G2 – G) and Olga (G2 – G), as very active members.⁹ Jerome's brother Frank (G2 – G) Gaudenzi said, "He [Jerome] belonged to quite a few clubs. . . Helped people out. He was in quite a few organizations. . . was on different boards. . . He was Sergeant at Arms with UNICO for many years." Frank himself "was on at least thirteen different boards in Lackawanna County."¹⁰

Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone was in the UNICO Ladies group. Her son Paul observed, "She was active with many clubs. She was also active at the school where we went. She was that type of person."¹¹

Tony Montrone observed that as women began to assume a greater role in the political society during the 1920's, the Women's Civic League of Lackawanna County was formed. It allowed Italian women, both immigrants and first-generation daughters, to get more involved in the public issues that affected their growing families, especially the education of their children.

Although loosely affiliated with the national organization of civic leagues, the Lackawanna County chapter's requirement that members be of Italian descent or related to an Italian American made it different from the many other affiliates. Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone served two terms as President of the organization during its most active period in the 1950s and 1960s. Until they went to college, none of the Montrone sons were exempt from attending the Civic League's annual summer picnic at Nay Aug Park.

As the membership in the Civic League began to wane in the

1970s, Beatrice, looking at the changes that were occurring around her and within her own family, led a charge to change the membership rules to include others who had relationships to people of Italian descent, especially spouses of the member's male children. The proposed change became very controversial within the League and was never enacted, and the League ultimately passed from existence. ¹²

In reflecting on social groups and clubs, Paul observed that Italian Americans were excluded from most non-Italian clubs and societies. He observed:

We must keep in mind that humans feel safest in their own groups. It's called tribalism and it often breeds discrimination. But the Italian Americans of his parent's generations, who were denied membership in many groups, did not view it as "discrimination". They were thankful for being in America. Their goals was to work hard, and educate their future generations and in that way they would fulfill the American Dream. ¹³

In fact, this attitude paid off. Over time doors that might

have once been shut to the Italian Americans began to open.

Non-Italian Fraternal Orders and Unions

By the mid-twentieth century, there were many non-Italian fraternal orders available to Italian Americans. For example, Angelo Montrone became a member of the Scranton Elks Club. While the very first Elks started out as a gathering place for theatre people, when one of the members died, leaving his wife and children destitute, the group decided they should have a more enduring legacy to help people in need.

In 1868, The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE) was formed with a charter to establish local lodges around the country. Many Lodges sprang up in Pennsylvania with the establishment of the Scranton Elks Lodge in 1889 to continue the Order's mission of promoting social & community welfare.¹⁴

In addition, after decades of difficult employment conditions suffered by Italian immigrants, participating in unions became an attractive alternative in the early 20th century. Angelo Montrone was especially known for his involvement with trade unions. His youngest son Tony explained:

My father was a great role model. He was. There's a museum here in Scranton called the Anthracite Heritage Museum—because Scranton was the heart of the anthracite coal industry—which I'd never been to. It was built after I left. It's been open now for, I think, close to twenty years. Lisa and I have come up here, but we're always involved in family stuff when we're here. So we never had time. So Friday, we actually went to see it. We were looking at the exhibit.

There's an exhibit for the ILGWU, which is the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. And one of the pieces they had in the exhibit was the charter that founded the Scranton Local 109 of the ILGWU. There were six individuals who formed the union in Scranton, and to my surprise my father was one of the names on the

charter. I knew from stories that he'd done some union organizing, but I never knew to this extent.

That was something he was proud of doing . . . working with the Italian immigrants in the thirties, improving their life's conditions, getting them better wages, better living conditions. And that was sort of the thing he always instilled in me . . .that you should really do whatever you can to help people¹⁵.

Paul also spoke of his father's union credentials.

He went to work in the Royal Miss dress factory. He was a union member and he was a cutter. He was such an aggressive union organizer that the owners promoted him and made him a manager. When I grew up, he was already a manager there. So in my business career whenever I am receiving a hard time from a Union, and people question my credibility, I produce this document showing my father as a founder of Local 109 of the ILGWU. It also comes in handy when I meet with Democrat politicians.

When he died, my father left me a picture of David Dubinsky, who was the national head of the ILGWU. And there he is with a cigar. My father smoked cigars. Of course, you had to smoke cigars in order to be anybody in that league¹⁶.

Charities and Civic Groups

About fifteen years before retiring, Frank Gaudenzi “used to handle programs for seniors and summer programs for the kids,” according to his wife, Jean.

He had three counties and about seventeen hundred kids. And he knew every one of them. And he made sure they worked. It wasn’t one of those, “I got this job with the county, I’ll just sit around and collect my check.” It was funny. One of the kid’s fathers was an umpire with the NFL. So his son had a job, and he was really goofing off. So Frank had him fired. Then they straightened things out. But he wanted them to know that you didn’t get something for nothing. They were only teenagers. Usually in their junior/senior year in high school.¹⁷

Angelo Montrone, was especially active with fund raising efforts for both St. Patrick's School and Scranton Preparatory School. He was also involved in local politics, maintaining close connections with the County Commissioners and particularly the Mayor of Scranton.

Although never an athlete, Angelo was a strong supporter of the NE Pennsylvania Amateur Baseball League and served as President of the All Hyde Park Baseball League for several terms. Upon his retirement, the Board Members and Manager of the Team feted him with a Testimonial Dinner at which he was presented a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Moving on to the next generation, Sandra has participated in many non-profit organizations. Following up on her teaching skills, she was very active in her church, teaching children Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) both in Scranton and in New Hampshire. She also taught other subjects in her children's schools in the Hampton Falls and Exeter New Hampshire areas. But she is best known for her

work in hospice care as a founder and President of Seacoast Hospice in New Hampshire.

Sandra put it simply, “I want to help people¹⁸. I don’t think in terms of just giving back, but in terms of what we can project and what we can do to make a difference. That to me is what’s important.¹⁹”

For his part, Paul gravitated toward many political and civic volunteer activities, at the local state and federal level, without much connection to his Italian heritage. He observed:

I guess I got the civic gene from my father who was very active behind the scenes in Scranton politics – though he never ran for office. I have served on many commissions and civic volunteer organizations.

At the local level, Paul served on the Conservation Committee in his hometown of Hampton Falls, NH and the Shoreline Committee in Wolfeboro, NH, where his family has a summer home.

At the NH state level, Paul was Chairman of the Business Taxation Committee, and was a business advisor to several state governors. He served for four years on the state's Shoreland Water Quality Protection Commission. At its termination he was voted the biggest pain in the neck on the Commission – and the most well-informed member – a vote with which he was quite pleased. He was also a founder of New Hampshire's Live Free or Die Alliance, later renamed Citizens Count, the Friends of Italian Americans and the Peace on Earth Foundation.

On a broader level, due to his experience with his health related businesses, he gave considerable time to helping advance healthcare in the U.S. He was a member of President Clinton's Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry, and a key founder of the National Forum for Health Care Quality Measurement and Reporting (now the National Quality Forum).

Paul was also active with the New England Healthcare Institute, the Healthcare Leadership Council, and served for 24 years on the Board of Directors and as Chairman of the Finance Committee for the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health in Washington, D.C.

At the civic level in Washington, D.C., for many years Paul was very active with the Business Roundtable, including serving on their Planning Committee and as the Chairman of their Civil Justice Reform Task Force.

As a follow on to his brief military service, Paul became a licensed helicopter pilot and served as Chairman of the New England Helicopter Council for several years.

Paul explains the drive for community service in the Montrone and Gaudenzi families:

The family traditions and values embedded in the Montrone and Gaudenzi families for multiple generations

include giving back. Whether it be in charitable, community or political activism, to always do our part to help shape our communities and more broadly, our nation, in line with the founding principles of our country. This is an expression of deep appreciation to both our American and Italian immigrant ancestors for providing us with the opportunity to live in this great nation²⁰.

¹ Website of Library of Congress – Immigration and Relocation in the U.S. History <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/italian/working-across-the-country/>

² Theda Skocpol, Marshall Ganz and Ziad Munson, “A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Voluntarism in the United States,” *American Political Science Review* 94.4 (Sept. 2000): 535, Table 3, online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2585829>.

³ Carl R. Healey, “History of Hyde Park: 1852-1952,” *Hyde Park Centennial: Hyde Park Borough, Scranton Pennsylvania 1852-1952, Sept. 28 – Oct. 4*, available at the website Lackawanna Valley Digital Archives, at <http://content.lackawannadigitalarchives.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/Centennial/id/2039/rec/1>; Website of the Victor Alfieri Literary Society, online at <http://victoralfierisociety.com/>.

⁴ Website of UNICO, online at <http://www.unicoscranton.org>.

⁵ Website of Order Sons of Italy in America, online at <http://www.osia.org>.

⁶ Comments from Tony Montrone, 27 August 2018

⁷ Helen (Montrone) Mastro, daughter of Antonio Montrone, interview by Brian O’Connell, 25 July 1995, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

⁸ Frank Gaudenzi, no. 5281, online databases *Pennsylvania, Order Sons of Italy in America, Enrollment and Death Benefit Records, 1910-1968* and *Pennsylvania, Order Sons of Italy in America, Mortuary Fund Claims, 1917-1978*, available at Ancestry.com.

⁹ Geraldine (Gaudenzi) Colizzi, interview by Mary Tedesco, 12 February 2014, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹⁰ Frank Thomas Gaudenzi, brother of Jerome Gaudenzi, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed 5 August 1996, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹¹ As related by Paul M. Montrone 26 November 2021

¹² Sylvia (Ware) Montrone, *Bea’s History*, written as Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone’s introduction for the Elmcroft Staff.

¹³ Paul Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 30 January 2014, transcript held by Paul Montrone. <https://www.paelks.org/our-history>

¹⁴ Tony Montrone, interview by Rhonda McClure, 24 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹⁵ Paul Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 30 January 2014, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹⁶ Jean (Miles) Gaudenzi, wife of Frank T. Gaudenzi, interview by Rhonda McClure, 24 July 2011, transcript held by

Paul Montrone.

¹⁸ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 23 March 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹⁹ MarywoodU, “2013 Presidential Medalist: Sandra and Paul Montrone,” video (19 Dec. 2013), online at [youtube.com/watch?v=AFVKJZRACsc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFVKJZRACsc)

²⁰ As related by Paul M. Montrone 6 June 2018