

1977

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### Recommended Citation

Pizzo, Tony (1977) "The Italian Heritage in Tampa," *Sunland Tribune*: Vol. 3 , Article 6.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune/vol3/iss1/6>

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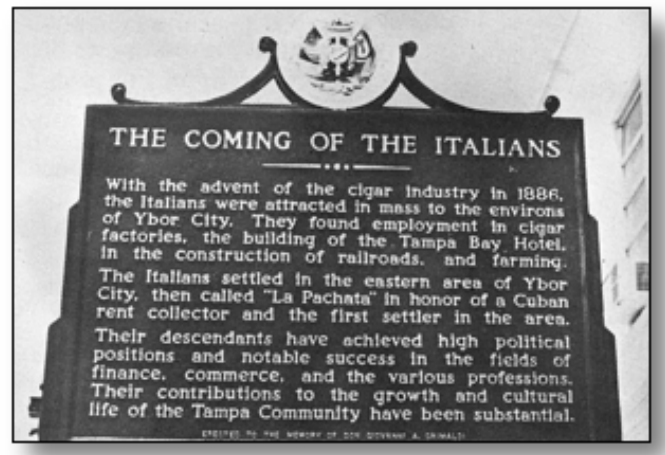
# The Italian Heritage in Tampa

## Italians At Tampa Bay In The Days of Conquest and Exploration

It is little wonder that the Italian historic connection with Tampa should start with Juan Ponce De Leon and the discovery of Florida. On his odyssey of discovery De Leon sailed his small fleet of three vessels into the Gulf of Mexico. On May 24, 1513, the expedition entered the mouth of Tampa Bay. The explorers tarried there for nine days. The Flagship of the fleet was named Santa Maria de la Consolacion, and its captain and master was an Italian named Giovanni Bono. With typical Italian zest for la dolce vita it comes as no surprise that an Italian should have been with Ponce De Leon on his famous quest for the illusive. Fountain of Youth!

When the great, but ill-starred Conquistador, the Adelantado Hernando De Soto and his six hundred men landed at Tampa Bay, May 30, 1539, four Italians formed an important part of his expedition. One of them was Captain Micer Espindola, a native of Genoa, who was in charge of sixty halberdiers of De Soto's guard. Another key figure was Maestro Francisco Aceituno, a Genoese engineer, and a great craftsman in carpentry and shipbuilding. The other two were calkers. Unfortunately, their names have been lost to history, but we know that one was a Genoese, the other one a Sardinian.

For three centuries after the glittering cavalcade of De Soto had faded into history, Tampa Bay remained a remote and forgotten harbor. Only the seagulls and Indian canoes were seen upon the lonely water. Through the long and silent years, an occasional Cuban trader or fisherman, ventured into the



The above historical marker hailing the "Coming of the Italians" was erected by the Ybor City Rotary Club. It stands at the entrance to the Columbia Bank on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 21st Street.

secluded bay. There is no record of a settlement on the shores of Tampa Bay until Fort Brooke was established at the mouth of the Hillsborough River by the Americans in 1824.

## Italians at Fort Brooke During Second Seminole War

The small fort on Tampa Bay was started into action on December 28 1835, when the Seminoles took to the war path. Fort Brooke became the chief depot of supplies, and the center of military operations. During the bloody seven year struggle two names of Italian origin became linked with Tampa history. On March 26, 1836, a Major Lawrence Taliaferro is reported to have repelled a band of Indians concealed in a hammock within the present day city limits of Tampa. Administering to the sic and wounded was a surgeon with the name, of Dr L. J. Trotti. It is believed that Trotti was a Floridian and a descendant of Gaspar Trotti who is listed as residing in Saint Augustine in 1773. In 1830, James F. Trotti, a bank examiner, and most likely a relative of Dr. Trotti signed a petition to President Andrew Jackson asking statehood for the Territory of Florida.

## Italian Settlers in Pioneer Tampa

After the devastating hurricane of 1848, that all but wiped out the fort and emerging village of Tampa, a fair number of inhabitants from Saint Augustine were attracted by the rebuilding boom that followed that catastrophe. By 1850, Tampa Town boasted of a population of one hundred and eighty-five souls. Among the new-comers to Tampa were descendants of the one hundred and ten Italian colonists who came to Florida during the English period to settle New Smyrna in 1768. They became a part of the pioneer fibre of the spunky little village, and provided the heritage of Italian participation for the immigrants who would arrive in Tampa a few decades later. These colorful people brought their musical names such as Leonardis, Pacettis, Maestres, Papis, and Canovas to the little Anglo Saxon community.

The Leonardis were of well known Italian ancestry. The founder of the Leonardis family in Florida was Rocco Leonardis, born in Modena, Italy, in 1749. He helped found New Smyrna in 1768. His wife was Esperanza Valle Bolla. Five of Rocco Leonardis's grandchildren who came to Tampa with their families were two brothers, Bartholemew C. Vincent, and their three sisters, Theodosia, (Mrs. John P. Andrew), Jane (Mrs. Robert Canning), and Florencia who was Mrs. Haager, a widow with six children who later married Louis Bell, Jr. They had two sons.

Bartholemew raised a family of three children, and was active in community affairs throughout his life. He was a member of the first brass band organized in Tampa in 1860. In 1866, he was elected to the City Council, and became the first member to serve on the council bearing an Italian name.



The Mortellaro Macaroni factory started on Seventh Avenue, near nineteenth street in a very small way. In time, business prospered, and the factory was moved to this three story building located on the southeast corner of Eleventh Avenue and Twentieth Street.

Vincent Leonardis married Venecia Andrew of Saint Augustine. He was a skilled architect and master mechanic; he built some of the finest homes in early Tampa. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he volunteered his services to the Confederacy. He was captured by the Federals and imprisoned at Fort San Marco in Saint Augustine for the duration. In later years Vincent was engaged in farming, fruit culture and stock raising. He developed the Leonardis grapefruit, the most flavorful variety cultivated up to that time. Old timers remembered him as a highly respected citizen, "honest and truthful."

In Oaklawn, the old cemetery of the Tampa pioneers there are five tomb stones bearing the Leonardis name. To this day their descendants continue the tradition of dedicated service to the Tampa community for which their forebearers fought, and so dearly loved.

In 1853, civilization began to make its mark on the geography of the area which thirty-five years later would be known as

Ybor City. Helping as a chainman for a survey team was a young man named Andrew Pacetti. He did not stay on this job very long. On February 16, 1856, Tampa had its first election in history. The little town elected their first mayor, councilmen, and a town marshal. The first Town Marshal of Tampa was the former chainman Andrew C. Pacetti, a third generation descendant from Trapani, Sicily. It is very likely that Pacetti is the first Italian elected as Town Marshal in the United States.

During the Civil War, the Italians of Tampa also served the cause of the South as home guards, supplying cattle to the rebels fighting in the North, and tending salt works. Although the Town of Tampa was pretty well bottled up by the Federal blockade, Tampa blockade runners, men of great daring, the likes of Captain James McKay, Christopher L. Friebele, and Edward Clarke, risked running the blockade. Eventually, one by one these blockade runners fell captive and were sent to military prisons in the north. Among the Union sailors lurking in the Gulf of Mexico on the prowl for rebel blockade runners was an Italian by the name of Bancroft Gheradi. He was in command of several blockade ships. This Italian Yankee later became chief of the North Atlantic Squadron, and retired with the rank of rear admiral.

Antonio Papi came to Tampa in 1848, he was a descendant of Gaspar Papi and Anna Pons of Saint Augustine. Three of the Papis gave their lives fighting for the Confederacy.

The members of the Maestri family who came to Tampa were scions of an old Florida family who originally came in the name of the Spanish sovereign. The progenitor of the Maestri family was Pietro Maestri, a native of Villafranca, Italy. The



The first fire captain in Ybor City history. This honor was given to Francisco Puglisi when the Cubans of the first volunteers fire unit selected him to head the Mirta Hook and Ladder volunteer Company in 1888. The unit honored Mr. Ybor's youngest daughter.

early history of the Maestri family describes them as Indian fighters, stock raisers, and farmers. They are known today by the name of Masters, and are numerous throughout Florida.

The year 1849 saw the arrival of Captain Domenico Ghira, a native of Ravenna, Italy. He was the first native born, Italian to come to Tampa and remain permanently. In -1850, at the age of twenty-four, he married Domenica (Masters). Maestre, a voting lady from Saint Augustine of Italian parentage. They made their home on Florida Avenue

on what was then known as the Ghira block, and what, is now the present, site of the Exchange National Bank Building.

Captain Ghira in early life was engaged in sea fearing pursuits. Later conducted a mercantile business. In 1864, he was appointed by the Hillsborough County Commissioners to run the river ferry. Through the years he acquired valuable pieces of real estate and accumulated considerable wealth.

When Henry B. Plant connected Tampa with his railroad to northern markets, the first enterprise attracted to the seaport town was the fishing industry. Three large fishing companies moved to Tampa, one of which was owned by Captain John Savarese, a friend of Henry B. Plant. This young Italian, a native of Naples, came to America at the age of ten in 1872. Captain Savarese developed his wholesale fishing business into one of the most important enterprises seen in Tampa up to that time. By 1895, his operations employed five hundred and fifty men. His fishing fleet consisted of fifteen sailing vessels, one hundred and fifty small craft and a large steamer, the Mistletoe. Savarese was shipping more than 1,700 barrels of fish per month to all parts of the country. Tampa became the most important fish-shipping center in the South.

John Savarese served as the first Italian Consul of Tampa, was elected to two terms on the Tampa City Council, and served on boards of business firms and financial institutions. Savarese was one of the founders and served as first commodore of the Tampa Yacht and Country Club.

### **The Coming of the Sicilians**

During the month of March, 1886, a momentous event occurred in Tampa that



LaUnione Italiana – The Italian Club. This magnificent neoclassical building has been the center for social, cultural, and educational functions. Throughout the years, the palatial headquarters has been a symbol of pride to Tampa Italians, and a memorial to the glorious past of Italian civilization. Photo made in 1919.

would have a long lasting influence and vitally affect its destiny. About two miles into the wilderness, east of Tampa, three Spaniards and a Cuban had established a small settlement and started manufacturing hand-made cigars. They were Vincente Martinez Ybor and his Cuban associate Edward Manrara; Ignacio Haya and his associate Serafin Sanchez. The little village was predominantly Cuban, and christened Ybor City, but the crackers in the immediated area called it Cuba City. These Florida Crackers, delighted and proud with the coming of the cigar industry which was bringing instant prosperity to the sleepy little village of Tampa, patriotically switched their smoking habits from corncob pipes to the fragrant clear Havanas!

At about the same time at the St. Cloud Sugar Plantation, near Kissimmee, a handful of Italians were barely eeking out a living earning seventy-five cents per day



The year was 1927, and the Italians stole the show at the Fair. Val Antonio, an ardent lover of Italian culture—literally a shipload of Italian objects of art—paintings, statues, carvings and the most magnificent automobile that had ever been seen in Tampa up to that time—it was a luxurious, black and lovely limousine known as an Isotta Fraschini, the local Italians jokingly called it the "Italian Ford". Among some of the dignitaries attending "Italian Day" ceremonies were: W. G. Borein, President of the Fair Association, D. B. McKay, Mayor of Tampa, the Consul General of Italy, Mr. Rossi, Joseph Barcellon, G. C. Spicola, Sr., City Councilman, Albert D'Arka, Philip Licata, Sam Minardi, Francisco Friscia, Angelo Spicola, Judge I. C. Spoto, Peter Pullara, Ivo De Menicis, Ignacio Zambito, Salvatore and Dominico Reina, Arthur Euse, and Angelo Massari, the founder of the International Bank of Tampa.

producing granulated sugar. Rumors began spreading throughout the state that a Cuban boom town near Tampa had sprung up like a mushroom in the night, and was the wonder of Florida. Exciting stories were told of Cubans and Spaniards coming in large numbers, tobacco workers, and construction men earning, unheard of wages, and that Mr. Plant, the railroad magnate, was offering one dollar and twenty-five cents per day for hands needed in the extension of his railroad to Port Tampa, and in the construction of a Byzantine Palace, his Tampa Bay Hotel! These exciting reports fired the imagination of the humble Italian immigrants at St.

Cloud. They envisioned Ybor City as their "pot of gold" at the end of the rainbow.

The origin of these Italians were the bleak hills of central Sicily. Although this island had been under Spanish rule for more than four centuries, Spaniards were rarely treated as enemies or considered as foreign by the Sicilian population. Intermarriage was common, and through the years the official language of administration and social life was Catalan and Castilian. The impact of *spagnolismo* on the mold of Sicilian culture had been extensive. The Sicilian dialect is flowered with many Spanish words. Among

the Sicilians arriving in Tampa in the early days there were some bearing Spanish names such as Reina, Pardo, Miranda, Marcello, Castellano, and Barcellona.

The first trail blazers from St. Cloud to Ybor City were from Santo Stefano Quisquina, Province of Agrigento, Sicily, a hill top village dating to the Middle Ages. In the vanguard were three Cacciatore brothers, Antonio, Calvatore and Angelo, and other paisani named Pietro Martino, Ignazio Camparetto, Francisco Di Bona and Salvatore Reina. A short time later others followed, and their descendants form a very important segment of today's Italian community-some of these were: Ignazio Pezzavecchia, Giuseppe and Gaspare Vizzi, Nicholo Russo, Giovanni Cacciatore, Angelo Piazza, Carlo Palermo, Gaetano Ferlita, Antonio Spoto, Giuseppe Vizzi, Nicolo Lo Chierro, Paolo Panipinto, Antonio Castaglia, Nicolo Russo, Angelo Piazza, Giovanni Afflito, Domenica Zambito, Ignazio Leto, Nicolo Albano, the brothers Francisco and Luigi Pitisci, Vincenzo Pullara, Stefano Giunta, Francisco Frescia Salvatore, Di Dio, Stefano Zambito,, Giovanni Parrino, Francisco La Longa, Castrenze Ficarotta, Giovanni Provenzano, Andrea Furia, Salvatore Giglio, Filippo Dino, Filippo Francisco and Niccolo Ippolito. Other early arrivals from nearby communities were the Pizzolatos, Saccos, Clesis, Geracis, Schiros, De Leos, Costantinos, Lalas, Falsones, Pendinos, Pizzos, Pugliis, Albanos, Demmis, Licatas, Barones, Di Maggios, Di Chirras, Lo Ciceros, Scagliones, Midullas, Motos, Ciminos, Friscos, Capitanos, Grecos, Bellancas, De Cortes, Macalusos, Oddos, and many others.

The trickle became a torrent! In central Sicily, glowing reports (often times exaggerated) from the new Americans,



Dr. Frank Adamo, Tampa's war hero of World War II is shown above in a photograph which appeared in Life Magazine April 20, 1942. He was captured by the Japanese when the Philippines were over-run, and held as a prisoner of war for the duration. When First Avenue was opened in the 1940's, a grateful citizenry named the new traffic artery Frank S. Adamo Drive in his honor.

fueled by steamship companies and others who would profit from their coming began to spread through the villages of central Sicily. The flames of propaganda were spreading the fame of Tampa and Ybor City as a place! where workers were paid in solid gold coins, and one could live a life da cristiani (a life of christians-a life worthy of human beings). The people of the neighboring villages of Santo Stefano such as Alessandria Della Rocca (the second largest number of Italians in Tampa came from this village). Bivona, Cianciana, -nd Contessa Entellina were most affected by those incredible tales. These villages experienced a virtual exodus. The village of Contessa Entellina differs from others in that it was settled by fleeing Albanians from the Turkish occupation of the Balkans in the Fifteenth Century. The people of La Contessa are Catholics of the Greek rite, and after five centuries retain a distinct identity

with their own dialect, Albanian-Greek dialect, national costume, and folklore. There are two distinct groups in Albania, the Ghegs and the Tosks. The Albanians who migrated to Sicily were of the Ghegs. They created nine new villages in Sicily of which Piani degli Albanesi is the most famous. Sicilians refer to them by their ancient name "Gheg-Ghegs." The late Frank Falsone, a descendant of this group and a highly respected citizen of Florida, once stated, "These are the most industrious people on earth. You will never see one a bread line."

Today the Italian population of Tampa is predominantly composed of descendants from these five villages, with only small numbers coming from other sections of Italy.

Among some of the outstanding Italian pioneer families who came from Naples are the Savareses, Marsicanos, Fantinis, Antuonos, Costas (Philip Shore), Grimaldis, Verris, and DeLeos.

The first Italians settled on the eastern fringe of the small settlement of cigarmakers. Tampa's "Little Italy" in the 1890s extended from Seventeenth Street on the west to about Twenty-Sixth Street on the east. The south boundary was Fourth Avenue, and at Twenty-Second Street the boundary line veered south and included Second and Third Avenues. The north boundary was Michigan Avenue-today's Columbus Drive. In the beginning, their small wood-frame houses barely dotted this area of wilderness.

Within the Italian area there was a scattering of Spanish and Cuban families. In the heart of this section was a Spanish settlement known as La Peguena Asturias. It stretched along Twelfth Avenue between Seventeenth Street and Twenty First Street. Some of the Italians moved into rental cottages while

others made purchases from Mr. Ybor on the installment plan. The Italian quarters became known as La Pachata after a Cuban rent collector.

The Mortellaro Macaroni factory started on Seventh Avenue, near Nineteenth Street in a very small way. In time, business prospered, and the factory was moved to this three story building located on the southeast corner of Eleventh Avenue and Twentieth Street.

The early beginning for the Italians in Ybor City was obviously not Alvin and pasta. One of the first arrivals was Giovanni Cacciatore. In 1935, at the age of 75, he related his first impressions of Tampa upon his arrival in 1887.

"Several friends described Tampa to me with such glowing colors that I soon became enthused, and decided to come here, and try for my fortune. Accordingly, in 1887, leaving my wife in New Orleans, I took the train to Mobile. At Mobile I took the boat that brought me here. We disembarked at La Fayette Street. I was then 27 years of age. I had expected to see a flourishing city, but my expectations were too high, for what I saw before me almost brought me to tears. There was nothing! What one. may truthfully say, nothing! Franklin was a long sandy street. There were very few houses, and those were far apart with tall pine trees surrounding them. The Hillsborough County Court House was a small wooden building. Some men were beginning on the foundation of the Tampa Bay Hotel.

"Ybor City was not connected to Tampa as it is today. There was a wilderness between the two cities, and a distance of more than one mile between the two places. All of Ybor City was not worth more than one cent to me. At different places in Ybor City a tall species of grass grew (saw grass), proper of



swampy places. This grass grew from five to six feet high. I was completely disillusioned with what I saw. There was a stagnant water hole where Centro Espanol Society (Seventh Avenue and 16th Street) is today located. A small wooden bridge spanned this pond. I remember that I was afraid to cross that bridge, and especially so at night, because of the alligators that lived there. They would often crawl onto the bridge and bask there in the sun all day long.

"The factory of Martinez Ybor had some twenty cigar-makers; Sanchez y Haya had some fifteen; while Pendas had about ten. I worked for a time at the factory of Modesto Monne as stripper (one who removes the center stem from the tobacco leaf) and made 35c for my first day's work. Of course, I was then only learning the cigar business, and could not expect to make more. When I became more skilled in my work as a stripper, I would make from \$1.00 to \$1.25 a day.

While still at this work, I gradually began learning the cigar-makers trade as I saw that they were making a much more comfortable income. When I had become somewhat proficient as a cigar-maker, I was earning from \$14.00 to \$15.00 a week.

Ybor City at one time had five Italian schools. In the early beginning of the Italian Colony these schools actually served as pre-schools to entering the little county school which was located on Eighth Avenue-the southwest corner of 14th Street, and popularly called by all the Ybor City inhabitants as the "free school." Note the healthy, and well dressed appearance of the children. The above photograph was made in 1903 by H. Weimer, a tall affable German photographer. He had been a buffalo hunter out west and had a striking resemblance to "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Everyone in Ybor City

loved the Spanish speaking, and kindly German.

"When I had been in Tampa some two years, I sent for my wife. When she arrived in Tampa she burst out crying at what she saw: wilderness, swamps, alligators, mosquitos, and open closets (out-houses). The only thing she would say when she arrived was: 'Why have you brought me to such a place?'

"At about this time Mr. Ybor was offering homes for sale at very low prices. I went to him, and purchased a house on Eighth Avenue and Eighteenth Street for the price of \$725.00. I paid \$100.00 in cash and the rest in monthly terms. In all I worked twenty-eight years in the cigar factories." With the passing of time, Cacciatore amassed important land holding. Upon venturing into La Pachata, or the Italian area, one would immediately become aware of their sense of self sufficiency and frugality-frugality was their overwhelming passion. Each family had a bread oven in their backyard. The oven, shaped like an igloo, was made of concrete and fire-bricks, resting on four sturdy wooden pilings. In their neat vegetable gardens were to be found new and exotic varieties of vegetables which were unknown to Floridians. For example they introduced esalcore, or endive; cardone, a thistle-like plant often called carder's comb; carciofo, artichoke, eggplant, and a variety of cucumbers from Sicily called cucuzza. They also brought a specie of cactus which thrives throughout the Island of Sicily called Ficco di India. Its delicious prickly pears with blood-red pulp is highly prized by Sicilians. Anthony Diecidue, a retired wholesale produce dealer, cultivates some of the most beautiful cactus plants in the area.

In cages they kept rabbits, and pigeons. Chickens roamed in the backyards along

with a few guineahens. Their milk-cows, and goats were scattered throughout the area in vacant lots. Like all Mediterranean people, they had a penchant for capretto arrosta, roasted goat meat.

Sundays were festa time. The mid-day meal was a genuine feast. This tradition prevails to this day. Relatives and friends gather for a mangata or tavolata. The main course was pasta prepared with delicious tomato sauce. The dazzling aroma of Italian bread baking in the numerous ovens, and the slow simmering of tomato sauce in the various kitchens cast a bewitching aroma throughout the little Latin settlement. Other Sicilian dishes introduced by the new arrivals which are a delight are macaroni and sardines made of salted sardines, raisins, pine-fruits, and wild fennel; spaghetti agghiu e oggh'ù (with garlic and oil); spaghetti with clam sauce; Pasta al Forno -includes anelleti, tomato, minced meat, hard boiled eggs, salami and cheese; macaroni and fried-on-pan broccoli; roast sausage; spidini, (stuffed veal pillows) thinly cut veal cutlets stuffed with ham or proccuito ad mozzarella; and Bruchuluni, slices of meat filled with ham, grated Romano cheese, boiled egg slices, green peppers, salt and pepper, and boiled in tomato sauce.

Vegetables are a main stay of the Sicilian cuisine. Vegetables such as fennels, green beans, broccoli, cabbages, green and black olives, capers, tomatoes and cucumbers, are widely used. The Sicilians of Tampa like those on their native island in cooking egg-plants (fried, stuffed or, capunata), squashes (fried or stuffed); peppers artichokes and cardoons (fried with butter and bread crumbs) are in a class by themselves.

Sicilians have a sweet tooth, and are most ingenious in creating the most unusual and delicious desserts. Regardless of their station in life, their dolci (esserts) are always superb. To tantalize the taste buds try the world famous cassata cake; cannoli (fried pastry filled with sweet ricotta), sugar soaked sfingi di San Giuseppe (cream puffs), sugar coated almonds, and piniolatti. Sicilians introduced ice cream to the French, but not in the varieties they introduced to Ybor City. The Cubans who are great lovers of cafe solo began enjoying the new pleasures of Sicilian gelati, such as granita or lemon sherbet and even the more exotic ice creams with the flavors of mulberry, prickly-pears, jasmine, cinnamon, almonds, and watermelon. They added a new dimension of pleasure to la bella vita in the new Latin town in Angelo-America.

On Sunday afternoons. small groups would gather under the shade of a mulberry tree which were numerous in the -area, to enjoy the balmy Florida weather which so reminded them of Sicily. It was appropriate for them to sing O'Sole Mio, since an old proverb claims that the sun is Sicilian. Even the mocking birds in the trees seemed to join with the sounds of the mandolins and guitars. Songs were heard everywhere-nearly everyone sang who wasn't talking. The air was filled with the happy sounds of children playing, and the mellifluous, tones of the Sicilian dialect.

The, men would gather to, play at the! game of bocce, a game played by rolling wooden balls toward a target on a hard packed sand court. It's the grandpa of modern ten-pin bowling.

Old traditions died hard in Ybor City. Among the traditions which eventually passed on was the, Sicilian style of mourning. Widows in those times spent their

life-time dressed in drab mourning garb --shrouded in black from head-shawls to shoes.

Another custom which attracted curiosity, and has also vanished with the passing of the first arrivals was the common scene of Italian mothers happily and proudly rocking on their front porches, humming a Sicilian lullabye to their bambinos sucking on their exposed breasts.

Funerals were occasions of high solemnity, and were attended by virtually the entire Italian colony. They were a closely knit lot. If they weren't related, they were paisani and in those days being a paisano (countryman) was tantamount to family. The Italian cemetery located on Twenty-Second Avenue and TwentySixth Street dates back to those days. The funeral procession left from the home where the body laid in state. The cortege was led by a black baroque hearse pulled by two white horses covered with black mesh. Families who could afford a band hired the only band available at that time-a musical group of Cuban cigarmakers. The band led the cortege playing funeral dirges, while small groups, wearing vestments of fraternal orders, carried banners and standards. Following on foot, trudging through the sandy streets, the seemingly endless line of Italian mourners, solemnly accompanied their compatriot to the cemetery where they paid their last respects. The more extravagant ones rented a horse and carriage for one dollar. Four or five would share the rental cost, and thereby demonstrated their frugality in their extravagance. The last funeral procession led by an Italian band was the funeral of Pietro Pizzolato during the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918. Pizzolato was the maternal-grandfather of the author. He was a native of La Contessa Entellina, and had migrated to Sorocco, New Mexico in 1879,

where most of his children were born. He came to Tampa in 1892, and established a grocery store and a horse trading enterprise on Eighth Avenue and Eighteenth Street \* The family continues in business at the same location under the firm name of Castellano and Pizzo.

The Italians from Sicily at the outset found work laying out tracks for the Plant System, in the construction of the Tampa Bay Hotel, as porters in the cigar factories, and in the construction of residential and commercial buildings of the budding community. Others became engaged in truck, and dairy farming, opened grocery stores, confectionary stores, fruit stands, saloons and fish markets. Some pursued their trades as cobblers, tailors, stone-masons and some of the: house wives were. able to better the family lot by sewing and embroidering. The art of pundina or crocheting attained its highest art form at the hands of the Sicilian donni.

Impressive vegetable farms began to appear between Twenty-Fifth Street and the Tampa Northern Railroad, from Seventh Avenue as far as Michigan Avenue. Antonio Capitano utilized a stream in that section known as the Two, Mile Branch to cultivate excellent water-cress, a vegetable highly prized by Italians. One of the finest farms was located south of Adamo Drive between Twenty-Second Street and the Estuary. The rich black soil produced the, finest celery and other vegetables. It's owner, Vincenzo Zambito, better known by his nickname Maraune, was a first class agriculturalist who gave a life-time to farming. In later years the -land became too valuable for farming, and the heirs were compelled to sell the acreage for industrial use.

The early farmers who converted the palmetto flats of Ybor City into lush and

profitable farm lands were the Lazzaras, Mastinos, Valentis, Scolaros and Capitanos.

Today the descendants of the Valentis, Geracis and Lazzaras are engaged in nationwide produce enterprises which include the operation of farm lands in California. Others who have been prominent in the fruit and produce business are the Schiros, Pupellos, Fillipellos, Rizzos, Ippolitos, Lalas, Diecidues, Manalis, Barones, Naplis, Ferlitas and the Macalusos.

A vital part of Sicilian life is the love of wine. It is therefore little wonder that as early as 1887, Italians were engaged in the cultivation of grapes in this area. Vincent De Leo, who was manager of the City Barber Shop located on Franklin and La Fayette Streets, established a twenty acre vinyard of malaga and scuppernong grape varieties on the Hillsborough River. In May, 1891, the Tribune reported that "a number of Cubans and Italians have bought sixty acres, and will go into grape culture this fall-near Tampa." Bartolo Filogamo, a young emigrant from Trapani, and a vary capable accountant, with Y. M. Alvarez, a cigar manufacturer, went into grape culture near Lake Bilows. If wine was ever made from these vineyards it must have been on a non-commercial basis as no later records of sales are known. Nearly three quarters of a century later (1973) Joe D. Midulla, Sr., a member of a prominent family of wine merchants established the first winery in the history of Tampa.

Salvatore Scolaro farmed along the west bank of the Two Mile Branch, a fresh-water stream near 27th Street and 7th Avenue. His farm lands reflected the loving care he gave to the cultivation of his beautiful celery.

Many Sicilians went into business as soon as they learned about fifty words in

English-more- to cope with the Anglo-Saxon salesmen than with his clientele who were predominately Cubans. If he opened a grocery store, a sign went up in Italo-English, Grosseria-Italiana. In some cases the cycle was from push cart to wagon-peddler, then to the privilege of a fruit stand and then a grocery store. Enticing displays of luscious fruits exemplified the pride with which they advertised their wares and artistic abilities. Among the well remembered fruit stand operators were Minico Ficarotta, 1702 Nineteenth Street; Nicola Marsicano, 903 Seventh Avenue; Charles Pitisci, 1630 Seventh Avenue; Peter Pullara, known as Tardiolo, 1806 Ninth Avenue; Antonio Spoto, 2106 Seventh Avenue; Angelo Telese, 1114 Seventh Avenue; Nicolo Tramontana, 2010 Seventh Avenue; Antonio Papy, Franklin and La Fayette and Louis Moses, California Fruit Stand, La Fayette Street.

The Italians love celebrations. Here they are shown forming a caravan to go on an Italian Club picnic to DeSoto Park, or Ballast Point or Rocky Point. These were the popular spots for an outing in those days- this was circa, 1912. The photo was taken from the old Italian Club building, and the empty lot in the foreground is the site of the present Club building on 7th Avenue and 18th Street.

B- 1910, there were fifty-four Italian grocery stores in Tampa. From this humble group of merchants emerged one of the miracle stories of American business. From very meager beginnings Salvatore Greco, parlayed his small grocery store located at 2705 E. Columbus Drive into a multi-million dollar grocery chain known as Kash 'n Karry. In 1946, Salvatore pooled the resources of his family and launched into his great enterprise. He was ably assisted by his sons Joe, John and Mac, and by his

sons-in-law Frank Giunta and Joe Dominguez.

The fame of Tampa Bay as a great fishing ground and the coming of many Italians, attracted fishermen who soon made Tampa a major Italian fishing community. Their names are well known to Tampan today as Mirabella, Felicione, Matassini, Boromei, La Bruzza and Agliano. Their success has been of long duration. For many years they owned large fishing fleets, and distributed their catch by refrigerated trucks throughout the Southeast. In recent years some of them have gone into the seafood restaurant business with much success.

The ever enterprising Italian soon established the first macaroni factories in Ybor City. Onofrio Mortellaro and Filippo Lodato established their factory at 1908 7th Avenue, and a little later Antonio Cacciatore opened his factory at 1806 8th Avenue. In the 1920's Greco and Ginex bought the firm from Cacciatore and continued into the years of the depression.

In the story of Italian activities in Tampa, the Reinas fully deserve a place of honor. The first Reinas came among those heroic nine immigrants whose coming marked the dawn of Italian contribution to the culture of Tampa.

Salvatore is the progenitor of the Tampa Reinas. Today Domenic Reina, and Salvatore, 96 and 94 years old respectively are agile and enjoying a healthy life. Carrying on in the business life of Tampa, Dick heads the Reina Bros. Grocery Wholesale Co., and Hugo runs the De Rio Packing Co.

The early Italian dairies were quite numerous with twelve operations being

reported in 1910, and doing good business. At Spanish Park in the vicinity of 40th Street, and out into the outskirts, were located Giuseppe, Guagliardo, Luiggi Massaro, Frank Albano, and at nearby Oak Park was located the dairy of George Coniglio. At Palmetto Beach, on the Hookers Point Peninsula, were located the dairies of John Spoto, Antonio Massaro, and Salvador Buggica; the others were Joseph Cutro, 3101 Second Avenue; Ignazio Gaetano, Thirteenth Street and Twenty-Seventh Avenue; Dominico, Militello, Thirty-First Street and Michigan Avenue; Antonio Sabatino 252 Arch Street, Ignazio Spoto, Michigan Avenue and Thirty-First Street.

One of the very first dairies was owned by Castenzio Ferlita and Salvatore N. Reina. In 1894, they established a milk dairy which they operated until 1916. Later from earnings realized in the successful dairy enterprise, they established the Cosmopolitan Ice Co., and the Tropical Ice Cream Company.

From these pioneer dairies emerged Florida Dairy, one of the largest dairy enterprises in the state. The founder was Giuseppe Guagliardo, a Stefanese. He started business in the most humble circumstances, with only two milk cows and a horse and buggy to make his deliveries. At the beginning his daily house deliveries totaled seven quarts and two pints. Today, the herd exceed several thousand head of cattle.

One of the amusing oddities which confounded the Italians when they first arrived in Ybor City was finding a black bartender in the Mascotte Saloon which was located on Tenth Avenue and Fourteenth Street, with the name of Christopher Columbus.

The earliest Italian meat-market was located at 1816 7th Avenue and was owned by five Cacciatore brothers, Giuseppe, Ignazio, Silvestro, Filippo and Salvatore. For some unknown reason, the butchershop was always referred to as Gamilla. Their meats were always of the best quality, and they adhered to the wishes of the Latin public in supplying Spanish style cuts. With the coming of Urban Renewal, this business disappeared, but two off-shoots of this pioneer meat-market still exist and are operated by descendants: a Cacciatore Brother at 2301 W. Buffalo Avenue, owned and operated by Philip Cacciatore and Cacciatore and Son at 3614 N. Armenia Avenue, owned by Angelo Cacciatore. At the beginning of the century, the following Italians were operating meatmarkets: Giuseppe Canova, Salvatore Castellano, Giuseppe Castaglia, Vincenzo Lazzara, Peter, Frank and Salvatore Leto, Raffaele Massaro, Salvatore Monteleone, Ignazio Zambito and Salvatore Pitisci.

Carmello Testesecca established one of the first Italian bakeries. It was located at 2009 10th Avenue. Other bakeries were Angelo Ferlita's La Joven Francesa at 1818 Ninth Avenue. This bakery building has been selected to house the Ybor City State Museum which will highlight the cigar industry and Tampa's Latin heritage. Other bakeries owned by Cosimo, Anastasia, Salvatore Muleo, S. Reina, and G. Ficarrotta.

It is sad to see the custom of making pupi di zucchero (sugar-dolls) disappear from the scene. These attractive candies were sold during All Saints Day, better known to modern day Italians as Halloween! The joy of the children waking up on the morning of All Saints Day and finding an array of lovely Pupidi, sweet as heaven, neatly

arranged on the night table, was a supreme pleasure to the doting parents.

The great majority of the Italians who were attracted to Ybor City came with the aspiration of becoming cigarmakers. The earnings were excellent and the cigar industry offered them an opportunity to quickly elevate their economic status.

In the course of a few years, six cigar factories with Italian affiliations emerged upon the scene. They were: George F. Borrotto, La Vatiata, Leonardi-Hayman, Filogamo, and Alvarez, V. M. (Val) Antuono, Andrea Re, and the Marsicano Cigar Co.

Of the six above factories, the one owned by Val Antuono marketing the C. H. S. label (Clear Havana Segars) became a fabulous success. His brand became famous from coast to coast. Antuono came to Tampa from Naples in 1886, at the age of twelve and soon learned to make cigars and dreamed of the day he would have his own factory. He married Jennie Geraci, and soon thereafter the young couple commenced making cigars in their home on Twelfth Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. In time he was able to employ three cigarmakers and moved to LaFayette and Tampa Streets. The site became known as Val's Corner until the First National Bank acquired the property. Subsequently he built a large cigar factory and amassed large real estate holdings. For many years he served as consular agent of Italy.

Today the V. Guerrieri Cigar Company is the only large cigar factory owned by an Italian in Tampa. This firm was established in 1937, and has become one of the major plants in the city.

In 1935, there were seven Italian cigar factories: Francisco Capitano, John B. Leto, Antonio Martorano, Alessi Scaglione, S. Spoto, Andrea Valenti and Antuono.

El Lector, the reader, held a position of high esteem in the cigar factories. It was required that the reader possess a resonant, clear voice that could be heard throughout the large workroom. The reading was always done in the Spanish language. In the history of the Tampa cigar industry only one Italian had the distinction of being a reader. He was Onofrio Palermo from Santo Stefano, a man of intellectual powers who possessed an excellent command of the Castilian language. He excelled in vocal delivery and for years was a favorite at the Villazon factory

One of the most colorful Italians to live in Ybor City was Orestes Ferrara, native of Naples. Ferrara was a revolutionary with rare oratorical talent. On occasions he would stand on a soap-box on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Seventeenth Street in his red Garibaldi shirt, and Ferrara fired the Cubans into frenzy for the cause of liberty. Before leaving with his Italian friends, Federico Falco, and Guglielmo Petriccione, to join General Maximo Gomez in the wilderness of interior Cuba, Orestes promised his sweetheart, Maria Luisa Sanchez, a resident of Ybor City and a daughter of General Serafin Sanchez that if he came through the war alive he would return and marry her. In 1902, when Cuba became a republic, they were joined in marriage and lived a very happy life together for some seventy years.

Ferrara went back to Cuba and, became a very wealthy man. He served as President of the Cuban Congress and later as Cuban Ambassador to the United States. He wrote several cultural and historical books. This

author, corresponded with him while he lived in Rome. He died a few years ago in his nineties.

It is of little surprise to find Jose Marti, the great Cuban patriot, commenting on the Tampa Italians in Patria, the official organ of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, on September 3, 1892:

"Patria renders a deserving tribute to the memory of that brave Italian Natalio, Argenta, who shed his blood for us, and under whose name the Italians of Tampa, lovers of liberty, offer their assistance to the grandiose task of liberating the Antilles."

The early Italians of Tampa, a proud people, strongly believed in self-help. Their antipathy to outside charities and the belief of helping their own led to the establishment of The Italian Club of Tampa - L'Unione Italiana. This mutual aid society was organized April 4, 1894 with 127 members. Bartolio Filogamo, a prominent, the first Italian cigar manufacturer, (Filogamo y Alvarez Cigar Factory), was elected as the first president.

La Union provided its members with sick and death benefits. Their comprehensive health insurance program is one of the oldest examples of cooperative social medicine in the United States. The Italian Club of Tampa is considered the fore-runner of the more than fourteen hundred mutual aid societies that flourished in Italian neighborhood throughout America.

The first clubhouse was located near the northwest corner of Seventh Avenue and Eighteenth Street. It was erected during the administration of Philip F. Licata a peerless pioneer leader who served on the city council and as Italian consular agent. One day in May, 1914, the club headquarters was completely destroyed by fire. A new and

impressive neo-classic, three-story building was inaugurated in 1918 across the street from the previous building.

In 1924, Paul Pizzo, a thirty-four year old native American, proud of his heritage and seeking to strengthen the position of Italians in America, founded the first chapter in the State of Florida of the prestigious Order of the Sons of Italy. The Tampa Chapter was named La Nuova Sicilia. Pizzo served as founding president for two terms. He was the author's father. The Order was originated in New York in 1905 by Dr. Vincent Sellaro, and his branched out into more than, three thousand lodges. Today Tampa has three lodges, and in Florida there are twenty-six.

The early Italian doctors who served the community through the programs of the societies were Drs. Isidoro Cici who lived at 1120 Ninth Avenue, David Guggino, 1915 Eleventh Avenue, Cosmo Noto, 1605 Ninth Avenue, and G. DiMaio who had an office on Seventh Avenue and Eighteenth Street. These men made house calls; they were on call around the clock, they were dedicated, and it wasn't their lot to die rich.

It was inevitable for Italians to enter politics. Their gregarious nature and desire to better serve the social needs of their people prompted their initial entry into public life. The first Ybor City Italian was elected to public office in 1911. Elected to the City Council was Nunzio DiMaggio. He was possessed with shrewd common sense, and a burning desire to get ahead. Despite the fact that he barely spoke English he was elected. This gave the Italians an aura of civic pride. It is true," many exclaimed, "in a democracy everyone is equal." There were many obstacles ahead, but the mental block had been breached. Intermittently others were elected to the

a, Phillip Licata, Nick City Council: Antonio Rein, Nuccio, Albert D'Arpa, Joe Bondi, Frank Cannella, James Minardi, Sam Mirabella, Dick Greco, Jr., Joe Chillura, and presently C. G. Spicola, Jr., is serving on the Council.

One of the most important Italian families in the political life of Tampa are the Spicolas. They have been politically active since the early thirties. The family dates to the pioneer days of Ybor City, and have served meritoriously through many years in the progress of the city. Charles, Sr., Angelo, A. G., Jr., and (1, C.- (Tommy, Jr.) have supported many worthwhile community projects through the Rotary and Lions Clubs. In the early days G. C. Spicola, Sr., the progenitor of the family, developed a drink to compete with Coca-Cola; its brand name was "SpiCola." The venture did not prove to be a world dazzler, and the enterprise was abandoned. Later he established a hardware store at 1815 Seventh Avenue which eventually developed into the present Spicola Hardware Company, Inc., a gigantic distributing operation. Judge Joseph G. Spicola served on the Justice. of the Peace Court, and his son, Joseph, Jr., served as State Attorney while his younger son, Guy W., is presently serving as State Senator. In Tampa there are 49 attorneys with Italian names. Five of these are Spicolas.

The personable Paul Antinori, Jr. became the first District Attorney with an Italian name in Hillsborough County history. Paul serves as chairman of that bella Festa Italiana given every year. In 1975 he was decorated by the Italian government.

In the judicial structure of the county, Judge I. C. Spoto has the honor of being the first Circuit Judge of Italian heritage in the history of Hillsborough County. Those



serving as Probate Judges Nick J. Falsone, and Rene Zacchini.

For many years of outstanding service to the Hillsborough County Public School System, four citizens bearing Italian names have been honored by having schools named after them: Philip Shore (Costa), Ateo Leto, A. Chiaramonte, and Angelo Greco.

Al Chiaramonte served on the Hillsborough County School Board for more than twenty years in a most creditable manner. Upon his retirement he was honored by having a new school building named after him.

Bob Bondi, the son of Philip Bondi, a retired county educator, has served on the County School Board, and is presently serving as Chairman of the Hillsborough County Commission.

Nick Nuccio, a third generation Tampan, entered politics in 1929. He served two terms on the City Council and eight terms on the County Commission. Nick Nuccio became the first mayor of Tampa of Italian heritage. Nick served the city most diligently through two terms. The boy from Eighth Avenue and Seventh Street, became a legend in his own time, and is admired as being, "A friend of all the people."

The venerable Nick Nuccio was succeeded by Dick Greco, Jr., who, at the time, was thirty-four, making him the youngest mayor of a major city in the nation. Dick, called the young lion by the press, brought a Latin "charisma" never before seen in Tampa politics. He served with great capacity and "gusto" into a second term, when he resigned to take an executive position with a national company.

For nearly eighty years the Spotos have been one of the best known families in the Latin

Community. The first Spoto to come to Tampa was Antonio. He was a native of Santo Stefano, and homesteaded on the south side of Seventh Avenue near Twentieth Street. The year was 1888. Antonio Spoto bought a few milk cattle and in a short period of time had developed a profitable dairy business. In time other relatives joined him. Today there are nearly two hundred Spotos in Tampa.

Antonio's two sons, Vincent and John, became the first two native born dentists of Italian descent. Today out of the thirty-three Italian dentists in Tampa, eight of them are Spotos. In Tampa there are 43 surgeons with Italian names, eight of them are Spotos. Judge I. C. Spoto serves as a Circuit Judge, Rudy Spoto served as the first County Administrator and Eddie Spoto has served the Broadway Bank as President for many years. Several of them are also in education.

Since the early days the Spotos have been engaged in many phases of the commercial life of Tampa. George is one of the most affable members of the clan. He owns a successful haberdashery known as Phil Fairchild, and two other stores of men's furnishings. Leslie Priede, the present reigning queen of Sant'. Yago, is a fourth generation of the Spoto lineage.

Madam Norma Tina Russo, the grand lady of Opera in Florida, came to Tampa via New York City in 1932. Her early vocal studies were financed by the great Enrico Caruso. Soon after arriving in Tampa she was widowed and became the sole supporter of the three children. Since she was a specialist in the bel canto technique, she became a voice teacher.

In 1954 this highly cultured lady founded the Tampa Grand Opera Association.

For years this dainty lady with the courage of a lion has struggled to keep opera alive in Tampa, and the townspeople take off their Borselinos to her.

F.S.U. halfback hero Nelson Italiano, insurance executive, and chairman of the prestigious Tampa Sports Authority, is one of Governor Ruben Askew's closest confidants.

Joe Testa-Secca, a native Tampan, is a nationally known artists.

Arthur Schiro is serving his second term as chairman of Tampa's Port Authority. Arthus was the founder of the Banana Trading Co., and after thirty years of operating the distributing firm he sold it to the Del Monte Co.

Judy Alvarez, (her mother is a Pupello) the girl who put Tampa on the map of the tennis world. She is the only Tampan to play at Wimbledon where she competed three years in a row.

Rick Casares, Tampa's football sensation and "the greatest Chicago Bear runner of them all," sixth ground gainer in NFL history, five times All-Pro and all-time favorite son of Florida. (Rick is three quarters Italian.)

Tony, Jimmy and Joe Leto, the greatest family in boxing in Tampa history. They were great fighters of world renown.

Joe Schiro is a natural born athlete with a gentle personality that belies his massive strength. Joe's athletic career spans fifty years. This highly succesful buinessman was selected for the Bowling Association's Hall of Fame.

Dr. Frank Adamo, the medical hero of Bataan in World War II. A grateful people of Tampa honored him by naming First Avenue Frank Adamo Drive. For his service in the war as chief surgeon in a general hospital he was presented the Legion of Merit Award.

Joseph D. Midulla, Sr., Chairman of the Board of Tampa Wholesale Liquor Company, Inc., one of the largest distributing companies in the South, has in recent years established The House of Midulla, Inc., an import company, and Fruits Wines of Florida, Inc. These two companies based in Tampa, supply foreign and domestic products on a national basis.

Molly Ferrara, the balla donna of Ybor City, is a unique combination of superb human qualities. Molly's Italian culture, marinating for years in a Spanish, Cuban, American environment, has given her an excitable and effervescent personality. Molly served brilliantly as Alcaldesa of Ybor City, or honorary mayor. Molly initiated the idea and fostered the founding of the first Girl's Club in Tampa.

Anthony J. Grimaldi, Sr., often called "Mr. Draft Board" for his thirty years of service as executive chairman of the Tampa Selective Service Board. He is the president of the Ybor City Crime Commission, a past president of the Ybor City Rotary Club, and served on the committee which established the Jose Marti Park. He served as Italian Consular Agent for more than twenty years. Presently he serves as Chairman of the Board of the Columbia Bank of Tampa.

Among the missing, who departed in recent years, is one of the most respected citizens of the Italian Colony, Frank Falsone, C.P.A. He was a native of Ybor City and

throughout his life he demonstrated his community interest and love for county.

Tony Guida is no longer with us, but he will be remembered as that nice, little man who nearly lost his life in World War I, and returned home with a disabled right arm. Tony was in love with his county - America - and lived a life dedicated to the American Flag and what it stood for.