

Solidarietà Sotto la Terra:
Italian American Community Building and Ethnic Strife
in the 1913-14 Copper Country Strike

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On July 23, 1913, the copper miners in the Copper Country of Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula led by the radical Western Federation of Miners (WFM) struck against the mining companies in the region, including the three largest: the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company, the Quincy Mining Company, and the Copper Range Company. The workers did not strike against the mining companies for purely economic reasons such as higher wages and shorter working hours. The workers and the WFM made specific demands including the abolition of the one-man drill, improved working conditions, and especially official representation of workers by the WFM. Additionally, the WFM took advantage of the infrastructure built by the "new" Eastern and Southern European immigrant communities, which were motivated to reconcile the ethnic divisions between themselves and the "old" Western European immigrants through the strike.¹

Italian immigrants, and more generally the divisions between the "new" and "old" immigrant groups and their respective relationship to the mining companies, are critical to understanding the story of the 1913-14 strike. Initially, before 1890, the first wave of immigrants to the mines was dominated by Cornish, Irish, English, Scotch, French-Canadian, and Finnish immigrants.² After 1890, Eastern and Southern Europeans arrived in the largest numbers. The

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² Although Finnish immigrants arrived in the first wave of immigrants, they were grouped with the new Southern and Eastern European immigrants due to racial and ethnic discrimination. Therefore, references to the new Southern and Eastern European immigrants in this article will include the Finnish immigrants.

new immigrant groups included Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Italian, Bulgarian, Greek, Polish, and Russian immigrants among others. The new immigrant groups took the low-paying and unskilled jobs in the mines often working as trammers who pushed carts of rock to the mine shaft to be hoisted to the surface. New immigrants were rarely promoted to skilled labor positions as miners, managers, and captains, which were dominated by Cornish, Irish, Scotch, and English immigrants. Therefore, as unskilled trammers, the new immigrant groups occupied the bottom rungs of the underground labor hierarchy. In addition to the position of new immigrant groups at the bottom of the underground hierarchy, they were also at the bottom of the social hierarchy above ground since they were largely excluded from the companies' paternal benefits, including company housing.

This article adds to the strike's scholarship by focusing on the story of the Italian community and its relationships with other immigrant communities. Italians were the second largest of the new immigrant communities behind the Finnish community, and, although difficult to quantify, one of the most socially, culturally, and economically active in the Copper Country. Therefore, it is an ideal community to study to understand the development of new immigrant communities and the ethnic strife with the old immigrant communities that were central to the 1913-14 strike. The critical question this article addresses is: what role did the Italian community play in organizing labor for the 1913-14 Copper Country Strike? The answer I find is not completely straightforward. That is, the Italian community empowered Italians who were excluded from company paternalism, which, in turn, caused the ethnic divide within the mining community to increase since "old" immigrants were threatened by the increasingly powerful "new" immigrant communities. When the mining companies introduced the one-man drill, which threatened all miners, the WFM briefly bridged the divide between the new and old immigrant communities. The strike caused a divide within the Italian community since some members of the Italian merchant class allied themselves with the companies based on their economic interests while other Italian merchants remained committed to the strike in defense of their "Fratelli" (Brothers). Similarly, the unity between old and new immigrants quickly dissolved as the old immigrants ended their strike efforts and allied themselves with the mining companies while the new immigrants remained committed to the strike.

Historiography

The scholarship on the 1913-14 strike has noted the ethnic divide within the community but has not penetrated the importance of the ethnic divide in the strike. One exception in the scholarship is Gary Kaunonen and Aaron Goings's *Community in Conflict: A Working-Class History of the 1913-1914 Michigan Copper Strike and the Italian Hall Tragedy*, which seeks to frame the story of the strike within the story of the turbulent Copper Country community. Kaunonen and Goings frame the story by analyzing the development of interethnic labor organization within the community. I analyze the ethnic divide within the context of the Italian community to understand the conditions that caused new immigrant communities to come

together in interethnic labor organizations before the strike. To do so, I track the development of the community in congruence with the development of ethnic strife between old and new immigrants and the resulting interethnic labor organization between new immigrant communities. I begin by telling the story of the first Italian pioneers to arrive in the Copper Country and trace the growing divide between the Italian community and the old immigrant communities until ethnic tensions exploded in the 1913-14 strike.

New Immigrants: Italian Pioneers Below and Above Ground

The first group of Italian immigrants to arrive in the late nineteenth century began a process of chain migration by earning money working underground in the mines and using their new capital to build businesses above ground and subsequently creating an active Italian community that attracted a continuous stream of family and friends from Italy, usually from a particular region. Chain migration defined Italian immigration to the Copper Country much as it defined immigration elsewhere in the United States; Italians immigrated to the Copper Country because they had a family or friend who was already there. Beginning the process of chain migration were pioneers such as Bartholomew “Bat” Quello who first established themselves in the Copper Country before bringing family and friends to join them. According to Peter and Charles Vitton, the sons of an Italian farmer in the Copper Country, “[Quello] was the one that brought most of the Italians from the old country to the Copper country. Some of them worked for him in the woods and some of them worked for him in the mines.”³ After Quello arrived in the Copper Country, he began by working in the mines in 1859 making him one of the first Italians in the region.⁴ After earning a wage underground, Quello became one of the first members of the Italian merchant class by building a teaming and hauling business transporting lumber.⁵ Quello came from the region of Piedmont in Italy, so many of the first Italians he brought to the Copper Country were also from Piedmont.⁶ As a result, the majority of Italians in the region were from Piedmont.⁷

Merchants such as Quello built the Italian community by bringing Italians to the Copper Country and by establishing businesses to cater to the needs of the new Italians. For example, Italian grocery stores allowed Italians to preserve their culinary traditions while saloons allowed Italians to form social bonds in an unfamiliar place. According to Russell Magnaghi, a historian of Upper Peninsula Italians, Italian grocery stores and bakeries “provided the Italian population

³ Oral History Interview of Peter and Charles Vitton Transcript, December 10, 1982, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

⁴ Alvah L. Sawyer, *A History of the Northern Peninsula of Michigan and Its People* (Chicago, Illinois: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1911), Volume 3, 1288.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Oral History Interview of Peter and Charles Vitton Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

⁷ Russel M. Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives: Michigan's Upper Peninsula Italians* (Marquette, Michigan: Belle Fontaine Press, 1987), 35.

with their traditional foods, such as olive oil, codfish, polenta, and varieties of pasta.”⁸ Like the other Italian merchants and pioneers in the region, grocery store owners usually began by working in the mines to earn the capital needed for a grocery store. Cesare Lucchesi, an Italian merchant, worked underground for the Quincy Mining Company and the Baltic Mining Company before opening a grocery store.⁹ Similarly, Domenico Picchiottino began working underground for the Calumet & Hecla Mining Company in 1886 before opening a saloon in Red Jacket (Calumet).¹⁰ According to a local guide of Italians in the Copper Country from 1910 titled “Pionieri della Colonia” (Pioneers of the Colony), “For the past seven years, [Domenico Picchiottino] has run the well-known Restaurant and saloon, Colombo, located on Sixth Street in Red Jacket, where an ever growing number of compatriots go every day.”¹¹ The account of Picchittino’s saloon demonstrates the continuous growth of the Italian community and its increasing social activity. According to Magnaghi, “The saloon acted as a social and recreation center for the immigrant men, and Italian saloons were found in most communities.”¹² Grocery stores such as Lucchesi’s and saloons like Picchittino’s provided infrastructure for Italian community building by preserving cultural traditions from Italy and by forming new social bonds in the US, which would prove essential in the face of discriminatory old immigrant groups and company paternalism.

“Old” Versus “New” Immigrants: Company Paternalism, Italian Community Building, and Ethnic Strife

The ethnic divide between the old and new immigrant groups formed when new Italian arrivals to the Copper Country found themselves increasingly excluded from company paternalism and estranged by discrimination from the old immigrant groups, forcing them to build their own communities outside the confines of company property. The Keweenaw Peninsula was a remote and undeveloped region before the mining companies arrived in the mid-nineteenth century. The mining companies had first established a system of paternalism out of the need to create infrastructure for the old immigrants who first worked the mines, but, in turn, paternalism made life and work inseparable in the Keweenaw. Larry Lankton, a historian of the Keweenaw Peninsula, argued, “On a frontier that experienced heavy winters and lacked transportation conveniences, it was essential to locate housing as close to a mine as possible.”¹³ As the wives and children of the mine workers began to arrive, the mining companies

⁸ Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 83.

⁹ Dave Halala Oral History Interview of Geno and Fred Lucchesi Transcript, September 13, 1980, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

¹⁰ “Pionieri della Colonia,” 1910, MS-708, Box 1, People Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

¹¹ “Pionieri della Colonia,” Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

¹² Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 14.

¹³ Larry D. Lankton, *Cradle to Grave: Life, Work, and Death at the Lake Superior Copper Mines*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 147.

constructed libraries and schools to accommodate the families. In 1875, the Washington School was constructed by Calumet and Hecla.¹⁴ In 1898, Calumet and Hecla opened the Calumet and Hecla Library holding 6,800 volumes.¹⁵

There were about 14,000 mine workers in the Keweenaw peninsula by 1913, but there were only about 5,000 company houses between company-owned houses and employee-owned houses built on company property.¹⁶ Therefore, the companies determined which workers lived in affordable company houses and which workers had to find their own and more expensive living arrangements. The unskilled Eastern and Southern European immigrants were prevented from living in company houses since the mining companies gave preference to the skilled Anglo-Saxon, German, and American-born workers. In 1905, 181 Austrians worked underground for the Champion Mining Company but none lived in company housing.¹⁷ According to Gary Kaunonen and Aaron Goings, historians of labor and radicalism, “paternalism rewarded those with roots in Anglo-European Protestant traditions” and “punish[ed] those with ‘foreign’ characteristics and traits.”¹⁸

By the time the Calumet and Hecla Library was built, it was clear the mining companies also had developed their system of paternalism into a system of social control. According to the 1910 census, copper mine workers in Montana received \$3.87 per shift while Michigan mine workers received \$2.36.¹⁹ The difference in wages between Michigan and Montana is tied to paternalism. Lankton argued, “By the early twentieth century, it cost a mine worker considerably less to occupy a dwelling on the Keweenaw than in Butte, Montana. Local managers figured the difference for comparable dwellings at \$12 per month, or nearly 50 cents per shift worked.”²⁰ In addition to using paternalism to justify lower wages, mining companies used paternalism to favor some ethnic groups over others.

Excluded from company paternalism, Italians and other Eastern and Southern European immigrants were therefore unconvinced by the mining companies’ justification for paying lower wages. In an Italian-language article published in the WFM’s *Miners’ Bulletin* during the 1913 strike, D. Giannerini wrote, “Brothers learn from the current development in Butte Montana. On October 1, the price of copper will reach 17 dollars, and, consequently, the miners will receive a fine salary of \$4 per day for 8 hours of work.”²¹ Italians refused to accept lower wages because they, along with other Southern and Eastern European immigrant groups, were prevented from living in affordable company housing. In addition, as “new” Southern and Eastern European

¹⁴ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 170.

¹⁵ Lankton, 173.

¹⁶ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 149.

¹⁷ Lankton, 155.

¹⁸ Gary Kaunonen and Aaron Goings, *Community in Conflict: A Working-Class History of the 1913-1914 Michigan Copper Strike and the Italian Hall Tragedy* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 7.

¹⁹ William B. Gates, *Michigan Copper and Boston Dollars: An Economic History of the Michigan Copper Mining Industry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951), 128.

²⁰ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 161.

²¹ D. Giannerini, September 11, 1913, “Coraggio Fratelli,” *Miners’ Bulletin*, KEWE-00628, Box 185, Folder 005, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records, Keweenaw National Historical Park, Calumet, Michigan.

immigrants were locked out of company houses, they established their own communities where radicalism and organized labor grew.

Since Southern and Eastern European immigrants were mainly prevented from living in company houses, they established their own communities, which in turn broke down the traditional paternal bonds between employers and their employees while facilitating the exchange of increasingly radical ideas. After 1890, production exploded in the copper mines, causing an influx of Southern and Eastern European immigrants who built new immigrant communities. In the Quincy Mining Company mines, production of copper ingot grew from 8 million pounds in 1890 to 14 million in 1900 to 23 million in 1910.²² Meanwhile, Quincy employed 484, 1,349, and 2,019 workers in 1890, 1900, and 1910 respectively.²³ Therefore, as production increased, so did employment and, consequently, immigration. According to Kaunonen and Goings, “By 1910 immigrants and their children represented 89 percent of the population of Houghton, Keweenaw, and Ontonagon Counties.”²⁴ The new Eastern and Southern European immigrant workers packed into small boardinghouses with up to twelve people living in each house. According to Peter and Charles Vitton, their father, Battista Vitton, built his farm by supplying the boardinghouses; teams of farm workers would take homemade meat, cheese, and butter from the farm and deliver them to the boardinghouses, which held 8 to 10 boarders.²⁵ Boarders were essential to the family income. Russel M. Magnaghi explained, “The Upper Peninsula had no factory jobs for the women. Instead [Italian women] augmented the family earnings by taking boarders into their homes.”²⁶ Boarders were found in all Eastern and Southern European immigrant homes. Packed boardinghouses formed the basis of the new immigrant communities by creating a space where social bonds could be formed and community building could begin.

Eastern and Southern European immigrant communities spilled out of boarding houses into co-ops, mutual benefit societies, and social halls, creating active and developed communities. Among the new Southern and Eastern European immigrant groups, the Finns, Italians, and Croatians were especially active in community building. In 1890, the Tamarack Co-operative opened in Red Jacket selling groceries and other household goods at low prices to compete with local merchants and company stores.²⁷ Co-ops quickly became fundamental to immigrant community building; Italian immigrants opened the Italian Co-operative Store on July 27, 1912.²⁸ Finnish immigrants opened three co-ops by 1910 while Croatian immigrants opened one.²⁹ Co-ops were essential to the autonomy of immigrant communities since their low prices meant local merchants and company stores could not raise prices freely. For example, the Italian

²² Larry D. Lankton, *Hollowed Ground: Copper Mining and Community Building on Lake Superior, 1840s-1990s* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 125.

²³ Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 125.

²⁴ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 36.

²⁵ Oral History Interview of Peter and Charles Vitton Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

²⁶ Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 17.

²⁷ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 177.

²⁸ MS-708 Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers Box

²⁹ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 177.

Co-operative Store formed to sell general store items “at the smallest practical rate of cost.”³⁰ In addition to co-ops, mutual benefit societies also granted autonomy to immigrant communities. Immigrants formed about 50 mutual benefit societies in Houghton County from 1865 to 1910.³¹ Italian mutual benefit societies, such as the Italian Mutual Beneficial Society, charged members 50 cents per month in exchange for paying benefits upon accident, sickness, or death.³² Social halls served as meeting places for mutual benefit societies and served as community centers. The Italian Mutual Beneficial Society constructed the Italian Hall in Calumet in 1908, creating a center for the Italian community since the Italian lodges of Calumet met in the Italian Hall.³³ Co-ops and mutual benefit societies were essential to immigrant community building because they gave immigrants much needed social and economic independence from the mining companies.

Although Italian community building originally began out of necessity since Italians were excluded from company paternalistic benefits, Italian laborers and merchants used community building to resist mining companies and strengthen the position of Italians in the social hierarchy. As the mining industry grew after 1890, new immigrants quickly became aware of the glaring dangers of underground work and their exclusion from paternal benefits; consequently, the mining companies became the clear adversary of new immigrant laborers and resistance to the companies spread in their communities. In 1895, as new immigrant communities were just beginning to form, 30 underground workers died in a fire at the Osceola mine in the most fatal mining accident in the history of the region.³⁴ On average, 61 men per year died in the mines between 1905 and 1911.³⁵ After 1900, 80% of the fatalities were foreign-born workers.³⁶ The continuous deaths of foreign-born workers and tragic accidents, such as the Osceola fire, forced immigrants to become acutely aware of the dangers of underground work while building communities. Eastern and Southern European immigrants were also aware of their place at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the Keweenaw Peninsula. Out of all the Austrians and Italians killed underground only 20% had been promoted to miners.³⁷ According to Louis Lombardi, the child of an Italian mine worker, Cornish immigrants were made bosses “because they knew mining and they knew how to talk English and all the other foreigners didn’t know how to talk. So they just put them in like slaves, you know, put them to work.”³⁸ Due to the mining companies’ ethnic discrimination, Italians, Finns, Croatians, and Slovenians occupied the lowest positions of the social hierarchy. The class consciousness of the Italians and other new immigrant groups was solidified by the constant discrimination they faced.

³⁰ Articles of Association of the Italian Co-operative Store, 1912, MS-708, Box 1, Unfiled, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

³¹ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 188.

³² Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 19.

³³ Magnaghi, 43.

³⁴ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 183.

³⁵ Lankton, 182.

³⁶ Lankton, 112.

³⁷ Lankton, 113.

³⁸ Oral History Interview of Louis Lombardi Transcript, December 3, 1982, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

Italians, “New” Immigrant Communities, and Solidarity

Italians faced constant discrimination from old immigrant groups, such as Cornish and Irish immigrants, solidifying Italian class and ethnic consciousness and increasing the ethnic divide within the community. According to William B. Gates, a historian of the Michigan copper industry, the new Eastern and Southern European immigrants faced ethnic discrimination from the old immigrant groups “since the Cornish and Irish workers tended to draw together in the face of new arrivals.”³⁹ While Cornish and Irish immigrants came together, they sought to divide the new immigrants with their ethnic discrimination. According to Louis Lombardi, the Cornish “wouldn’t put two Italians together. They thought maybe they would do too much talk and no work, so they put a Finnish, an Italian, and an Austrian with somebody else.”⁴⁰ Ethnic discrimination against Italians was not limited to the underground mines; ethnic discrimination extended above ground where differences in language and religion fed discrimination against Italians in the communities. Giovanna Cappo discussed, “If [the English] could down an Italian, they wouldn’t stop. That was very prevalent. It was very well known that we were Catholics and Italians, and they were English.”⁴¹ Therefore, Italians were constantly reminded of their ethnicity by Cornish mining captains who separated workers based on ethnicity and by English community members who discriminated against them due to their religious and cultural differences. As a result, immigrant communities were built with class and ethnic consciousness in mind leading to increased resistance to the mining companies and the old immigrants.

In addition to the glaring dangers of underground work, Eastern and Southern European immigrant community building after 1890 contributed to employee resistance to the mining companies by weakening the paternal bonds between employer and employee. As Eastern and Southern European immigrants were forced to build new communities, they did not view their relationship to the mining companies as benevolent, they viewed it as adversarial. According to Gates, increased immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe “increase[ed] the difficulties of the employer-employee relationship.”⁴² Since the companies became the adversaries of the new immigrant laborers, the companies became more suspicious of their employees, and the employer-employee relationship was defined by mistrust on both sides. The new immigrant laborers led brief strikes against the Quincy Mining Company in 1904 and 1905.⁴³ In response, William R. Todd, President of the Quincy Mining Company, wrote to John L. Harris, General Manger and Superintendent of the Quincy Mine, blaming Italian agitators and advocating for labor spies. Todd wrote, “The Italians seem to be the chief agitators, would think it desirable to

³⁹ Gates, *Michigan Copper and Boston Dollars*, 114.

⁴⁰ Oral History Interview of Louis Lombardi Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

⁴¹ Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, March 16, 1982, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

⁴² Gates, *Michigan Copper and Boston Dollars*, 114.

⁴³ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 89.

let these underground men go fast as their places can be filled with others, better run a little short handed for awhile than keep men who want to make mischief.”⁴⁴ Todd reflected the growing distrust of Italian laborers, continuing by advocating for labor spies. Todd proposed, “It may be desirable to find one or more men underground for awhile, who will mix in with the men and who will report those making trouble.”⁴⁵ Todd’s advocacy for labor spies represents the complete breakdown of paternal bonds between employer and employee; instead of serving as a benevolent father for the workers, the companies became suspicious and malicious entities attempting to thwart cooperation between workers.

Italian community builders’ class consciousness and resistance to mining companies caused a rise in cooperation and solidarity among Italians in the community, thereby creating the infrastructure for interethnic labor organization. By providing benefits to underground workers who were injured or killed, mutual benefit societies responded to the dangers of underground work. However, mutual benefit societies also advocated for Italians above ground in the communities by fostering solidarity and cooperation among Italians. The Italian Mutual Beneficial Society claimed they associated “together for the purpose of forming a body politic.”⁴⁶ Therefore, central to the formation of the society was the idea that Italians could improve their lot by coming together in numbers. The same idea fueled the formation of La Federazione Italo-Americana (The Italian American Federation), which was formed in 1909 by Italian community builders who sought to bring all the Italian mutual benefit societies together under one banner.⁴⁷ In an Italian-language letter to all the members of Italian mutual benefit societies in the Upper Peninsula, the federation wrote, “United and organized we can form a powerful mass that will demand respect, achieve self-government, and know how to block and prevent any attack.”⁴⁸ To celebrate and organize Italians, the federation established an “Italo-American Day” held annually on July 10.⁴⁹ Solidarity among Italians was not confined to mutual benefit societies; Columbus Day served as another celebration of Italian culture and heritage. The Italian Hall hosted parades, feasts, and dancing annually on Columbus Day.⁵⁰ Through the creation of an Italian community based on solidarity, Italian workers were constantly reminded of their adversarial relationship with the mining companies. Members of mutual benefit societies were required to attend the funerals of deceased members in full uniform.⁵¹ Therefore, through grieving, Italians were constantly reminded of the dangers they faced daily. The Italian solidarity fostered by mutual benefit societies and Italian holidays gave Italian workers autonomy and created a community capable of standing up for itself.

⁴⁴ William R. Todd Letter to John L. Harris, April 7, 1905, MS-708, Box 1, Unfiled, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 57.

⁴⁷ Meeting Minutes 1909-1915, MS-266, Box 1, Folder 7, Italian American Federation of the Upper Peninsula Records, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 43-44.

⁵¹ Magnaghi, 65.

Outside organizers took advantage of the communal institutions and the ideas of solidarity spread within the institutions to organize and radicalize increasingly discontented Italian workers. The spread of ideas in the Italian community related to solidarity and resistance to the mining companies caused a rise in radicalism within the community. At Italian Hall, radical and socialist meetings were held by local organizations. According to Kaunonen and Goings, “In March 1906, the Houghton County socialists held a meeting at the hall to pass resolutions protesting the arrests of WFM officials charged with the murder of former Idaho governor Frank Steuenberg.”⁵² Newspapers were fundamental to the spread of radicalism in new immigrant communities. Famous labor organizer Teofilo Petriella edited an Italian socialist newspaper called *La Sentinella*.⁵³ Croatian immigrants formed the *Hrvatski Radnik* as a weekly left-wing newspaper to promote workers’ interests.⁵⁴ The Croatian Publishing Company, which published *Hrvatski Radnik*, rented space in the Italian Hall.⁵⁵

Although the Italian Hall was a center of radicalism within the community, it also served conservative community members and organizations. According to Kaunonen and Goings, “Calumet’s Italian Hall *was* an important meeting place for Copper Country radicals as well as their more conservative counterparts.”⁵⁶ Although Italian Hall was not a purely radical organization, the Italian Hall provided infrastructure for the spread of radicalism, and the increasing radical activity at the hall marked increasing radicalism within the community.

The 1913-14 Strike: Western Federation of Miners, Italian Solidarity, and the “New” and “Old” Immigrants

The one-man drill introduced by the mining companies provided the necessary spark for social revolt. The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) took advantage by rapidly organizing the Copper Country laborers using the infrastructure created by the class-conscious organizations especially the Italian infrastructure and interethnic organizers. The drill issue briefly united the new and old immigrant groups.

The WFM recognized the potential for Italian workers to be organized alongside the other Eastern and Southern European immigrant groups as a result of the brutal conditions they faced in the mines. In Charles Moyer’s address at the 1910 WFM convention, he listed Michigan with states that had the potential to be organized. Moyer argued, “Then to Michigan, where we find some forty thousand men employed in the production of iron and copper. Of this number but a small per cent are organized and the conditions under which they labor are but little, if any, better than those employed in the southern states.”⁵⁷ Although Moyer recognized the Copper Country laborers’ potential to be organized, he also recognized the difficulties of interethnic

⁵² Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 58.

⁵³ Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 19.

⁵⁴ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 52.

⁵⁵ Kaunonen and Goings, 58.

⁵⁶ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 58.

⁵⁷ WFM Convention Proceedings 1910-1911, MS-553, Box 1, Reel 7, Page 28, Western Federation of Miners Collection, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

organization. In the same address, Moyer declared, "It is safe to say that more than one-third of the workers in the mining industry of this country are unable to speak or understand the English language and it is to be regretted that many of our so-called American citizens have yet to realize that these fellow workers are here to stay."⁵⁸ Moyer and the WFM realized the biggest obstacle to organizing Copper Country laborers would be organizing diverse ethnic groups without a common language. Moyer and the WFM were able to overcome the difficulties of interethnic labor organization by capitalizing on the infrastructure provided by local community organizations and foreign-language newspapers and by sending labor organizers who represented the ethnicities of the Copper Country's new immigrant groups.

Local community organizations and foreign-language newspapers provided the infrastructure for interethnic labor organization. Organizations and newspapers created both physical and ideological infrastructure for interethnic labor organization by providing physical spaces and ideas of solidarity and class consciousness utilized by organizers. Interethnic labor organization developed before the 1913-14 strike. In support of a 1906 miners' strike in the region, Petriella, editor of the socialist Italian-language *La Sentinella*, organized Italians for an Italian and Finnish socialist meeting and social event.⁵⁹ By 1907, Petriella had left the Copper Country to serve as the Italian strike leader for the WFM on Minnesota's iron range.⁶⁰ However, interethnic labor organization continued in the Copper Country. According to Kaunonen and Goings, "A number of Copper Country ethnic groups had, by the early 1910s, begun to unite in class-conscious organizations that bridged ethnic divisions." Therefore, due to communal organizations and the efforts of interethnic labor organizers, interethnic labor organization and radicalism was on the rise in the Copper Country's new immigrant communities leading up to 1913.

The conflict over the one-man drill was simple: the companies sought to save labor costs by introducing a drill that only required one man to operate while laborers feared the companies would cut underground jobs in half.⁶¹ In an Italian-language article published in the *Miners' Bulletin* in September 1913, Ben Goggin, an Italian WFM organizer, expressed the workers' anger towards the one-man drill. He wrote, "It is a sacred truth that the one-man machine while it exhausts and wears the worker in charge, it damages the working-class that sees many of its members turned out on the street."⁶² The one-man drill issue appealed to the class-consciousness and solidarity of the Italian community since the drill threatened the jobs of all underground Italian workers; consequently, Italians along with all other immigrant groups began to organize in early 1913. According to Lankton, "Early in the spring and summer of 1913, the one-man drill galvanized the men, and membership in the WFM mushroomed from a thousand to about seven thousand."⁶³ The one-man drill caused an explosion in labor organization because it united

⁵⁸ WFM Convention Proceedings 1910-1911, Page 27, Western Federation of Miners Collection.

⁵⁹ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 64.

⁶⁰ Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 61.

⁶¹ Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 192.

⁶² Ben Goggin, "LA SACRA VERITA," September 9, 1913, *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

⁶³ Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 193.

unskilled and skilled workers and, consequently, new and old immigrant groups. The one-man drill united skilled and unskilled labor because it threatened to cut skilled miners' jobs in half while limiting the chances for unskilled trammers to be promoted into miners' jobs.⁶⁴ Uniting skilled and unskilled labor was essential to interethnic labor organization because it bridged the ethnic hierarchy that existed in underground jobs. Kaunonen and Goings argued the one-man drill caused "usually English- or German-speaking skilled workers, to confront capital and join ranks with their fellow workers."⁶⁵ The WFM capitalized by sending multiethnic labor organizers to unite workers who had been divided on ethnic lines.⁶⁶

WFM organizers took advantage of the discontent among workers caused by the one-man drill and utilized the infrastructure provided by immigrant communities to organize immigrants for social revolt in the 1913-14 strike. To organize Italians, the WFM sent two major Italian labor organizers to the Copper Country: Ben Goggin and Steve Oberto. Goggin and Oberto captivated Italians with their speeches and articles. According to Giovanna Cappo, "[Oberto] was called 'Red' because of his red hair, and he had these Italians so hypnotized that he was their God. They would have killed for him."⁶⁷ Although Cappo had negative memories of Oberto, it is clear his hold on the Italian community was strong and he was successful in his attempts to organize and galvanize the Italian community. Oberto and Goggin used the community infrastructure built by the Italian merchant class to organize Italian workers. An Italian-language advertisement in the October 14, 1913 issue of *Miners' Bulletin* promoted a speech by Oberto at the Torreano Hall in Laurium on October 15.⁶⁸ James Torreano was a prominent Italian merchant and active community member.⁶⁹ Interethnic organizers such as Oberto and Goggin also took advantage of local newspapers, especially foreign-language newspapers, which published schedules for speakers and parades held at local social halls. According to Kaunonen and Goings, "The publication of speakers' schedules and parades was perhaps one of the newspaper's most important functions. It literally got union folks on the same page regarding collective action among the Copper Country's striking mineworkers."⁷⁰ Therefore, interethnic organizers built their organizational efforts using the community infrastructure built by the merchant class. The merchant class, in turn, became integral to organizational efforts leading up to and during the strike.

Using the community infrastructure built by Italian merchants and other ethnic groups, labor organizers had successfully galvanized the Copper Country laborers by July 1913 when the strike was called. As interethnic labor organization reached its peak in early 1913, 98 percent of Copper Country WFM members voted for a potential strike.⁷¹ The strike was begun on July 23,

⁶⁴ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 221.

⁶⁵ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 113.

⁶⁶ Kaunonen and Goings, 98.

⁶⁷ Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

⁶⁸ *Miners' Bulletin*, October 14, 1913, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

⁶⁹ Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 33.

⁷⁰ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 121.

⁷¹ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 222.

1913 after the mining companies refused to meet with WFM representatives.⁷² The workers and the WFM demanded the abolition of the one-man drill, higher wages, improved working conditions, and, most importantly, official representation of workers by the WFM.⁷³ The workers struck against the advice of the WFM, which only had \$23,000 in the bank at the time of the strike.⁷⁴ However, the lines had already been drawn and WFM President Charles Moyer led the workers against the mining companies who were led by Calumet and Hecla President and General Manager James MacNaughton.⁷⁵ The strike divided the Italian community by dividing the Italian merchant class who served as community leaders. Some merchants allied with the mining companies to defend their economic interests while others remained committed to the miners in defense of ethnic solidarity. The division, in turn, left the community weak and unable to defend itself during the strike.

The 1913-14 Strike: Merchants, Miners and Division Among the Italians

The strike quickly divided the Italian community forcing Italian merchants to make a choice between supporting Italian workers and joining the companies in opposition to the strike. Due to the prominence of Italian merchants in community leadership, they quickly realized they had to choose a side; Italian merchants were forced to choose between supporting their laboring compatriots and supporting the companies, which provided valuable stability and development in the region. On the pro-company side, merchants such as Cesare Lucchesi rallied behind August Marinelli and the pro-company stance promoted in his newspaper *Il Minatore Italiano* (The Italian Miner). On the pro-labor side, merchants such as Antonio Federighi, D. Giannerini, Carlo Macchi, and Paul Tommei rallied behind the organizational efforts of Ben Goggin and Steve Oberto often writing articles and purchasing advertisements in the WFM published *Miners' Bulletin*. Marinelli, due to his position as editor of *Il Minatore Italiano*, quickly became the most infamous pro-company Italian merchant. Goggin, in his Italian-language articles in the *Miners' Bulletin*, relentlessly attacked and insulted Marinelli for his pro-company views. The *Miners' Bulletin* published a series of Italian-language articles titled "SI CERCA" in which they listed and insulted Italian scabs and pro-company merchants often using the series to further insult Marinelli. In a "SI CERCA" article from December 2, 1913, the *Miners' Bulletin* wrote, "If the companies happen to be in debt to him for some item, what system does Mr. Marinelli use to collect checks from them?"⁷⁶ The *Miners' Bulletin* contributed to division within the Italian community by polarizing the community through their divisive and insulting articles targeted at pro-company Italian community members. Cesare Lucchesi was another target of the *Miners' Bulletin*. After the strike broke out, Lucchesi supported the companies by working as a deputy

⁷² Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 222.

⁷³ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 111.

⁷⁴ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 225.

⁷⁵ Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 106.

⁷⁶ "SI CERCA," December 2, 1913, *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

for the Copper Range Company.⁷⁷ In an Italian-language article published in the *Miners' Bulletin* in March 1914, Lucchesi was attacked and insulted along with other pro-company Italians for their pro-company actions. The newspaper wrote, "Amerigo Santori, Domenico Zana, Cesare Lucchesi, all from south range, are three loyal dogs, or better sycophants, of the companies."⁷⁸ Despite the divisiveness and insulting articles published in the *Miners' Bulletin*, many Italian merchants continued to support the paper by purchasing advertisements and writing articles.

Italian merchants who supported the workers did not shy away from the divisiveness of the *Miners' Bulletin*, contributing to the division within the community through their virulent articles in the paper and financial support of the paper. Antonio Federighi was one of the Italian merchants who supported the strike. Federighi was directly involved with the WFM since he issued and signed WFM membership cards, demonstrating the involved role of Italian merchants in organizing labor.⁷⁹ Federighi also supported the *Miners' Bulletin* by purchasing advertisements for his grocery store, which he operated out of the Vertin Bros Department Store.⁸⁰ Other Italian merchants such as Giannerini, Macchi, and Tommei supported the *Miners' Bulletin* more directly by writing articles in the paper without shying away from the divisiveness of the paper. In an article titled "Corragio Fratelli" (Courage Brothers) from September 11, 1913, Giannerini threatened Italian scabs with ostracization from the community. He wrote, "In conclusion, [a scab] is a danger to the wellbeing of the working-class, and will be chased out from any society and will never find a friend outside of their class in any place."⁸¹ Giannerini was advocating for solidarity in the Italian community, but in doing so, contributed to the division within the community by threatening ostracization for scabs from the mutual benefit societies. However, other Italian merchants who supported the strike, such as Natale Pucci, sought to use the autonomy granted by the mutual benefit societies to foster cooperation within the community. In an announcement in the October 21, 1913 article of *Miners' Bulletin*, Pucci declared the Hancock chapter of La Società Lega Cittadina would support striking members by waiving their monthly dues until the conclusion of the strike.⁸² Although Pucci attempted to build cooperation and solidarity within the community, the divisiveness of the strike was too strong and division defined the community.

The division visible within the merchant class came to define the Italian community leading to the defeat of solidarity amongst Italians and, consequently, the weakening of the Italian community. The division within the Italian merchant class was reflected throughout the entire community even dividing close family and friends. According to Giovanna Cappelletti, "The Italians went on strike and they were terrible. Brother didn't speak to brother, and sister didn't

⁷⁷ Gelsomina "Jennie" Lucchesi Family History Notes, KEWE 47408, Box 2, Folder 20, Lucchesi Family Papers, Keweenaw National Historical Park, Calumet, Michigan.

⁷⁸ "SCABBIA – SCABBIOSI – SCABBIERIA," March 12, 1914, *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

⁷⁹ Western Federation of Miners Membership Cards, MS-553, Box 1, Folder 2, Western Federation of Miners Collection, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

⁸⁰ *Miners' Bulletin*, October 11, 1913, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

⁸¹ D. Giannerini, September 11, 1913, "Coraggio Fratelli," *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

⁸² Natale Pucci, "AVVISO," October 21, 1913, *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

speak to sister. If somebody went to work, they were scabs.”⁸³ The idea of solidarity amongst Italians that had come to define Italian community building was defeated by the divisiveness of the strike since the strike had even defeated solidarity within families. Solidarity was replaced by fear and hate. Louis Lombardi remembered his father, a surface worker at the mines, would bring a revolver to work during the strike. He said, “He never used [the revolver] or got into trouble with it but he was scared.”⁸⁴ The fear felt by Lombardi’s father was felt throughout, preventing solidarity and cooperation in the community. Consequently, the Italian community was not able to stand up for itself in the face of pro-company old immigrant communities.

The 1913-14 Strike: Division Among “Old” and “New” Immigrants

Similar to the breakdown in unity of Italians above and below ground, the ethnic divide that had existed in the mining community before the strike quickly rose to the surface when the old immigrant communities abandoned the strike and joined the companies. The brief unity between the old and new immigrants quickly dissolved soon after the strike began. In early October, 98 percent of Cornish employees had returned to work and between 80 and 90 percent of Irish, Scottish, and Scandinavian employees had also returned to work.⁸⁵ Therefore, it is clear the old immigrants quickly gave up support of the strike. As a result, the ethnic divisions returned as the old immigrants allied with the companies against the new immigrant groups. While the old immigrants allied with the mining companies, the mining companies formed a pro-company community organization called the Citizens’ Alliance.⁸⁶ The Citizens’ Alliance provided the old immigrant communities with an outlet to organize a pro-company resistance to the strike within the communities while the new immigrant communities came together in the face of conflict.

New immigrant communities remained committed to the strike by expressing solidarity across ethnic lines. Two Croatian men, Steve Putrich and Alois Tijan, were killed by company-hired Waddell-Mahon gun thugs at a Croatian boardinghouse on August 14, the same day the Champion mine reopened.⁸⁷ The striking Italians felt as if two of their own had been killed. In an Italian-language article in the *Miners’ Bulletin*, Ben Goggin announced the killing of Putrich and Tijan referring to them as “confratelli” (brothers).⁸⁸ Shortly after the killings of Putrich and Tijan, the pro-company Citizens’ Alliance was formed with 5,236 members who demanded the expulsion of the WFM from the region.⁸⁹

The Citizens’ Alliance gained support when Cornish residents Arthur and Harry Jane and Thomas Dally were struck and killed by bullets shot into their boardinghouse on December 7.⁹⁰

⁸³ Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

⁸⁴ Oral History Interview of Louis Lombardi Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

⁸⁵ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 229.

⁸⁶ Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 201.

⁸⁷ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 228.

⁸⁸ Ben Goggin, August 23, 1913, “LE VITTIME,” *Miners’ Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

⁸⁹ Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 201.

⁹⁰ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 235.

The Citizens' Alliance quickly blamed the killings on the WFM and, according to Lankton, "drew strength from strong undercurrents of ethnic discrimination and hatred, which now surfaced."⁹¹ The old immigrant groups united in the Citizens' Alliance while the new immigrants were represented by the WFM and the strike against the mining companies devolved into an ethnic war in the mining community. Since cooperation and solidarity within the Italian community had been defeated, they did not stand a chance against the Citizen's Alliance or the old immigrant groups who supported it.

The interethnic war continued through December. As a Christmas Eve gathering for the strikers and their children at the Italian Hall was ending, a stampede for the door ensued killing 74 attendees of which 60 were children.⁹² Of the 74 dead nearly 50 were Finns, 20 were Croatians or Slovenians, and 3 were Italians.⁹³ The WFM blamed the tragedy on the Citizens' Alliance, claiming a Citizens' Alliance member deliberately yelled "Fire!" to cause a stampede.⁹⁴ The truth of the claim remains unknown, but the Italian Hall Tragedy highlights the ethnic division within the community since Eastern and Southern European children died while their families condemned the Citizens' Alliance. By the time the strikers' children were crushed in the hallways of the Italian Hall, the Italian community had already been defeated. In early October, 1913, Calumet & Hecla reported 50% of their Italian workers had returned to work.⁹⁵ Between October and the Christmas Eve Italian Hall Tragedy, Italians had slowly returned to work. The divided Italian community had been defeated by the more united Citizens' Alliance. As the tensions of the winter thawed, the WFM knew the strike was over and cut strike benefits, causing the remaining 2,500 strikers to call off the strike on Easter Sunday 1914.⁹⁶

Conclusion

The Italian community never recovered from the division of the strike. Giovanna Cappo remembered Italians leaving the Copper Country during and after the strike. She said, "There wasn't much they could do, so they left, and that's how the Italians lost out. They left the community."⁹⁷ Italian laborers left and headed south for industrial midwestern cities such as Detroit and Kenosha. Cappo claimed Copper Country Italians who left during the strike found employment manufacturing mattresses at the Simmons Factory in Kenosha.⁹⁸ Ercole Barsotti remembered Italians leaving to work for Ford in Detroit. He said, "Ford came out with the \$5 per day wage and that's what brought them down there."⁹⁹ Therefore, the defeat of the Italian

⁹¹ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 235.

⁹² Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 237.

⁹³ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 237.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 229.

⁹⁶ Larry D. Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 205.

⁹⁷ Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

⁹⁸ Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

⁹⁹ Oral History Interview of Ercole Barsotti Transcript, October 22, 1982, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

community in the 1913-14 strike marked the defeat of a vibrant, booming, and cohesive Italian community in the Copper Country. Although victorious in the strike, the mining companies never fully recovered from the strike and crashed after World War I. Without the mining companies, the Italian community in turn had no chance of returning to the vibrancy and cooperation that had defined it before the strike. The old immigrant groups did not fare any better since the mining companies “effectively halved their force of miners.”¹⁰⁰ The mining companies’ crash after World War I prevented the old immigrant communities from ever regaining the standing they held before the strike.

The ethnic divide, which had been developing since new immigrant groups began to arrive in large numbers around 1890, reached a violent climax in the strike of 1913. Discriminatory company paternalism and ethnic discrimination from the old immigrant groups caused the ethnic divide between the new and old immigrant groups. The one-man drill initially united old and new immigrant groups because it targeted skilled and unskilled labor equally. However, once the strike began, the cooperation between the new and old immigrant groups quickly dissolved, causing the new and old immigrant groups to become rivals once again. The old immigrant groups united in the Citizens’ Alliance while the new immigrants were represented by the WFM. Therefore, the strike became an ethnic battle rather than a struggle for purely economic gains. The new immigrant groups could not compete with the old immigrant groups since the new immigrant communities were marred by division, which was especially visible within the Italian community. The new immigrant groups were defeated, leaving their communities divided and destroyed. The Italian community was no exception since it never recovered from the strike. Italian merchants and laborers alike were both left without the vibrant and powerful community they had before the strike.

Despite the turbulence and emotion that defined Italian community, its story reached an anticlimactic conclusion; the laborers who constituted the largest group of Italian community members realized their opportunities in the Copper Country were behind them after the strike. The community had failed to commit to its defining value: unity. Instead, it was clear individual community members had their own personal interests and would abandon unity when conflict arose. Consequently, the Italian community, which had been building strength and autonomy since the first Italian pioneers settled in the Copper Country, was left divided and weak during the strike. Italian workers were unable to defend themselves against the old immigrant groups and mining companies that had discriminated against them for so long. The Italians were defeated in the strike, so their workers left, forced to start over in some other industrial center.

I now return to the question I posed in the introduction: what role did the Italian community play in organizing labor for the 1913-14 Copper Country Strike? The Italian community facilitated the organization of labor by creating the infrastructure utilized by the WFM to organize Italians alongside the other new immigrant groups. Once the strike began and the new and old immigrants divided once again, the Italian community and the other new immigrant communities became the centers of labor organization and the struggle against the

¹⁰⁰ Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 241.

mining companies. The Italian community was involved in a process of give and take between itself and the old immigrant communities. The Italian community first developed in response to exclusion from company paternalism and ethnic discrimination from the old immigrant communities. The power Italians gained from their community threatened old immigrant groups and the mining companies causing the ethnic divide to grow and the traditional employer-employee paternal bonds to dissolve. Consequently, Italians used the social, ideological, and physical infrastructure of the Italian community to resist the mining companies and old immigrant groups. As Italian resistance grew, the WFM sent interethnic labor organizers to unite the new immigrant groups, including the Italians, and to use their combined resistance to confront the mining companies and old immigrant communities in the 1913-14 strike. However, the Italian merchants who built the community were divided by the strike and consequently that lack of unity caused the community to collapse while confronting the mining companies. Equally importantly, the unity of the “old” and “new” immigrant groups broke down and killings inflamed the situation causing the new and old immigrant groups to become rivals once again. Brief unity dissolved into animosity, both between “new” and “old” immigrant groups and among the Italians above and below the ground.

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