

GREENBUSH: A PLACE FOR ITALIANS IN MADISON

Dr. Loren Eadie discusses the origins of Italians in Madison, and the UW-Madison Italian departments relations with the Italian community in Greenbush — still a vibrant neighborhood today

By Zehra Topbas

At the onset of Italy's unification until the end of World War I, 14 million Italians came to the United States passing through Ellis Island and setting up Italian enclaves in New York, Chicago, Boston or New Orleans. Still, however, many Italian immigrants made their way to Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha where they were employed in factories.

Dr. Loren Eadie, director of the Italian Language Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, discusses the history of Italian migration to Madison and the greater Wisconsin.

"Lots of people from the North of Italy came to Wisconsin, and there was this large group that came from almost one town that set up the town of Genoa. So it's interesting how you have, like, in the town of Genoa, Wisconsin what was basically an Italian enclave from the north of Italy," Eadie said.

Most Italians settled in the Greenbush neighborhood of Madison which is centrally located and just west of downtown. In fact, the "Bush" was originally a swamp until land was put down to create more houses.

"It was essentially the neighborhood that was basically like the slums or tenement neighborhood, meant to house all of the influx of people coming to Madison, and keeping them, you know, away from the Madison aristocracy around the university and the capital area," Eadie said.

A large number came from Sicily and southern parts of Italy. However, little is known about their initial settlements. "It was not necessarily a source of glory for the city... they were the slums," Eadie said. "And it's not really until after World War Two, that you start seeing that area being highlighted as a source of cultural and social pride."

"Hopefully, it'll still remain a vibrant element of the Italian community"

The Italian Workmen's Club, one of the oldest active Italian clubs in the U.S., became not just a location for literal Italian workmen, but a meeting point and cultural center for those of Italian heritage. "You start seeing it becoming the site of, you know, events like celebrating Italian flag day and celebrating different holidays," Eadie said.



Dr. Loren Eadie, director of the Italian language program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

In the 40s and 50s Madison saw the establishment of the "Spaghetti Corners". "It's essentially the corner of Park and Regent where they had a bunch of different spaghetti or Italian restaurants. The one that lasted the longest was Josie's," Eadie said. The spaghetti house was established by Sicilian immigrant Josie Magnasco who then passed it onto his daughter Joanne.

The Italian Workmen's Club and Italian department at UW-Madison have done several events together over the years. The club offers Italian classes for members of the IWC and people in the community, some of which Dr. Eadie has taught. "One of my colleagues, Ernesto Livorni, did poetry readings there. A lot of their members will come to our Cena Italiana that we would hold in the spring. We used to do cooking demonstrations and classes there," Eadie said.

However, as many of the club's members get older, Dr. Eadie worries for the future of the club "Hopefully, it'll still remain a vibrant element of the Italian community. But you know what, with life changes, and people pass by to say how much of it will remain as vibrant as it was, say, 20 years ago?" Eadie said.



Italian Workmen's Club at 914 Regent St. Photo by Italian Workmen's Club.