

FROM NAVVIES TO CONTRACTORS: THE HISTORY OF  
VINCENZO AND GIOVANNI VELTRI, FOUNDERS OF  
R. F. WELCH LIMITED  
1885 - 1931



by

John Potestio

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## ABSTRACT

At the turn of the Twentieth Century, thousands of Italians, woefully improvident, emigrated to North America to find employment and ultimately to make enough money to enable them to return home and start a new life. Many of these itinerant workers became navvies and remained so for years. A few were able to surmount considerable difficulties to become entrepreneurs.

The purpose of this study is to trace the history of a railway building company founded by two southern Italian navvies who turned entrepreneurs in the late 1800's. Because of the nature of the company and the cultural background of Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri, it became necessary to explore the life of Italian railway workers within the framework of the receiving society. The examination of this milieu sheds some light on extant work on padronism (R. Harney's work comes to mind) and railway construction (E. Bradwin's experiences in Canada's railways provide a unique parallel).

The thesis also furnishes additional insight into the role of the small construction companies in building railways in Canada. This field has been neglected by historians because of their inclination to research the more popular aspects of railway building. This work should stimulate additional research in the role played by the few individuals who were able to overcome considerable cultural restrictions. In the process we should gain some understanding of an important component of our history.

## PREFACE

I became interested in the life of the navy in the 1950's when, as a young immigrant of fifteen I went to work on a summer job for R. F. Welch Ltd. Working as a cookie on an extra-gang was an experience totally alien to my upbringing. The polyglot, multinational world of the extra-gang, where Italians, Finns, Portuguese, French-Canadians, Ukrainians, Native people and Canadians<sup>1</sup> worked side by side, was totally different from the undiversified, conservative, agrarian milieu in which I grew up. I could not then appreciate the subtle workings of that strange society where road-masters - the czars of the section and extra-gangs - were feared by the many whose loss of a job would have had dire consequences. Nor could I understand the ethnic hierarchy which I would subsequently appreciate thanks to the works of John Porter, Anthony Richmond and others.<sup>2</sup> On the railway one had to keep his occupational as well as his ethnic place.

Through the years (I worked for nine consecutive summers on the railway) I perceived and experienced the harsh life of the railway

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<sup>1</sup>It is pointless here to enter into a discussion of the definition of a Canadian or a Canadian identity. I wish merely to point out that in the minds of immigrants, there existed a difference amongst "Canadians," "French-Canadians," and "Native people."

<sup>2</sup>John Porter's The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), is still one of the best works on social mobility, the economic and social elite and class structure in Canada. Canadian Society, Social Perspectives is also an invaluable source for an understanding of Canadian society, particularly such contributions as John Porter, "The Economic Elite and the Social Structure in Canada," Anthony Richmond, "Social Mobility and Immigrants in Canada." and William Petersen, "The Ideological Background to Canada's Immigration." Bernard R. Blishen, Frank E. Jones, Kaspar D. Naegele, John Porter (Editors), Canadian Society, Social Perspectives, Third Edition, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968).

worker. It was natural for me to feel empathy for that mass of humanity for whom the wilderness was not a pleasurable experience but rather something to be endured, and who had to tolerate deplorable working conditions because the immigrants of the 1950's who worked on the railways had few rights and little recourse to anything which might improve their lot. In retrospect, one looks on those difficult days with nostalgia - the most effective way of forgetting one's past hardships. Reality, however, was lamentable. When gangs were stationed miles away from any community for prolonged periods of time, the navy appeared more as a troglodyte than as a product of Western civilization.

For the first summer, working for R. F. Welch meant nothing to me. There was no way I could have linked that name to the Veltri family, one of the best known families in the town in which I was born. In the summer of 1955, once again, I applied for the same job at the company's head-office in Port Arthur. It was at this time that the name Welch became Veltri as I was introduced to a gentleman who, I was told, owned the company. His name was Ralph Veltri. In years to come, I met that gentleman again under different circumstances. It was he and his friend, confidant and assistant-manager, Frank Jacino, who stimulated my interest in the inception and operation of a contracting company founded by two Southern Italian peasant brothers: James (Vincenzo) and John (Giovanni) Veltri.

Perhaps it was a stroke of good fortune that John Veltri, Ralph's father, had a sense of posterity and kept many of the documents and memorabilia connected with the company. In 1957, at the age of ninety, he even dictated his memoirs. Ralph Veltri had frequently expressed a desire that some day someone would appreciate the significance

of his uncle's and his father's efforts. Ironically, while he was alive, no one undertook the task. Still, Frank Jacino maintained his friend's wish that the company's records serve a historical end. These documents were turned over to me in the hope that the remarkable story of two contadini (peasants) of the Old World who made good in the New, would be told.

My experience with the railway workers of the 1950's served me in good stead in appreciating the hardships of the navy at the turn of the century. This is not to say that, half a century later, conditions on Canadian railways had not changed. Mine was an appreciation of the personal sacrifices which, in the 1950's as at the turn of the century, were inevitable. The navy had always found himself at the bottom of the social ladder. To overcome such a handicap requires an indomitable spirit. To be sure, many succumbed to social injustices as well as to a harsh environment. Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri rose above them.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In telling the story of two individuals who lived in a society far different than the present, one becomes painfully aware of Voltaire's charge that history is a pack of tricks played upon the dead. Despite this admonition (or rather because of it) I have attempted to reconstruct the portion of the Veltri brothers' lives which, somewhat accidentally, became public through their business records and the memoirs of the younger brother.

I believe I have exercised some caution in order to minimize a rather real temptation on my part to create heroes. Given the circumstances of my birth and my upbringing, I suppose I could have been praised by some and forgiven by others had I done that. But I preferred to earn the respect of those who for many years have nourished my intellectual growth and have implanted in me the seed of historical curiosity. I refer, of course, to the dedicated people of the History Department at Lakehead University. To them I owe much. My gratitude also goes to Dr. Ernest Epp, my advisor. I am indebted to him not only for his expert advice but also for his tactfully phrased suggestions. There is nothing more reassuring and more challenging than the knowledge that a few slashes of the red pen can put a halt to a galloping ego. Even more gratifying to me is the friendship of Ernest Epp. Sharing viewpoints does indeed lead to fellowship. The prompt and courteous service of the Library staff at Lakehead University must also be acknowledged. One wonders whether historical research is possible without their assistance. I am also grateful to Frank Jacino who not only made the Welch records available to me but also gave me invaluable insight into the more recent



history of the Welch operation.

I should also like to express my gratitude to my family - my wife in particular - whose encouragement and support made my task much easier.

## GLOSSARY

- Bracciante - day-labourer.
- Camorra - racket; fraudulent scheme.
- Campanilismo - the term derives from the word campana (bell). It implies that one's allegiance is only to the people within the area which can be reached by the sound of the village church bell.
- Carbiniere - Italian state police.
- Comparaggio - a relationship between two families deriving from the act of an individual becoming the god-father of a child.
- Compare - god-father.
- Contadino - peasant; farm-worker.
- Latifondi - large estates owned in many instances by absentee landlords.
- Latifondisti - owners of latifondi; big landowners.
- Mafia - Sicilian secret criminal society having complex origin and significance.
- Mezzadria - a permanent share tenancy on a fifty-fifty basis (or similar agreed share basis) in which a compact and fixed holding (podere) with farmstead and all farm equipment are leased to the tenant by the owner.  
R. E. Dickinson, The Population Problem of Southern Italy (n.p.: Syracuse University Press, 1955), p. 58.
- Mezzadro - share tenant on a mezzadria.
- Mezzogiorno - a term to denote the South of Italy; literally, the "land of the noon sun."
- Padrone - used in this paper to mean boss, master.
- Paesano - of (or from) the (same) village, country.

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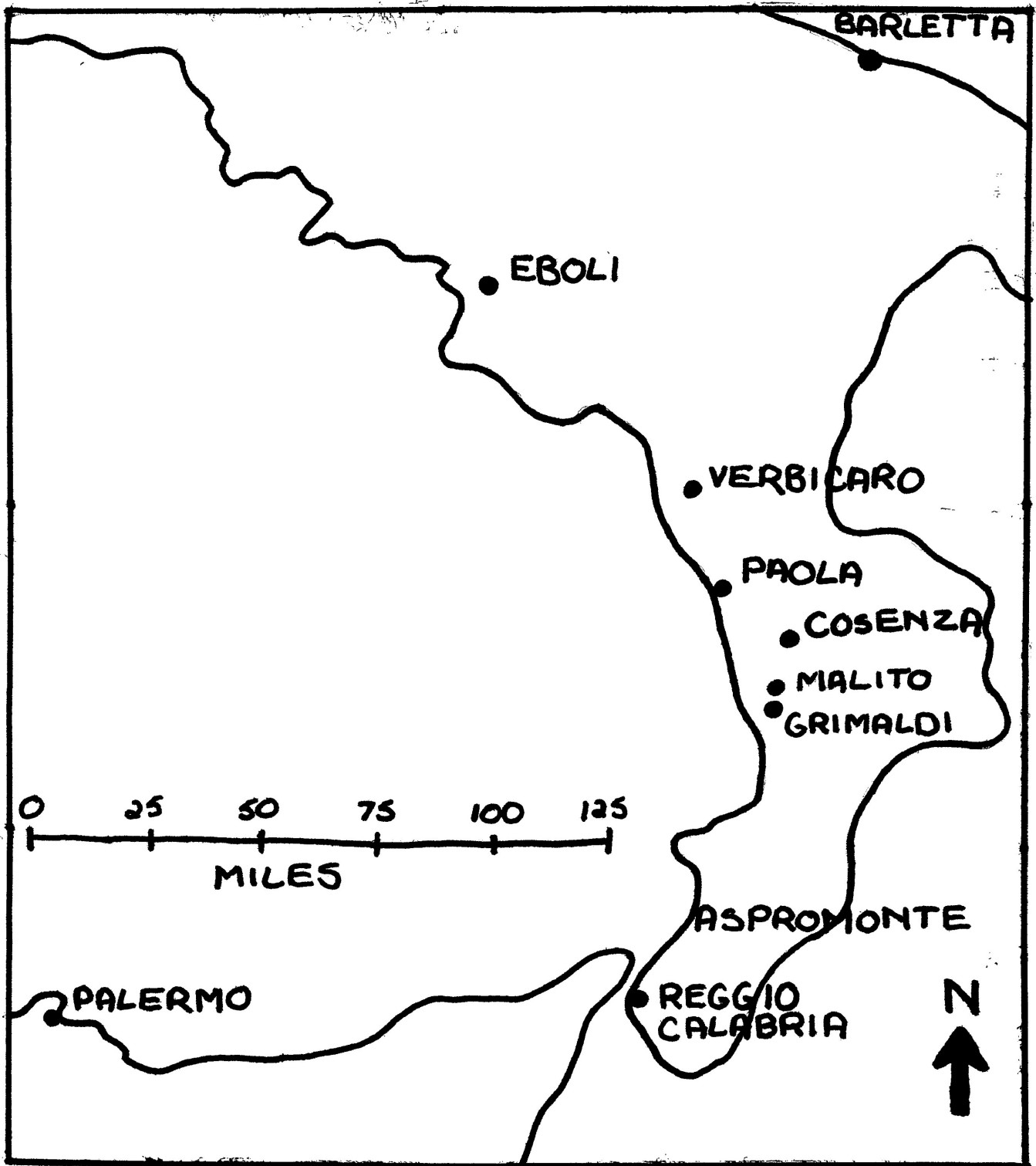
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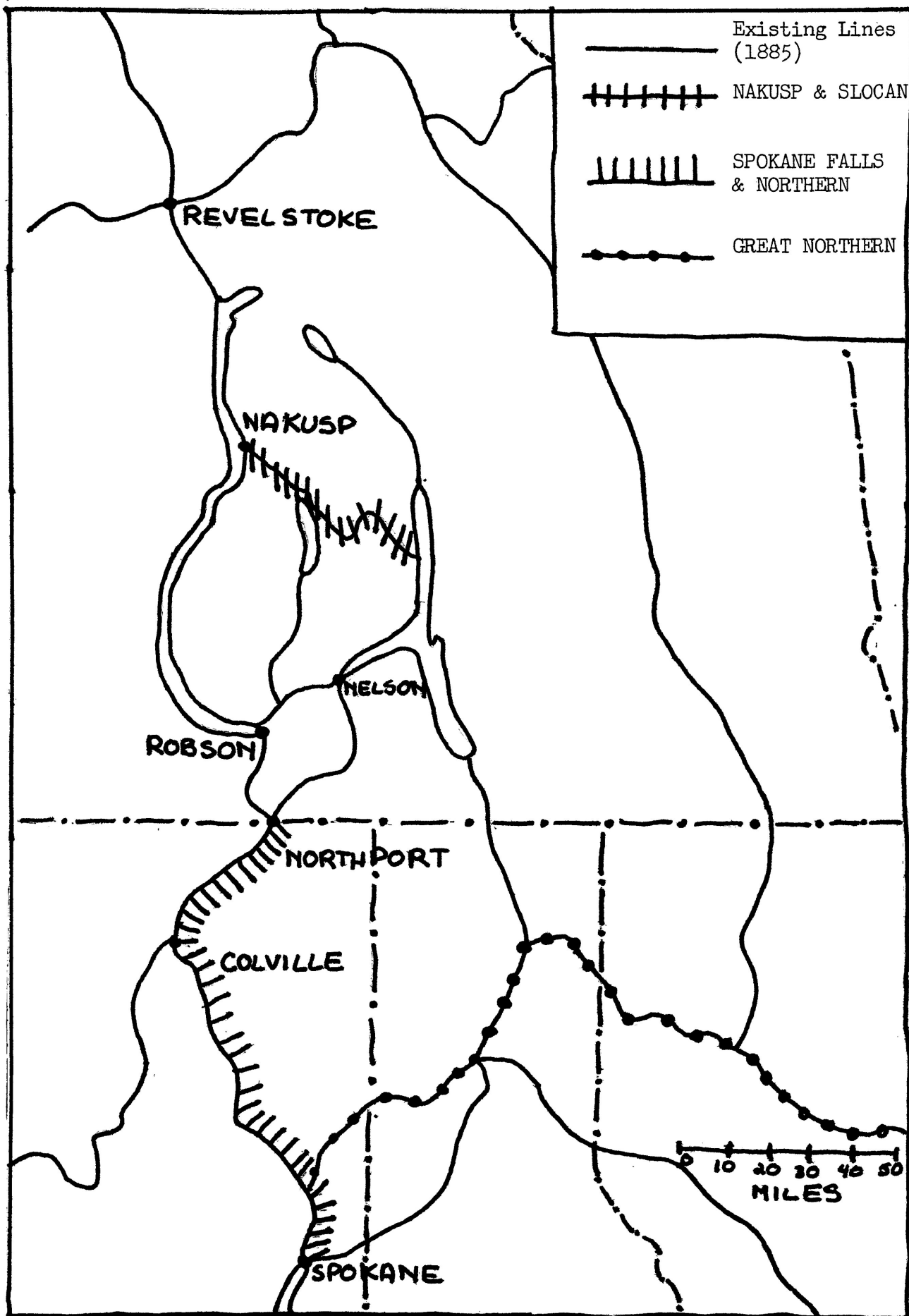
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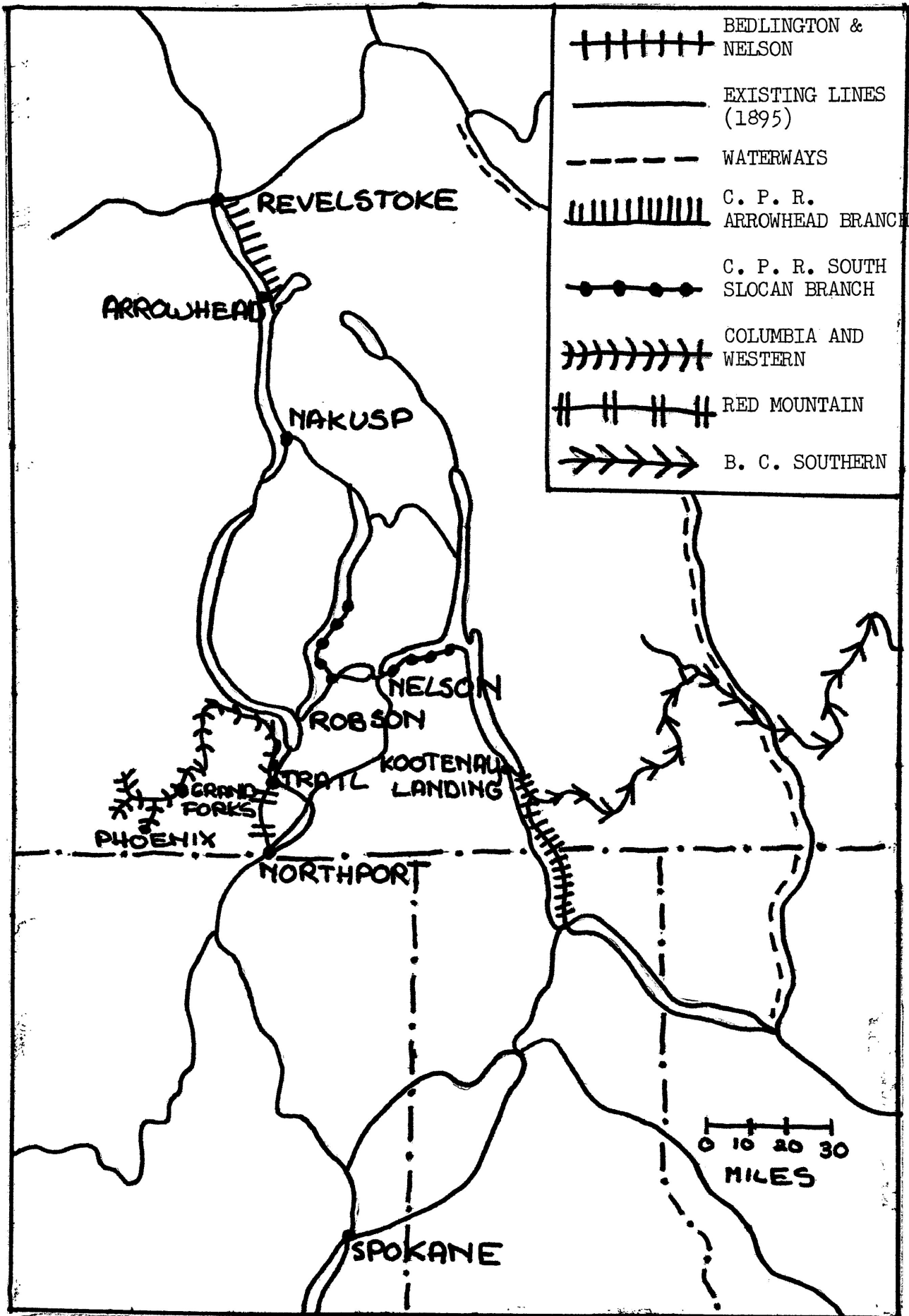
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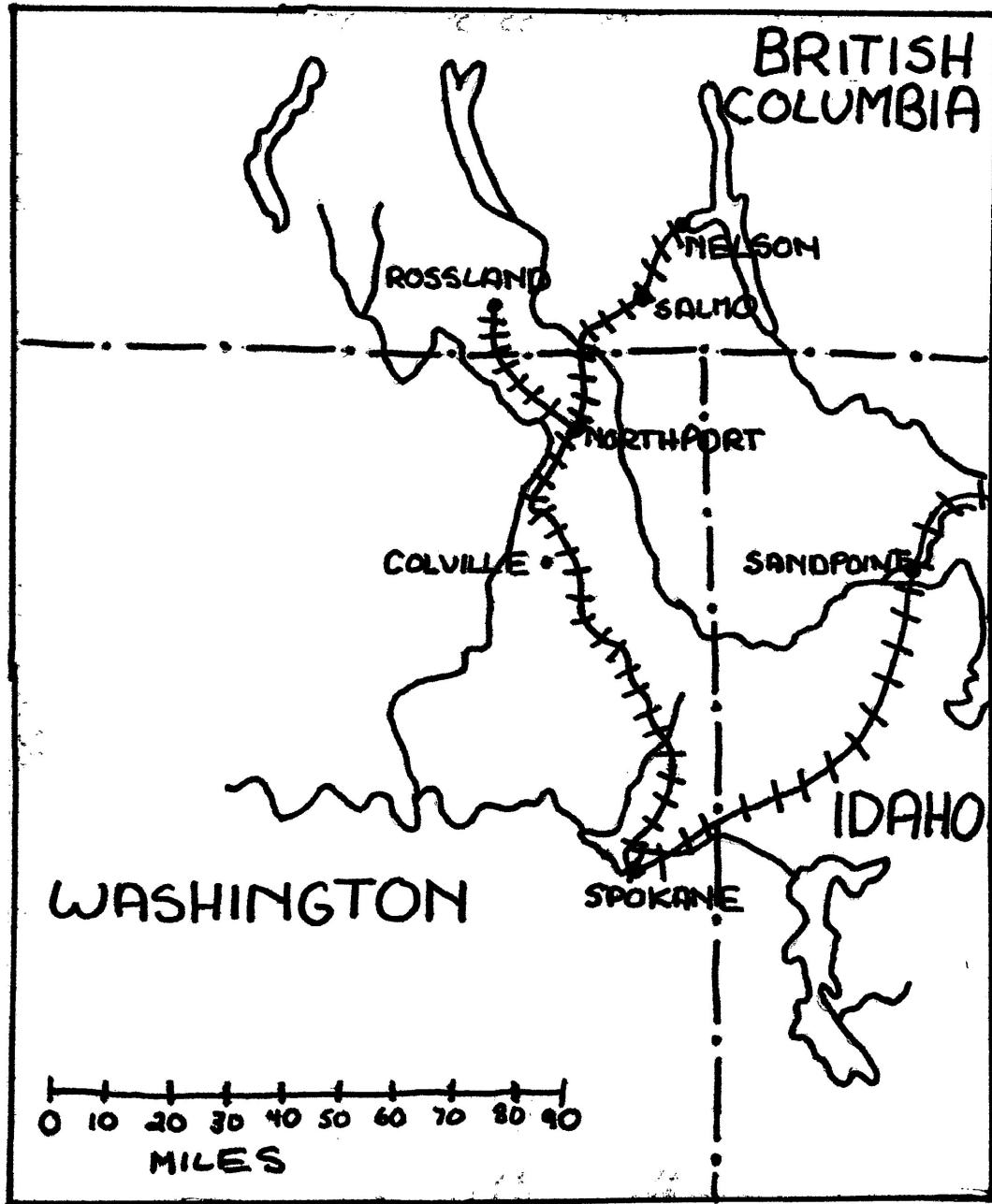
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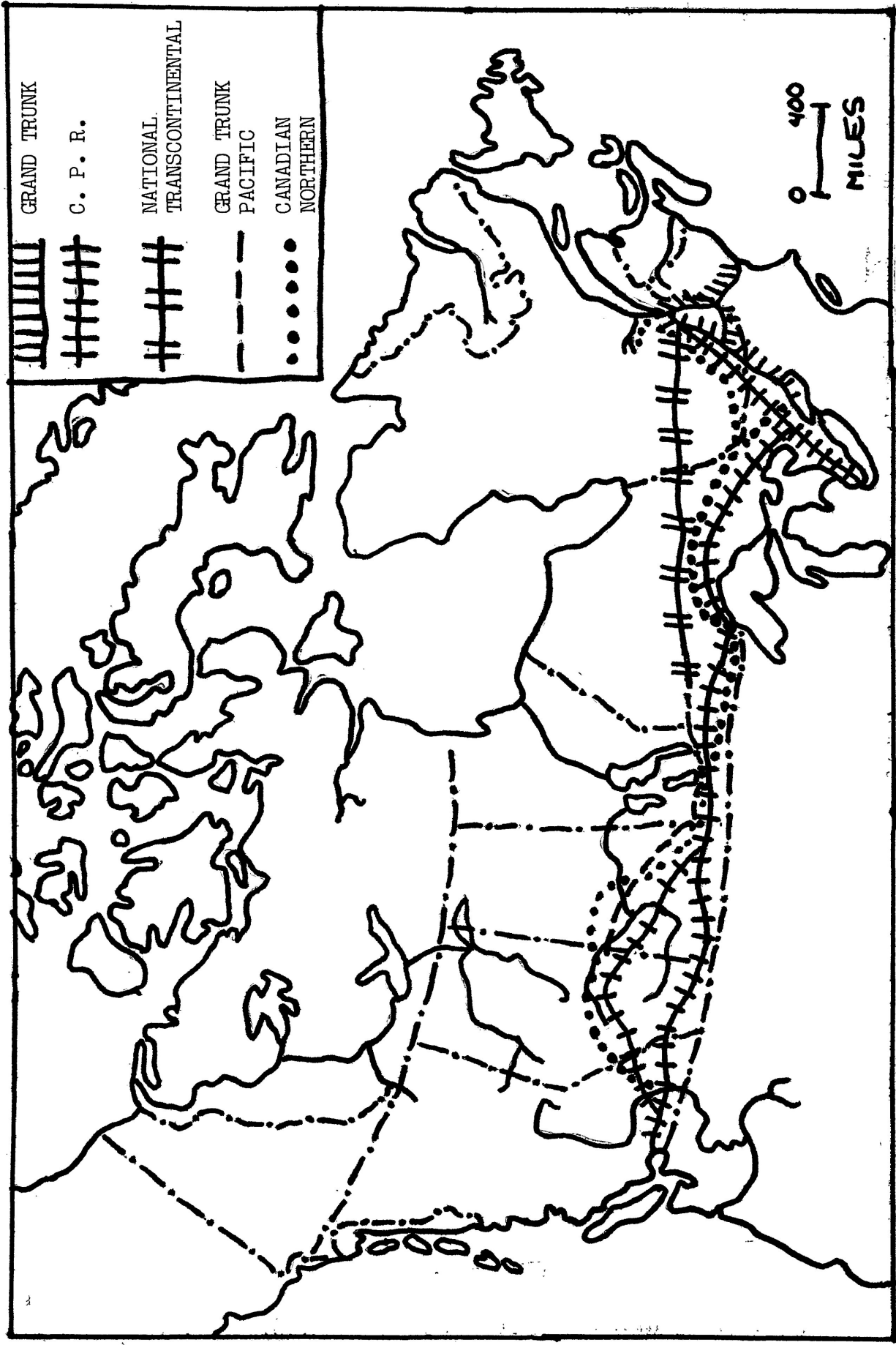
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Adapted from J. Fahey, Inland Empire, p. 77

Map #4



CANADA'S MAJOR RAILWAYS

## CHAPTER I

### ITALIAN SOCIETY AND THE CAUSES OF EMIGRATION

#### 1. Grimaldi: A Microcosm of Southern Italian Society at the turn of the Century.

The village of Grimaldi, where the Veltri brothers were born, lies about 30 kilometers south of Cosenza, one of the regional capitals of Calabria. In many ways Grimaldi was, at the turn of the Century, typical of the socio-economic conditions of Southern Italy. Like most inland towns in the South, it was built high on an Apennine hillside so that its inhabitants could protect themselves against malaria and insecurity and have easier access to drinking water.<sup>1</sup> Its inaccessibility was at once its strength and weakness for, in order to seek protection from disease and crime, the people had to endure the isolation which made these small communities impervious to new ideas. The nondescript nature of a town like Grimaldi was both a physical and spiritual reality. It was not difficult to mistake Grimaldi for Malito, Altilia or any other surrounding town. Nor could Grimaldesi have claimed renown in any field of human endeavour. The town's socio-economic make-up was hardly conducive to the amelioration of one's condition. For most of the villagers contributing to the development of society was an academic question as one's energies were consumed not by living but by surviving. Grimaldese folklore does claim a

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed account of peasant agglomeration see Anton Blok, "South Italian Agro-towns," in Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 11, (Cambridge University Press, 1969), passim.

famous doctor who cured a Bourbon king in Naples, however, while, even today, intellectuals allude to the Grimaldese, Raffaele Mileto, who was a regional delegate at the First International. There might also have been some Bakuninist-inspired stirrings in the 1880's.<sup>2</sup> Current research in the more recent history of Grimaldi has revealed some rather interesting developments. It appears that the town displayed republican traditions. Most of the people were contadini, though the town did have some latifondisti and mezzadri, a few of whom were sufficiently wealthy to be counted amongst the leading families of Grimaldi. There is also some evidence that the Grimaldesi participated in the 1848 rebellions led by some Carbonari from the nearby town of Altilia. The participation in the revolution was inspired by socio-economic reasons. There were some violent outbursts and a few people were killed, but the most celebrated incident was the planting of lupine seeds in the town square in order to prevent the "nobles" from taking their daily stroll in their favourite place. The unification of Italy caused no real change in the lives of the people. For most of the townspeople there was no significant difference between the Bourbons and the Piedmontese.

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<sup>2</sup>Historical accounts of the socio-economic evolution of Grimaldi and its surrounding area are nearly non-existent. Any explanation on this topic is, therefore, tentative and speculative.

It should be remembered that Bakunin enjoyed, for some time, a considerable following in Italy. For a more complete account of Bakuninism in Italy see Seton-Watson, L'Italia dal liberalismo al fascismo, 1870-1925 (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1973) pp. 81-85. D. L. Horowitz also wrote: "(Anarchism) did have considerable appeal in the rural and urban areas in the south and north central Italy which were economically backward." D. L. Horowitz, The Italian Labour Movement (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 23.

After unification, Grimaldi remained a closed, agrarian town with a small local market which provided an opportunity to exchange chestnuts, figs, and grains. These agrarian exchanges were responsible for the development of rudimentary banks and mutual aid societies which had Mazzinian and socialist undertones, though few people understood Mazzinianism or socialism.<sup>3</sup>

The economic conditions which caused the exodus from Grimaldi were similar for all regions of the mezzogiorno.<sup>4</sup> Seventy or eighty years ago - and even today for that matter - one would have been hard-pressed to find an explanation for the economic existence of Grimaldi (or any other surrounding village). The terrain was unsuited for agriculture, and its elevation, 650 metres above sea level, made it difficult to grow in any quantity, the fruits which abounded a mere 20 kilometres away along the coastline. The small quantity of agricultural produce, which was of the garden type, was grown primarily for family consumption.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>I am indebted to Raffaele Saccomanno of Grimaldi who, in 1973 and 1978, was gracious enough to allow me to use some of the information he has gathered on the history of Grimaldi. His research has not, as yet, been published.

<sup>4</sup>Analysis of the socio-economic make-up of the native village of the Veltri brothers can only provide a historical framework. It is logical, however, to attempt to determine the milieu in which Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri lived prior to their departure for North America. No individual, no matter his position in life, can be totally separated from his environment.

<sup>5</sup>"Our four or five acre farm" reported Vincenzo Brescia, "was not large enough to feed our family. We had to buy everything with the revenue generated by the produce of the land.... We had to buy oil, clothes, shoes...." Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia, August 8, 1979. Brescia was born in Grimaldi in 1898. He came to Canada in 1921. His father had worked for the Veltri brothers.

Some grains such as wheat, rye and corn were grown, but the amounts were hardly sufficient to make these crops economically important. The plots of land were also so small that efficient farming methods were almost impossible. To make matters worse, small landowners (as well as mezzadri), because of archaic traditions of inheritance, owned parcels of land which were spread over considerable distances. This fragmentation of land took a heavy toll on a contadino's time, for he had to walk exhausting distances in order to cultivate his land.<sup>6</sup>

Agriculture, therefore, was not profitable, nor did it provide reliable employment. The mezzadria was a system which favoured the landowner at the expense of the mezzadro. The contadino had to expend much time and energy, often fighting the vagaries of nature, in order to increase his yield. Yet, by contract, he was entitled only to one-third of what he was able to eke out from the soil. The other two-thirds went to the landowner who reaped much from a feudal system which he exploited to the limit. Any attempt to change the system proved fruitless, since landowners were aware that the supply of farm hands far exceeded the demand. Organized resistance to the mezzadria was thwarted by the state intervening on the side of the landowners. It was one more injustice perpetrated against the peasantry. The laws and institutions of the newly-found Italian state, patterned

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<sup>6</sup>For further information on this topic see Antonio Pucci, "The Italian Community in Fort William's East End in the Early Twentieth Century," M.A. Thesis, Lakehead University, 1977, p. 36.

after a "liberal formalism," concealed oppression with legality.<sup>7</sup> Commercial or business ventures were risky. The town's isolation, lack of adequate transportation and industries, had made the southern community a nearly cashless society.<sup>8</sup> Any money peasants and bracci-anti earned<sup>9</sup> went for the payment of services rendered by the middle class; those of doctors, lawyers, and notaries.

Very few possessed artisan skills which would be marketable. Of course, all these towns had their blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters, barbers and the like, but their skills and services were operative in a home market. Their clients were the townspeople and some contadini and herdsmen who lived on the outskirts of the village. The income derived from these sources was meagre indeed, particularly since most people paid for their services with whatever they could spare: chickens, eggs, vegetables, fruit, and frequently, labour.<sup>10</sup> In Grimaldi, such

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<sup>7</sup>Sidney Sonnino, "I contadini in Sicilia," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. I (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1972), p. 137. This work was first published in Florence in 1877. Translation is mine.

In 1914 Grimaldesi sharecroppers organized a demonstration aimed at changing the contract on chestnuts from one-third to one-half. The leaders were quickly disbanded. Vincenzo Brescia, one of the leaders, was spared a jail term by the fact that he was in army uniform. Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia.

<sup>8</sup>"In those days (early 1900's), if you had one lira in your pocket," Vincenzo Brescia related hyperbolically, "you were a millionaire." Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia.

<sup>9</sup>Grimaldi is surrounded with chestnut trees. Sharecroppers were able to earn some money by gathering chestnuts under the mezzadria system.

<sup>10</sup>Giovanni Verga, I Malavoglia (n.p.; Oscar Montadori, 1974), p. 112. First published in 1881. As one of Italy's great realist writers of the late Nineteenth Century and as a Southerner (Sicilian born), Verga has displayed a profound understanding of Southern Italian society.



practices were common as recently as two or three decades ago. On June 24, the day of the feast of St. John, there would be a great deal of bustle in the household of the most trustworthy doctor of the town. On that day, it was customary for the townspeople to honour the doctor's namesake with sundry gifts. In reality, these gifts represented their repayment for the services the good doctor had rendered.

The numerous fairs, reminiscent of an economy that, in more progressive lands, had run its course, offered an opportunity to barter. Like every other town, Grimaldi boasted a number of fairs, mostly held on the dates of patron saints - St. Peter, St. Anthony, etc. The most popular and most lucrative - at least for some of the shop keepers - was "La fiera della Madonna di maggio," held on the second Sunday in May. These fairs by and large, served more of a social than an economic function. They provided relief from the monotonous, uneventful, hard life while their commercial significance was negligible, at least in terms of the village's economic development.<sup>11</sup>

Economically, then Grimaldi was not a viable community. There is no doubt that, if an economic profile had been done, one would have found in Grimaldi a community rural in its infrastructure with a

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<sup>11</sup>The author is aware that much of the information here is not documented. The paucity of material on the economic (as well as social and political) development of the towns such as Grimaldi dictates that some hypotheses be tentative and inferential in nature. However, on a few occasions in the past, the author has had the opportunity to talk to elderly people who had no hesitation in describing conditions as they remembered them. Much of the information on fairs is based on actual experience. As a young boy, assisting his father who was an ambulatory merchant, usually selling used, donated or discarded American clothes, the author had occasion to observe the process and conduct of the fairs. One might infer that the changes which had occurred over the years were not so much in the raison d'etre for these fairs but in the degree of significance that they had in the lives of people.

"stationary society tied strongly to traditional structures and methods which prejudiced its development and which lived with difficulty from agriculture."<sup>12</sup>

The town also offered little in terms of social mobility. Education, because of its costs and inaccessibility, was the realm of the small middle class<sup>13</sup> - a reality which further stratified society. In one of his short stories, Alvaro described an altercation between a group of shepherds' sons and some university students. A stone hurled by one of the boys nearly found its mark. "What's going on?" asked Antonello, the central figure in the story. "Those from the university are trying to beat us up." "Who are they," inquired Antonello. "Those with trousers, the sons of the gentlemen (signori)," replied one of the shepherd boys.<sup>14</sup>

Marriage, as well, did not represent a significant means of advancement. Under the influence of Bourbon rule, the South of Italy did not share in the liberal traditions of Western Europe. Instead, it developed a rigid conservatism of classes and caste which

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<sup>12</sup>Pietro Miraglia, "il fenomeno migratorio a Verbicaro," in Calabria Contemporanea (Cosenza: Cronache Calabresi; 1973), p. 37. Translation is mine. The above is a description of the town of Verbicaro, approximately 100 kilometres north of Grimaldi. Verbicaro and Grimaldi are not unlike. They are both small centres with a population of less than 5,000 having similar demographic and topographic characteristics. Both are situated on the slopes of the Calabrian Apennines. Though Miraglia described current conditions in Verbicaro, one has to infer that these same factors must have been worse in the past, since the Italian South has shared in the economic progress experienced by the rest of the peninsula; even if at a considerably reduced rate.

<sup>13</sup>As one moved from North to South, the rate of illiteracy increased. In 1911, 11% were illiterate in Piedmont, 37% in Tuscany, 54% in Campania, 65% in Basilicata and 70% in Calabria. The national average was 37.6%. Taken from Seton-Watson, p. 358.

<sup>14</sup>Corrado Alvaro, Gente in Aspromonte (n.p. Oscar Montadori, 1973), p. 37. This work was first published in 1930. Translation is mine.

is still evident today.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it would have been unlikely that a young man from the poorer classes could have married above his rank. When he did marry, his choice of a mate was greatly influenced by economic necessities. In most cases, love was one of the least important considerations. As for the young woman, a good dowry represented a reasonable assurance for an adequate match. However, for a family with numerous daughters - a rather common occurrence in the days when families were large - the dowries became an added burden. It was not unusual for the head of a family to emigrate in order to ensure unmarried young ladies in the family a competitive chance at marriage. Young men, also, resorted to emigration as a means of escaping the traditionally-imposed and onerous duty of assisting the head of the family to provide the dowries.<sup>16</sup> It was one of those strokes of good fortune - thanks to regional differences - that the people of Grimaldi escaped some of the burdensome dowries dictated elsewhere by tradition. In many other towns throughout the South, dowry contracts frequently exacted small houses (hovels by modern standards) for each marriageable daughter.

One of the structures over which the bourgeoisie and the landowning classes did not possess a full monopoly was the church hierarchy. It was possible for the son of a poor contadino to become a priest, a highly desirable vocation. A priest could obtain many benefits from the church, so much so that he could improve the economic condition for his entire family. Nepotism in the South had its clerical

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<sup>15</sup> Adriano Beglivo, Giovanni Pellicciari, La tratta dei meridionali (Milano: Sapere Edizioni, 1973), p. 33. Translation is mine.

<sup>16</sup> Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia.

counterpart.<sup>17</sup> The theme of this potential rescue from poverty by a would-be priest was best illustrated by Alvaro. No doubt, it is the southern writer talking through one of his characters who, speaking of one of his sons, said: "Se riesco a fare di lui un prete staremo tutti bene, e anche lui."<sup>18</sup> However, clericalism as a means of social mobility has to be discounted as a major consideration because it applied to an insignificant number of people. More importantly, the priests' preoccupation with the economic welfare of their families served as one more factor contributing to the alienation of the peasantry from the church, an institution which, in the minds of the poor, functioned not to promote the public good but to support the establishment.<sup>19</sup>

Patronized, oppressed and alienated, the contadini of Grimaldi, like thousands of others, turned to emigration. The province of Cosenza (Grimaldi is in this province) contributed the earliest and most numerous emigrants.<sup>20</sup> "Emigration was born as a need, grew as a desire and became an infectious disease," reported a landowner at the turn of the

century.

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<sup>17</sup> Allegedly, Grimaldi's wealthiest landlord obtained his rather large estate through an uncle who had managed to accumulate considerable wealth during his priesthood. Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia.

<sup>18</sup> "If I can make a priest of him we will all be well off, including himself. Alvaro, p. 60. My translation.

<sup>19</sup> Even today in Grimaldi (as in many other towns) there are countless stories of greed and selfishness perpetrated by the men of the cloth. Aubert found many of the central and southern Italian clergy to be men of rather loose habits. See Roger Aubert, Il pontificato di Pio IX, Vol. I, translated by D. Salvatore Marsili (Torino: Editrice S.A. I.E., 1970), p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> Francesco Coletti, "Dell' emigrazione italiana," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. I, p. 414, first published in Cinquant'anni di vita italiana (Roma: 1911).

century. The mayor of San Fili (a suburb of Cosenza) claimed that "at first one left because of poverty, now [at the turn of the nineteenth century] even the small proprietors leave to make a fortune."<sup>21</sup> The extent<sup>22</sup> of the "infectious disease" can readily be appreciated from emigration figures for Grimaldi.<sup>23</sup> The exodus was directed towards America,<sup>24</sup> the land of milk and honey.<sup>25</sup> From 1901 to 1915, when the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 414. Translation is mine. One of the reasons for emigration from Grimaldi, cited by Francesco Sdao, was the promise of fortunes in America. Taped interview with Francesco Sdao, July 25, 1979. Sdao was born in Grimaldi in 1892. He migrated with his father to the U.S.A. in 1901.

<sup>22</sup>The author searched in vain the archives of the Comune di Grimaldi to attempt to find emigration records prior to 1900, the period which would have been more relevant to the historical reconstruction of the emigration flow at the time of the Veltri brothers' departure from Grimaldi. However, the statistics (Appendix A) will certainly be helpful as an aid to interpret general emigration patterns from a town which has contributed a disproportionately high number of emigrants.

<sup>23</sup>For a more complete statistical analysis of national emigration patterns see Antonio Pucci, pp. 13-22.

<sup>24</sup>A very small number of Grimaldesi indicated Canada and Brazil as their destination, but in the minds of people no geographical distinction was made, particularly with Canada. People went to America, and those who returned were called americani. Even the second wave of emigration, by and large directed to Canada, did not change this attitude. Those who resettle in Italy or those who return for a visit are still known as americani.

<sup>25</sup>Whether immigrants left their homeland enthusiastically is a nice question indeed, though popular literature about emigrants has frequently tended to take on romantic nuances. See Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani, Contenuti ambivalenti del folklore calabrese: ribellione e accettazione nella realtà subalterna (Messina: Peloritana Editrice, 1968) p. 179. Folklore reveals that the opposite may have been true; rather than being the mythical land of gold, America was often the source of maledictions (and benedictions). A popular song in the first decade of the twentieth century denounced Columbus for his discovery, (Satriani, p. 180). Four decades later, in Grimaldi, a song about the americani became well known. It too, though in a humorous vein, described the disruption of family relationships - husbands being cuckolded, wives becoming indolent because of the American dollars. In 1952, many Grimaldesi sang a sad song: it was entitled "Addio paesello mio," (Farewell, my home town).

emigration flow was interrupted by the war, more than 80 people per annum applied for their passports, the number fluctuating from a high of 160 in 1903 to a low of 7 in 1915.<sup>26</sup> The vast majority of emigrants were male. From 1901 to 1915, 133 out of 1211 applicants for passports were female - about 11% of the total emigration. During the same period, only 27 families indicated their intention to emigrate to North America. The small number of families demonstrates the difficulty of travel and the uncertainties that a family would have to face in the New World, but it also corroborates the theory that the first wave of Italian emigration was not permanent in nature.<sup>27</sup>

Given the economic and social conditions of Southern Italy, it is not surprising to find that 90% of the male emigrants were contadini. The remaining 10% were shoemakers, tailors and carpenters. Amongst the skilled 10% there were a few tinkers, musicians, watchmakers, barbers and masons. A closer examination of the figures for Grimaldi shows another aspect of Southern Italian emigration: its ravenous appetite for youth. 61% of all those who left were 30 years of age and

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<sup>26</sup>"Emigration Records for the Comune di Grimaldi," Appendix A.. It is very difficult to establish the actual number of people who left. At a time when travel outside the country was very limited, the request for a passport was made with emigration in mind. Therefore, one would have to infer that the percentage would be very high. The population of Grimaldi in the first decade of the 20th century was approximately 3,000. It grew to about 4,500 by the end of W.W.II; it now is less than 2,200 - the decline being attributed to transoceanic and European emigration. (Approximate demographic statistics for Grimaldi were given to the author by the clerk of the "Comune di Grimaldi.")

<sup>27</sup>In one of the most important works on the subject, R. F. Foerster stated that Italian emigration had a "strangely temporary character." R. F. Foerster, The Italian Emigration of Our Times, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), p. 39

under. Of these, 35% were 21 and under. Only 18% were over 40. It was not unusual for a thirteen-year-old to apply for a passport, though minors had to be accompanied by an adult during their voyage. Incredible as it may seem today, there were some boys, less than 10 years of age, who ended up as water boys on the North American railways.<sup>28</sup> Fifteen and sixteen-year-olds were numerous. A typical Grimaldese emigrant at the turn of the century would be a young male, twenty years of age, nearly illiterate and largely unskilled, whose destination was New York<sup>29</sup> (one could infer that the same composite could apply to Southern Italian emigration in general, since Grimaldi is typically Southern).

That the Veltri brothers left Grimaldi for the reasons outlined above is a conclusion that can be accepted a priori. Giovanni's "Memoirs" make no specific reference as to reasons why they emigrated. It is likely that to Giovanni the causes of emigration may have appeared so obvious that they did not merit comment.<sup>30</sup> Their condition was no different than the thousands of others who left the "grim situation."<sup>31</sup> They could hardly be identified with the propertied, titled, bureaucratic or clerical classes. They simply belonged to the contadini or braccianti

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<sup>28</sup>Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia. Francesco Sdao came to North America with his father at the age of nine. Taped interview with Francesco Sdao.

<sup>29</sup>Appendix A, "Emigration Records for the Comune di Grimaldi."

<sup>30</sup>It is possible that to many contadini emigration was not merely a matter of necessity; it was an obligation. At the turn of the century, when asked why he contemplated emigration, a young man replied: "Why should I stay here? It would be dishonest: here I have (earn) 2 lire, in America 14." Reported in Francesco Coletti, "L'Emigrazione," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. I, p. 414. Translation is mine.

<sup>31</sup>Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia. Brescia recalls that the Veltri family was typical in the community of Grimaldi. Though having fewer children, it was a family of poor contadini who lived in a two-room house.

class which was totally devoid of any of the means which could have given them any hope for the future. It is to their credit that they left this situation at a time - the 1880's - when they could not rely on the experience of others as a guide for their future plans. In this sense, they were courageous pioneers, for to venture forth from a small Apennine town in Southern Italy, inexperienced, uneducated and impecunious, required nothing less than bold resolution.

## 2. Emigration from the Italian South - Causes of the Exodus

Paradoxically, the departure of the Veltri brothers, (Vincenzo in 1878 and Giovanni in 1885) just over a decade after the annexation of Rome - the last block in the new Italian edifice - was a clear confirmation that, for most people in the South, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. The microcosmic conditions which affected the lives of hundreds like the Veltris in a village like Grimaldi, were remarkably similar to those circumstances which caused an exodus from the entire South. Indeed, when one considers the social fabric of most of the Southern Italian communities at the turn of the 20th century, it is not surprising to find that Southerners did not belong to the mainstream of Italian life. The dichotomy of the "two Italies" surfaced during and after the unification process. When Garibaldi freed Sicily from Bourbon rule in 1860, the cry of "viva l'Italia" (long live Italy) had a curious meaning for many ignorant Sicilians. They thought they were cheering a princess married to Garibaldi by the name of "Talia."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>George Macaulay Trevelyan, Garibaldi and the Thousand, (London: Longmans & Green, 1948), p. 303.



In Verga's great novel I Malavoglia, the townspeople were resentful of the taxes they had to pay to their king, Victor Immanuel. During a heated argument one peasant finally declared: "Va a finire brutta, va a finire, con questi Italiani."<sup>33</sup> In Gente in Aspromonte,<sup>34</sup> the writer, Corrado Alvaro, with a sensitivity that is often lacking in historians, described conditions in Southern Italy thus:

The liberation of the kingdom of Two Sicilies found here an order fixed by centuries. The turmoil which occurred with the reform of state lands, increased the fortunes of those who were already rich. The town remained unchanged: it was an agglomeration of rustic homes comprising one room on the ground level, with natural earth for a floor, rocks for chairs and fireplace, surrounding the one substantial house of the titled family which had a porch, stables, kitchens, gardens and servants. The people bustled about this house, which was next to the church and where all the wealth was found - all the good and all the evil of the town.... To be a servant in that house was a privilege.... No one entered this house without a secret fear. Wherever one turned the land belonged to this house, from the forests on the mountains to the market-gardens near the sea. Everywhere the land was theirs; the olives which fell upon it; the forests... the fields.... How many blows on the face did the peasants endure, how many kicks... the anterooms teemed with wretched people who were waiting to be received; ruined by pig stricken with disease or by an ox which had fallen over a precipice. Here one discussed property because the livestock which grazed on it<sup>35</sup> and the trees which bore fruit on it belonged to the house.

Evidently, southern Italian peasants did not receive many benefits from the creation of a new Italian state. More than fifteen years later, (that is, fifteen years after the publication of Alvaro's work in 1930), Carlo Levi found the situation unchanged. His Cristo si e'

<sup>33</sup>"It's not going to end up well with these Italians."  
Verga, p. 87. Translation is mine.

<sup>34</sup>Aspromonte is a mountainous area in the southernmost region of Calabria. (See map #1)

<sup>35</sup>Corrado Alvaro, p. 71. Translation is mine.

fermato a Eboli is an elequent testimonial to the total alienation of the contadini. Because of his anti-fascist views Levi, a northerner from Turin, was confined in Lucania. Here he had occasion to study the life, values and attitudes of the peasants. For the contadini, he wrote, "the state is more distant than the sky." The state is malign because it is always on the other side. To the contadini, political formulas have little significance. They do not understand the political language because it is different from theirs. There is no real reason why they should attempt to understand it. "The only possible defense, against the state and against propaganda, is resignation."<sup>36</sup> This political estrangement was matched equally by a marginality which readily bred a compliant fatalism and pessimism.<sup>37</sup> The difficulty of coping with life was manifest in the folklore and sayings of the poorer classes of Southern Italy: "he who has eats, and he who has not watches;" "this is a world of troubles;" "to a skinny horse God sends flies;" "one does not die of pain;" "he who gives orders does not sweat;" "if you want to live in peace, listen, look and be quiet."<sup>38</sup>

Working to survive was the order of the day.

Until eight years of age the child looks after the donkey, the sheep and the sow; at nine his father places in his hand the mattock and the spade and takes him to work and puts him in a position to earn 42 cents per day. At fifteen his salary increases to 67 cents, at twenty he no longer works with the small mattock but with the large one and runs the

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<sup>36</sup> Carlo Levi, Cristo si e' fermato a Eboli (n.p., Oscar Montadori, 1973), p. 71. Translation is mine.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>38</sup> Satriani, Contenuti ambivalenti del folklore calabrese. pp. 174-175. Translation is mine.

risk of breaking his back from morning to night, earning 85 cents and pottage or 125 cents without.<sup>39</sup>

The peasant had few avenues of redress. He could, as he frequently did, resort to brigandage<sup>40</sup> as a form of primitive vindication of his rights. More infrequently, and perhaps less effectively, contadini and braccianti would come together to form workers' associations which, from the outset, were "moderate and legalistic."<sup>41</sup> At Paola, less than 40 kilometres from Grimaldi, an association was named after the King. Grimaldi, also, had its own "Società operaia di mutuo soccorso" founded in 1884.<sup>42</sup> The aim of these associations was not to fight an ancient feudalism but rather the new feudalism created by novel methods of acquiring land which were permitted after unification.<sup>43</sup> The benefits accrued were more illusory than real,

<sup>39</sup> Enrico Esposito, Il movimento, operaio in Calabria, l'egemonia borghese - 1870-1892 (Cosenza: Pellegrini Editore, 1977), p. 9. Vincenzo Brescia said that when he was only eleven years of age he worked 10 - 12 hours per day in the fields. Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia.

<sup>40</sup> Levi wrote that during his exile he had occasion to talk to contadini regarding brigandage. He found that, with few exceptions, they were on the side of the brigands. Indeed, Levi wrote, "the contadini saw in the brigands their heroes." Levi, pp. 120-121. In his analysis of Calabrese folklore, Satriani also mentioned numerous folk songs with the brigand as the central figure. He is the hero, who, with daring and with a little powder, conquers paper, ink and pen, the symbols of the oppression of the rich. Satriani, pp. 117-119.

One of the few organized mass movements against the exploitive, unjust conditions borne by the peasants occurred in Sicily in the year 1893-94. The unsuccessful rebellion known as the Sicilian Fasci (unions) was crushed. For a more detailed account see Napoleone Colajanni, "Le cause del movimento dei fasci siciliani," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. I, pp. 227-241. Also see Pucci, pp. 30-31.

<sup>41</sup> Esposito, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

however, because the workers' organizations were under the tutelage of a moderate bourgeoisie which was not interested in relinquishing its position of dominance.<sup>44</sup> Brigandage and socialist dabbling were symptoms of an all-pervasive economic and social malaise in the South of Italy, but neither was the answer to the plight of the peasantry. The real escape valve was emigration.

Emigration was inextricably tied to the "problema del mezzogiorno" - the problem of the South. The trickle which began in the 1860's<sup>45</sup> decreased somewhat during the next few years. After 1871, a notable increase in emigration was recorded. In 1869 there had been slightly over 22,000 emigrants; by 1879 the number had grown to over 40,000.<sup>46</sup> Until 1886, the majority of emigrants were from northern Italy, most of them leaving from Veneto. In Southern Italy, emigration was restricted to a few zones in Basilicata and Calabria. Yet a significant number of people were leaving the southern provinces, so that, from 1867, emigration was considered an "effective substitute to brigandage."<sup>47</sup> That emigration was fast becoming a serious concern is borne out by an outburst of a member of

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-46. Vincenzo Brescia put it more dramatically when he alleged that the leaders of these workers' organizations "sold out" to the authorities and landowners. Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia.

<sup>45</sup>Fernando Manzotti, La polemica sull'emigrazione nella Italia unita (Milano: Societa' Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1969), p. 13. Prior to 1869, statistics are unreliable. In 1869, Leone Carpi began to gather emigration data for publication. His findings are dependable. Official emigration statistics began in 1876.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

parliament from Cosenza who said to the Minister of the Interior, Lanza: "Italians are leaving, honourable sir." Then using a rather foreboding metaphor he added: "This emigration is life which withdraws from the stomach and the lower limbs to which the head has denied nourishment."<sup>48</sup>

In the next twenty years, the warning that Lanza had received from the Cosentine member of parliament became a reality. Emigration reached epidemic proportions. Between 1881 and 1900 emigrants nearly trebled from approximately 135,000 to 350,000, with the greatest increase occurring in the year 1887 because of new custom duties and the tariff war with France.<sup>49</sup> Writing in 1891, A. De Vito De Marco attributed the chronic economic depression of the South which had contributed significantly to emigration to two causes: French and Italian protectionism. "If Italy had not responded to the French tariff with a tariff on manufactured goods, it is evident ... that with wheat, with livestock and with wine, even at reduced prices, we could always have bought more clothes, more rails, more yarn and more battleships than we can now buy."<sup>50</sup> The South of Italy during this period replaced the North as the leading source of emigration since the South, deprived of industries, was more exposed to the injurious effect of the agrarian crisis.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>50</sup>Antonio De Viti De Marco, "Finanza e politica doganale," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'italia, Vol. I, p. 202. This work first appeared in "Giornale degli economisti," January 1891. Translation is mine.

<sup>51</sup>Manzotti, p. 56.

The departure of so many citizens generated a debate not only on the causes of emigration but on the problems of the South generally, a debate which has not yet ended. One of the first to participate in the controversy and to point out the deficiencies of the economy of the South was Giustino Fortunato, one of the Southern intelligentsia and a member of parliament. In a speech delivered in Bologna in 1880 to the third Congress of the Societa' Cooperative di Credito, Fortunato outlined what he perceived the ills of Southern Italy to be. He emphasized the fact that, contrary to popular opinion, the South was not "naturally very rich." Indeed, it was "naturally very poor."<sup>52</sup> As he travelled in the Southern countryside he found an "universal desolation" and a "fierce struggle between man and nature." A common destiny - "the absolute want of capital" - made everybody equal. Distribution of wealth where there was no wealth made little sense. In the land Fortunato saw nothing but bleakness: the land was desolate, rendered less productive by deforestation. Rivers were mere torrents, the banks crumbling. Property itself often became the source of litigation and was also encumbered with mortgages and land credit.<sup>53</sup>

A decade later, writing at the turn of the 20th century, and describing the conditions of the South, Ettore Ciccotti presented a no less lamentable situation. In the South he found "parasitism elevated to a system."<sup>54</sup> The sources of this malignant parasitism were numerous.

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<sup>52</sup> Giustino Fortunato, Il mezzogiorno e lo stato italiano, Vol. I, (Firenze: Valecchi Editore, 1973), p. 38. This work was first published by Laterza: Bari, 1911. Translation is mine.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>54</sup> Ettore Ciccotti, "Mezzogiorno e settentrione d'Italia," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. I, p. 292. This work was first published in Milan in 1898. Translation is mine.

There were the absentee landlords who drew their incomes from distant holdings, others who lived luxuriously, and still others who thrived on corruption.<sup>55</sup> Ciccotti was also aware of a disturbing difference between North and South. "The mezzogiorno lacked an industrial middle class; its bourgeoisie was made up of 'pettyfoggers,' 'junk dealers' and 'procurers' of every kind and measure."<sup>56</sup> The South did not have a people; it had plebs. Resorting to Hegelian phraseology, Ciccotti described the fabric of southern society as lacking in that "contrast of vital forces which leads to an intellectual and moral elevation." He concluded that "from this degenerative process emerged naturally as a poisonous flower, either the camorra or the mafia."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 292. Two decades later Antonio Gramsci wrote about the "psychology of the contadini" in the following manner:

the peasant psychology was (under these conditions), uncontrollable; the real sentiments remained hidden, implied and confused in a system of defense against exploitation; merely egotistical, without a logical continuity, realized by-and-large with slyness and feigned servilism. Class struggle was confused with brigandage and blackmail, with setting woods on fire with the slaughter of livestock, with the kidnapping of children and women; with the assault on the town hall; it was a kind of elementary terrorism, without any stable and effective result.... The contadino has always lived outside the domain of the law, without any legal entity, without any moral individuality: he has remained an anarchic element, the independent atom of a chaotic tumult checked only by the fear of the carabiniere and the devil. He did not understand discipline; he was patient and tenacious in the individual labour required to wrest from nature scarce and meagre fruits, and capable of incredible sacrifices for the family.

Antonio Gramsci, La questione meridionale (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1973), pp. 64-65. Translation is mine.

Ciccotti was no less severe in denouncing the economic basis of southern society. The attempt to create a class of small landowners through the partition of large estates was "fully aborted."<sup>58</sup> The peasants were also left to compete unsuccessfully with foreign cereals. The mezzadria was no more effective. The mezzadria was made inefficient by the poverty of the mezzadro and the lack of intensive farming which would provide steady employment to the contadino.<sup>59</sup> No less damaging to the southern economy were the policies of the newly-founded Italian state which became protectionist to secure a measure of success for northern industries. "United Italy became the great market place for her industrial region."<sup>60</sup> Gramsci was later to give a Marxian inter-

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<sup>58</sup>Ciccotti, p. 294. In 1879 Fortunato also wrote that the tracts of land appropriated to peasants after the many redistributions of large state lands varied from 83 acres to one-and-a-half hectares - too small to sustain a family. He added further that a small piece of land of the lowest quality did not alter the economic conditions of the peasant class. In addition, Fortunato proved that in many areas the partition of land was more apparent than real since the wealthy landowners managed to increase their holdings in spite of the legal obstacles. In Barletta, for example, in a period of 30 years prior to Fortunato's investigation, three quarters of the partitioned lands, which originally had been assigned to 800 "proletarians," were now owned by wealthy landlords. The same development occurred at Eboli. Giustino Fortunato, "La questione demaniale nell'Italia meridionale," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. I, pp. 164-167. This work first appeared in Il mezzogiorno e lo stato italiano, Vol. I, (Bari, 1911).

Another southern liberal, Pasquale Villari, a contemporary of Fortunato, made the same point in his "le lettere meridionali ed altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. I, p. 111.

<sup>59</sup>Ciccotti, p. 294.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 298.



pretation to the economic poverty of the South in these terms: "The northern bourgeoisie subjugated southern Italy and the islands and reduced them to colonies of exploitation."<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the crux of the "questione meridionale" lay precisely in the exploitation of the South by the North. Emigration was merely the other side of the coin: "the development of Italian emigration, as a mass phenomenon, in the decades which followed Italian unification was generated by the convulsed and contradictory ascendancy of Italian capitalism and the subsequent rupture of the old social and economic equilibrium."<sup>62</sup>

The contadini of the South found little consolation in the response engendered by the debate on emigration. To begin with, leading politicians ignored the glaring inequalities between the North and South and then committed the same errors as others had done before the inquest on the problems of the South (they would later use similar faulty logic), when "they applied the same laws in the whole country, not realizing that a law which might be useful in one area, might be harmful in another."<sup>63</sup> Southern leaders Nitti and Crispi being among them - succumbed to the moderate, bourgeois mentality of the day which advocated cautious policies at a time when radical measures were necessary. This is not to say that

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<sup>61</sup>Gramsci, p. 73.

<sup>62</sup>Alvo Fontani, Gli emigrati (n.p., Editori Riuniti, 1962), p. 13. Translation is mine.

<sup>63</sup>Seton-Watson, p. 377. Translation is mine. See also Horowitz, p. 3.

they failed to grasp the significance of the plight of the poorer classes in the South. Nitti, as a southerner born in Basilicata, understood the problems of the South. He well appreciated the sacrifices made by this region in order to achieve unification with the rest of Italy. He realized that the formation of the new state produced a "very great exodus of riches from the South to the North."<sup>64</sup> Some of the problems could be alleviated, Nitti wrote, by the North becoming more sensitive to the needs of the mezzogiorno and by giving it political power commensurate with its population, (Nitti stated that from Cavour's first ministry to Pellux's in 1900, out of 174 individuals given ministerial positions, the South received only 41) and by insisting on a more efficient bureaucracy.<sup>65</sup> But the same Nitti believed that it was in the nation's interest not to limit emigration but to promote it as a means of offsetting the natural growth of the population.<sup>66</sup> Emigration, as far as Nitti was concerned, was the result of a rather evident causal relationship: "... until certain causes are removed, certain results cannot be avoided. To want to suppress or limit emigration is an unjust and cruel act ... it is a sad and fatal law: either emigrants or

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<sup>64</sup> Francesco Saverio Nitti, "Nord e Sud," in Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. I, p. 318. This work was first published in Torino, in 1900. Translation is mine.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 323-328. In 1901 Italy's population was 32,514,000. The North, with 20,087,000 made up approximately 60% of the population, the South with 12,427,000, made up approximately 40%. With 40% of the population the South received only 25% of the ministerial positions. (Population figures obtained from Vera Lutz, Italy a Study in Economic Development (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 148.

<sup>66</sup> Fontani, p. 14.

brigands."<sup>67</sup>

Crispi's reaction towards the exodus of emigrants from the South was a reflection of his own position in society. He was closely linked to the big Sicilian and Southern landowners who were more concerned with the effects that mass emigration might have on agrarian wages and contracts than with the lot of the contadini.<sup>68</sup> His attitude towards a programme of social legislation were well illustrated in a speech he made in Palermo in 1886: "The worker of our nation with few exceptions, has a great deal of good sense, and has the virtue of knowing how to wait."<sup>69</sup>

One of the government's early attempts to do something about the emigration problem was a bill introduced by Crispi himself in 1887. The bill has been called "an organic testimony to the Crispian concept of emigration."<sup>70</sup> It did nothing to alleviate the problems of the destitute. The only redeeming feature was the government's endeavour to regulate the conditions before embarkation and during the actual voyage. The bill stressed the right of any citizen to migrate, unless he were liable for military service. A house committee would later modify the bill to guarantee not only freedom to emigrate but also

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>69</sup>Seton-Watson, p. 107. As president of the Council of Ministers, Crispi was also responsible for a systematic suppression of socialist activity throughout Italy prior to his fall from power in 1896. Horowitz, p. 34.

<sup>70</sup>Manzotti, p. 68.

freedom to make emigration possible. The implication was that emigration agents could now feather their nests.<sup>71</sup>

It can be argued that it was most unlikely that the Italian state, dominated by the bourgeoisie (most of the theorists and writers on the problems of the South, men such as Villari, Sonnino, Fortunato and others, could not rise above their class interests<sup>72</sup>) would go to the root of the problem. Only a radical thinker like Napoleone Calajanni, writing in the early 1890's, could accomplish this. He refuted, convincingly, the argument that emigration could be used as a safety valve against rapid population growth. Even without the benefit of sociological research, he stated that it was conditions of poverty which engendered "improvident procreation."<sup>73</sup> This southern thinker advocated social reform to combat the drain of men, whereas the southern politician Nitti formulated the theory of the gains a nation could derive by exporting men rather than goods and capital.<sup>74</sup>

The push factors which compelled hundreds of thousands of southern Italians to leave their homes had nearly universal application. The exodus which began in Basilicata, Calabria and Campania in the 1880's soon spread to Abruzzi. Puglia was the only region in the South where the rate of emigration was below the national

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>72</sup> Fontani, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 19. During the period 1900-1913, emigrants' remittances amounted to 2 milliard 763 million lire. (Figures quoted from Rosario Villari, Il Sud nella storia d'Italia, Vol. 1, foot-note p. 404).

average.<sup>75</sup> As Seton-Watson has written,

Southern emigration was an exclusively proletarian phenomenon, a spontaneous protest against unbearable conditions. It began in the plains and coastal zones where contacts with the external world were easier; later it spread in the interior, reaching the highest levels in the more isolated mountainous areas where poverty was greatest.... Some emigrants were artisans, but the vast majority were contadini and braccianti.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Seton-Watson, p. 366.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., Translation is mine.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VELTRI BROTHERS IN THE NORTH AMERICAN SOCIETY OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

#### 1. The Milieu of the North American Society

A stranger who saw Giovanni Veltri walking the streets of Grimaldi in the 1950's would have noticed that this frail but spirited old man was not like the other older townspeople. The Grimaldesi knew him as u cavaleri,<sup>1</sup> a title of deference which acknowledged his past achievements and which accorded his family a degree of respect that only a few other families enjoyed. The house he built at "the cost of an eye"<sup>2</sup> was tangible evidence of this man's uniqueness in the town. His abode was the best. It was envied and admired, for it displayed architectural refinements and comforts to which the townspeople were not accustomed.

Giovanni Veltri was an enigma. He was a stranger in his own land, a man who had returned to a "voluntary exile"<sup>3</sup> having spent more

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<sup>1</sup>The Italian Government bestowed on him the "Croce di Cavaliere della Corona d'Italia" (The Cavalier Cross of the Crown of Italy), "Memoirs," in the Preface. See foot-note 2.

<sup>2</sup>"Memoirs," p. 75. This expression is the equivalent of the English saying "an arm and a leg."

Giovanni Veltri dictated his memoirs in 1957 at the age of 90. The author is aware of the historical pitfalls inherent in a document of this nature, not the least of which is the reliability of Veltri's memory. However, a rapid persual of names, places and events will attest to his remarkable recollection. According to Frank Jacino, whom the author has interviewed, it is also very likely that Giovanni Veltri, like his son Ralph, kept a diary and used it as the basis for his memoirs.

Veltri's memoirs will be hereinafter referred to as "Memoirs." Translation for this, and all other references from the "Memoirs" is mine.

<sup>3</sup>"Memoirs," p. 74

than forty years in the New World. He was different because he was an americano. The self assurance and independence that he displayed could not be attributed only to the accumulated wisdom of years. It was the self-assurance and independence of a man who had been accustomed to a different life.<sup>4</sup> Yet, like all marginal men, he had lost that sense of belonging which often mitigates the vicissitudes of life. He felt betrayed<sup>5</sup> by his family members whose failure to be integrated--in the Canadian milieu, made his return inevitable. His son Ralph had always opposed the family decision, however.<sup>6</sup>

Even his "ancient passion" for the land could not diminish the yearning for the more active life he had led:

Accustomed for nearly forty years to journeying across the North American continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific; traversing the immense prairies; to ploughing the waves of the Great Lakes far and wide; it is certainly not pleasant to have isolated myself in my primitive, native village, a town of a few thousand people.

The isolation he endured was a stark contrast to what he had left behind. Since his arrival in Grimaldi in 1932, he left the village twice only to go to Naples in order to renew his passport. He made both trips because his hope "to return to Canada could not be extinguished."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The theme of the "transformation" of immigrants caused by their experiences in the New World has been examined by many historians. See Ingrid Semmingsen, "Emigration and the Image of America in Europe," in Henry Steele Commager, Immigration and American History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 53. See also Antonio Pucci, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup>"Memoirs," p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

Forty years absence from once familiar surroundings would have alienated any man; but forty years spent working on the North American railways, first as a navvy, than as a sub-contractor and, finally, as a full-fledged contractor, made reconciliation impossible with the society he had left behind. So much had happened in his life in the New World that he had effectively severed most of the emotional links with his past. Giovanni Veltri did not, of course, intellectualize<sup>9</sup> his experiences as a navvy, but he understood well the uniqueness of his life. Why dictate his memoirs if it were otherwise?

The inexperienced, unskilled, uneducated young man of fifteen who came to North America in 1885 could not have been overly optimistic about his future in spite of the bleak past he left behind. He was not driven to emigration by grandiose dreams; his departure was as necessary as had been his brother's. Vincenzo Veltri had left a few years before to seek employment wherever it was to be found. The matter-of-fact way in which Giovanni himself first turned to North Africa for work<sup>10</sup> was indicative of that fatalistic acceptance of life so common amongst the peasants of the South. Since one could not rebel or change the economic conditions of his village, one left in the hope that elsewhere, things might be better.

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<sup>9</sup>The few annotations, notes and letters attributed to Giovanni Veltri reveal a keen but unschooled mind. Veltri did not have the intellectual wherewithal to comment on or even understand his economic role within a capitalist society. One therefore searches his memoirs in vain to discover any comment on social and economic conditions that shaped North American society at the turn of the century. His are the day-to-day comments of a man who was concerned more about his "daily bread" and his reputation as an individual than about the impersonal forces which influenced his life.

<sup>10</sup>"Memoirs," p. 1.



His initiation into North American society did not augur well. The receiving society displayed in his day all those characteristics which made the process of integration difficult and seriously hindered social mobility for these "undesirable" people. Americans expressed doubt about the moral fiber of Italians; as a consequence, they were worried about the substantial influx of these immigrants. American citizens clamoured for "heroic measures" to curb Italian immigration.<sup>11</sup> The peasants of Southern Italy were in an even worse position since they were seen on both sides of the 49th parallel as inferior to their Northern Italian brethren. Official American statistics classified Italians into two distinct categories: Italian North and Italian South.<sup>12</sup> The literature of the day implied that the Southern Italian was hardly a suitable citizen. The Immigration Commission, relying on an Italian sociologist's findings, described the Southern Italian as "excitable, impulsive, highly imaginative, impracticable; as an individualist having little adaptability to high organized society." The North Italians, on the other hand, were pictured as "cool, deliberate, patient, practical and capable of great progress in the political and social organization of modern civilization." However, the Commission did acknowledge commonly stereotyped virtues as exemplary in both components of the Italian immigration. It recognized their devotion

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<sup>11</sup>J. H. Senner, U.S. Commissioner of Immigration, "Immigration from Italy," North American Review, May 1896, Vol. CLXII, p. 649. Other official reports expressed a serious concern about the inassimilable nature of Italians. See "Reports of the Immigration Commission," Senate, 61st Congress, 1910, 3rd Session, Vol. 1., p. 571.

<sup>12</sup>"Reports of the Immigration Commission," 1910, Vol. 1, p. 100.

to the family, their benevolence, their artistic sense and their industry.<sup>13</sup>

Such stereotyping and the xenophobia of a prejudiced North American society worked to the ultimate detriment of millions of Eastern and Southern Europeans. The Southern Italians occupied one of the lowest rungs of this human hierarchy and fell victim to most unenlightened analyses and crass defamation. American social scientists (in the attempt to gain an understanding of people) attacked the "immigrant problem" by looking in the very places which would reveal the most wretched human condition. They "approached their subject through the analysis of specific disorders: criminality, intemperance, poverty and disease."<sup>14</sup> These scientists, perhaps themselves falling prey to prejudice, used a supercilious, patronizing modus operandi, which produced rather dubious results. The Immigration Commission, for example, found that the cephalic index of Hebrew and Sicilian children whose parents had lived in America for a "long time" would change slightly. From this they concluded that when "(these) features of the body change, the whole bodily and mental make-up of the immigrants may change."<sup>15</sup>

The climate of opinion towards certain kinds of immigrants was not much better in Canada. Eastern and Southern Europeans did

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 251. See also Andrew F. Rolle, The Immigrant Upraised: Italian Adventurers and Colonists in an Expanding America (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 95. Foerster also wrote: "The North Italians repudiated kinship with the Neapolitans and Calabrians." Foerster, p. 323.

<sup>14</sup> Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), p. 278.

<sup>15</sup> "Reports of the Immigration Commission," Vol. II, pp. 506-507.

not suit the ideology of Anglo-conformity so prevalent in this country.

"A group desirability as potential immigrants varied almost directly with its members' physical and cultural distance from London, and the degree to which their skin pigmentation conformed to Anglo-Saxon white."<sup>16</sup>

On January 18, 1899 the Calgary Herald wrote an editorial on the number of immigrants who came into Northern Alberta the previous year. Its message can be clearly understood from the following passage:

It would be better for the reputation of this country throughout the world were statistics such as these entirely suppressed. They need a press censor in the interior department just as badly as they need a fool killer. Like a hotel, or other public place, a country is gaged and sized up according to the class of people who frequent it, the same as the company which a young man keeps is made the criterion by which he is judged by others. As against 1,375 dirty, frowsy Galicians, there came to North West Territories from the Mother country last year 13 Englishmen, 10 Scotchmen and 15 Irishmen.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Howard Palmer, "Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century," in Conference Report Second Canadian Conference on Multiculturalism (Ottawa: February 13-15, 1976), p. 85.

Even the most enlightened writers expressed a subtle desire for Anglo-conformity. J. S. Woodsworth's Strangers Within Our Gates (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), first published in 1909, and Robert England's The Central European Immigrants in Canada (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1929), are typical examples of the authors' faith in the Anglo-Saxon superiority.

<sup>17</sup> Calgary Herald, "The Character of Our Immigration," January 18, 1899. Reported in Howard Palmer, Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1975), p. 45. Preference for the Anglo-Saxon stock was also evident more than a decade later. In an address delivered to the Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1913 Rev. W. E. Reid, expressed his views on immigration thus:

Canada today faces the greatest immigration problem that has ever confronted any nation.... Of the Anglo-Saxon we are not in the least afraid, but when we consider that last year over twenty-one percent of all the incomers to Canada were non-Anglo-Saxon, who can not speak our language, have no sympathy with our ideals, and are foreigners in every sense of the term, then we begin to understand what a task is ours as a nation.

An address by Rev. W. D. Reid, Montreal, "The Non-Anglo-Saxon in Canada - Their Christianization and Nationalization." in R. C. Brown, M. E. Prang, (editors), Confederation to 1949 (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada Ltd., 1966), p. 83.

French-Canada too had its class of "l'immigrant indésirable."

The inquest on immigration carried out by Le Devoir stated:

L'indésirable est celui que la nation ne pourra jamais assimiler, a cause de ses origines, de ses mœurs, de sa civilisation différent de la nôtre. Le Calabrais, le Sicilien, grand nombre de classes de Juifs, tous les immigrants recrutés par la Church Army, la Salvation Army et autres institutions analogues ... les noirs, les Chinois et la plupart des Asiatiques constituent cette catégorie.<sup>18</sup>

Such widespread intolerance was bound to have very serious repercussions. Sifton's vigorous efforts to populate the West notwithstanding, the government embarked on a very active policy of exclusion based on Anglo-conformity. The head tax on Chinese immigrants, the gentleman's agreement with Japan which restricted Japanese immigration, restrictive immigration laws passed in the early 1900's - all were part of Canada's immigration policy prior to the war of 1914. Immigration officials did not hesitate actively to discourage those whom they considered unworthy citizens.

In 1897, W. F. McCreary, Commissioner of Immigration, made use of such discretionary powers when he persuaded the new Minister of Railways, Andrew G. Blair, to reduce the importation of Italian navvies from the United States.<sup>19</sup> Frequently the worth of Italian workers was measured in terms of their endurance as beasts of burden.<sup>20</sup> With many others, they were "foreigners" (as opposed to "whites"), a term "applied

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<sup>18</sup> George Pellettier, L'Immigration Canadienne, Les Enquêtes du Devoir (Montreal: 25 novembre, 1913), p. 7. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>19</sup> Donald Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Foreign Navy, 1870-1914," The Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers, 1972, p. 141.

<sup>20</sup> Robert F. Harney, Italians in Canada (Toronto: The Multi-cultural History Society of Ontario, 1978), p. 13.

to those campmen, of whatever extraction, who stolidly engaged in the mucking and heavier tasks."<sup>21</sup> Lacking any kind of technical training, Italian peasants were forced into "a geographical mobility and occupational pluralism" which typified many European immigrants. "The unskilled immigrant worker had one basic commodity to exchange - his physical strength."<sup>22</sup> This willingness to do any kind of work cheaply, at any time in any place, pleased the "captains of industry," who naturally advocated a new kind of immigration policy - a sufficient supply to meet their demand. The desirable immigrant workers would be those who would not hesitate to roam the country to do whatever work was available.<sup>23</sup> The early work experience and its attendant hardships of both Giovanni and Vincenzo Veltri exemplified an indomitable spirit which served well the entrepreneurial, capitalist class of North American society. Indeed, only a certain kind of labourer - the foreigner - would tolerate the subhuman conditions of work. British labourers, for example, were regarded as poor workers by railway companies such as the C.P.R. because of their unwillingness to accept low wages and their eagerness to use the English language press to expose unacceptable working

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<sup>21</sup>Edmund Bradwin, The Bunkhouse Man (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), first published in 1928, p. 105.

<sup>22</sup>Donald Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners," European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932 (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1979), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 18. The fact that large numbers of Southern Europeans, particularly Italian labourers, were admitted into Canada in spite of the government's insistence on bringing in only the settler-labourer type, shows that the former government policy had been displaced by a new policy which stressed the importing of an industrial proletariat. See D. Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Foreign Navy," p. 145.

conditions.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, Giovanni Veltri, himself the victim of social injustices in his own land, found it difficult to appreciate the British navvies' attitude towards work. To him, the well-dressed gentlemen who asked for a place to eat as soon as they descended from the train could not be capable of doing railway work. They were simply "loafers gathered in the streets of London."<sup>25</sup>

It would not have occurred to either Giovanni or Vincenzo Veltri to complain about their lot. Had they not left an equally miserable situation and had they not come to North America to work and improve their condition? The vigour of the Italian labourers could not "be placed in doubt"<sup>26</sup> because men like the Veltri brothers, realizing that failure as immigrants would contradict the basic purpose of their decision to migrate, preferred to endure rather than to deplore and commiserate. To work, to earn and to save - these were the precepts, devoid of morality but pregnant with economic necessity, which motivated

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 25. "The Industrial Worker" published a good number of letters written by both Canadian and British workers who complained bitterly about the near-enslavement of navvies. Reported in Irving Abella, David Millar (editors), The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 60-70.

D. Avery claimed that Shaughnessy, President of the C.P.R., as well as many other Canadian entrepreneurs, wanted "hardy, malleable labourers whose salary requests would be 'reasonable' who were not unionized and who could not use the English-Canadian language press to focus public attention on their grievances." D. Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Foreign Navy," p. 138.

<sup>25</sup>"Memoirs," p. 30. Giovanni Veltri did, nevertheless, acknowledge that of the very few Englishmen who remained for more than a week near Rennie on the C.P.R. line, four of them, father, son, and two nephews - were "excellent people." "Memoirs," p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>G. E. Di Palma Castiglione, "Italian Immigration into the United States, 1901-1904," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 11, (July 1905 - May 1906), p. 194.

the Veltris as navvies and later as contractors. How else could they have endured all that befell them? Giovanni slept in railway stations with transients, to wake very early next morning and look for work.<sup>27</sup> In 1887 he worked for two subcontractors, Allen and Smith, who paid him and others with signed cheques which later proved to be worthless.<sup>28</sup> He suffered the agony of having a paesano, Raffaele Greco, die on his knees after he had been struck by a stone in a mine explosion.<sup>29</sup> In 1900 he traversed a frozen river near Rainy River and reached a tiny hotel but slept on the floor because he and a few others were "too dirty" to be given a bed. He got up at four the next morning to reach Emo. The next day he arrived in Fort Frances.<sup>30</sup> The same year he witnessed the accidental death of another paesano.<sup>31</sup>

His brother, Vincenzo, was no less affected by the hard life of the navy. In 1905 Vincenzo succumbed to the many pressures brought about by his incessant quest for economic success and by the rootlessness intrinsic to such yearning.<sup>32</sup> He was found "along the banks of

<sup>27</sup>"Memoirs," p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 18. Donald Avery wrote: "The coercive measures against immigrant navvies were characteristic of their harsh and dangerous lives." Between 1904 and 1911, out of a total of 9,340 fatal industrial accidents in Canada, 23 per cent occurred in the railway industry. D. Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners," p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>The author of this paper does not claim that the drive toward economic success ultimately causes psychological impairment. He wishes merely to point out that in the Veltri's case, the stabilizing agents such as family, friends, familiar surroundings and tradition were missing from his life, hence making him more vulnerable to stress.

the river" in Winnipeg and the next day was admitted to Selkirk's psychiatric hospital. The entire poignant incident was felt deeply by his brother.<sup>33</sup>

In 1906 Giovanni Veltri experienced a near brush with death when he nearly perished of exposure in his attempt to reach a work gang at Jones, having left Hawk Lake on an extremely cold day when the temperature had dipped to 38 F. below zero.<sup>34</sup> This incident, and others recounted by Veltri, was by no means unique to his life, for similar accounts abound. Bradwin's own experiences with the bunkhouse men not only point to close parallels to Veltri's own life but also provide keen insight into the modus vivendi of Italian navvies.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the occupational hazards recalled by Giovanni Veltri appear to have been an integral part of the day-to-day existence of most navvies. Thomas Cozzolini's experience as a migrant worker, for example, was very similar to Giovanni Veltri's. In 1886 he too nearly died in cold weather. His description of the daily life of the immigrant worker could also serve as a litany of the navy's hardships: tormenting mosquitoes; exposure to cold; rejection by nervous, frightened people; spending sleepless nights on beds of straw; enduring the jealousy of insecure, often incompetent, superiors.<sup>36</sup>

Such was the North American socio-political milieu with which the navvies had to contend. The next section deals with the navy's response to this formidable challenge.

<sup>33</sup>"Memoirs," p. 21.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>35</sup>Bradwin, p. 25

<sup>36</sup>Abella and Millar, pp. 6-10.



## 2. Causes of Padronism

The Italian navvy had few avenues of defense in the face of a hostile milieu. He had little social, political or cultural organization to which he could turn for support.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, he was the product of a society which did not foster in its citizens a sense of political and social solidarity.<sup>38</sup> He was an apolitical creature to whom tradition had taught that the only people one could rely on were family members. A confining sense of campanilismo<sup>39</sup> made him suspicious of strangers. Only rarely would he admit a person not related by kinship in his intimate circle by a decision which was accomplished in the ritualistic bondage of comparaggio.<sup>40</sup>

Faced with a socio-economic system which frequently exploited not only ethnic differences but also regional differences among members of the same ethnic group,<sup>41</sup> navvies overlooked some of their Old World

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<sup>37</sup>Harney argues that the Italian state, because of its late inclusion in the circle of great powers, had limited influence in the history of North America. Hence, he claims, that "all of Italian history in North America is the history of individual immigrants." Emphasis is mine. R. Harney, Italians in Canada, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup>Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of The Uprooted," Journal of American History, Vol. 51, 1964-1965, p. 400.

<sup>39</sup>See glossary. In his analysis of Calabrian folklore, Lombardi Satriani found that many sayings expressed the peasants' distrust of others as well as their ingrained belief that one has to look after one's own interests in the world. Consequently, one has to talk little - even at the cost of appearing a simpleton - lest he say something that could prove harmful. Lombardi Satriani, pp. 177-178.

<sup>40</sup>Vecoli, p. 405. See list of terms.

<sup>41</sup>D. Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners," p. 51.

prejudices and attempted to find some security in their shared cultural bond and occupational experience. The early work experience of the Veltri brothers testifies to the navvies' eagerness to seek members of their background as a means of escape from the various ills which befell their lot. The records for the year 1897-1901 - a period when the Vincenzo Veltri-Gaetano Iachetta (Iachetta was also from Grimaldi) partnership operated a subcontracting firm that was at a critical stage of development - show that the work gangs were largely made up of Italians, most of them Grimaldesi.<sup>42</sup>

The employment of compatriots, who shared a deep-seated concern for their economic survival, by men who were capable of providing work has been a much maligned and misunderstood process. The term "padrone system" had its origin in Italy. It referred to the employment of youngsters who were obtained from their parents under

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<sup>42</sup>See pp. 40-47. Amongst numerous documents left by the Veltri brothers are some monthly time books, the earliest of which dates back to 1897. The handwriting shows that more than one person made the entries. One entry shows a more schooled calligraphy, possibly that of an English-speaking person. The Veltris realized early in their business ventures that bookkeeping was not one of their virtues. Giovanni reveals in his memoirs that as early as 1902 they employed a permanent bookkeeper, D. W. Montgomery (sic) - "a very honest and trustworthy person, who remained with the company for more than twenty years." "Memoirs," p. 19. The other entries were made by either Giovanni or Vincenzo. The penmanship, in these instances, is typical of those who possess a limited education.

The list of names reveals a high percentage of people who came from Grimaldi. The author is reasonably certain that these names are typical of Grimaldese families since, not only are the same family names in existence today, but many of the most common ones seem to be peculiar to the town. Further proof of the employment of Grimaldesi is furnished by the memoirs. In 1889 Vincenzo obtained some work from Hendricks & Chapman on the Spokane Northern. Vincenzo employed two Grimaldesi, Pietro Gagliardi and Fortunato Albo, as foremen and many others as workers. "Memoirs," p. 6. In his interview, Francesco Sdao also mentioned that the Veltris employed "many Grimaldesi." Francesco Sdao, taped interview.

Ullie and

**MONTHLY**

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Month of

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- Luis Argenti
- Jac Jacobi
- \* Rosario Caffelli
- Lame Guaraso
- \* Petri Nigro
- \* Gusto Canoin
- \* Tranti Sdro
- Tranti Merlaino
- \* John Naccarato
- A Flori
- \* Nite Nigro
- \* S. Pulci
- \* Manli De Rose



TIME BOOK.

MONTHLY

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Month of April 1900

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Per  
Day

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\$      Cts

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* 3	...	23	...	46.60
* 4	...	24	...	38.10
* 5	...	10	...	20.00

...	...	24	...	49.00
...	...	23	...	47.20
...	...	22	...	40.00
...	...	21	...	44.20
...	...	20	...	47.00
...	...	19	...	49.00
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Henry Case No. 18  
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103	W. J. ...	11.00
104	W. J. ...	11.00
105	W. J. ...	11.00
106	W. J. ...	11.00
107	W. J. ...	11.00
108	W. J. ...	11.00
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112	W. J. ...	11.00
113	W. J. ...	11.00
114	W. J. ...	11.00
115	W. J. ...	11.00
116	W. J. ...	11.00
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118	W. J. ...	11.00
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W. J. ...  
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18

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contract to work as strolling musicians. These children were "directed" by a master or padrone. After the cessation of child employment, primarily because of legislation passed by the Italian government, the same term was used by Americans to indicate a means of "organizing unskilled labour."<sup>43</sup> The new context given to the padrone system described a labour condition whereby "Italian foremen began to supply gangs of adult unskilled labourers to contractors."<sup>44</sup>

The American Immigration Commission, which had attempted to come to grips with the many facets of immigration, also tried to reach an understanding of this phenomenon. The Commission acknowledged the Italian derivation of the term with all its implications and concluded that

in countries where the labouring classes are wholly under the control of their employers, the term "padrone" is applied to the manager, superintendent, foreman, or proprietor of any mercantile establishment, and signifies that in the person designated as padrone absolute authority is vested to control employees. He has the right to prescribe the character or the work that each labourer shall perform, to increase or decrease at will the hours of work and the wages received, and to punish him physically at times.<sup>45</sup>

The Report claimed that during the early period of Italian immigration, workers who were unfamiliar with working conditions and who did not know the English language tended "to depend entirely" upon members of the "same race" who were familiar with both. The workers were

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<sup>43</sup> Edwin Fenton, Immigrants and Unions - A Case Study: Italians and American Labour, 1870-1920 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 71.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>45</sup> Reports of the Immigration Commission, Vol. II, p. 391.

hired at fixed rates. Any amount received above the established wage would go to the padrone. This system, the Report implied, was exploitive.<sup>46</sup>

The very real and frequent abuses engendered by the padrone system led to a rather negative attitude towards it. Accounts abound in both U.S. and Canada where the padrone is described as a sinister, greedy individual. These descriptions border on caricature and come very close to a portrayal of "feudal patronage."<sup>47</sup> There is no doubt that moral degeneration may have been the experience of people who were placed in a position of nearly absolute power. But descriptions of the padrone frequently made him a "stock figure."<sup>48</sup> Though one cannot dispute the existence of men who abused their power, nevertheless, one has also to take with a grain of salt the following experience:

Our boss, Fulvio, was a man 'round forty, of medium height, with broad Herculean shoulders. His large, apish head, resting upon a solid, bull-like neck gleamed from a pair of eyes that recalled those of the screech-owl. His whole appearance was calculated to inspire more dread than respect; a man, once you made his acquaintance whom you would walk a mile to avoid.<sup>49</sup>

The same unmistakable stereotype may be seen in the following account:

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 391-392.

<sup>47</sup> Nitti used the phrase intermediarismo - forced tribute - to describe the relationship between Italian workers and the North American capitalist, individualistic system. Reported in Robert Harney, "The Padrone and the Immigrant," The Canadian Review of American Studies, No. 2, Fall 1974, p. 111.

<sup>48</sup> Harney, "The Padrone and the Immigrant," p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> Cesidio Simboli, "When the Boss Went Too Far," in Wayne Moquin (editor), A Documentary History of the Italian Americans (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), p. 146.

"The beasts," said the padrone, "must not be given a rest, ... Otherwise they will step over me." As those men silently appealed to him for mercy, I was filled with pity, and often during the day I was tempted to beg the padrone to let them rest, but how could I approach a raging maniac. He was the type railroads wanted. He had obtained more than many other foremen, and a slavedriver is a success on the railroad.<sup>50</sup>

A more realistic figure emerges when the padrone system is examined in the light of the evidence presented by the Commission which examined Italian immigration to Montreal and the alleged fraudulent practices of employment agencies. By any standard, Antonio Cordasco of Montreal was a padrone who, like many others in his position, "contrived to 'fleece' his poor ignorant fellow-countryman."<sup>51</sup> He was not the man with the whip. Indeed, ironically, he was the uncrowned "king of Italian labourers" in Montreal.<sup>52</sup> Rather than emerging as a Simon Lagree, a slave driver in Kurtzian<sup>53</sup> dimension, Cordasco appears to have been a man who understood the needs of the railway industry in Canada and capitalized on it by providing the services required. Though it is true that he must have accumulated a fortune by exploiting his compatriots, it is equally true that the C.P.R., which used his services so eagerly, made it easy for Cordasco to do so. Not only did the C.P.R. pay a fee of one dollar for each man he recruited, but he himself was also allowed to collect a fee from

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<sup>50</sup> Domenic Ciolli, "The 'Wop' in the Track Gang - an Account by a Medical Student," in Moquin, p. 142.

<sup>51</sup> This phrase, by J. S. Woodsworth, describes aptly the true intentions of many padroni. J. S. Woodsworth, p. 133.

<sup>52</sup> Harney, "The Padrone and the Immigrant," p. 111.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness.

each worker.<sup>54</sup> The magnitude of his enterprise and the resultant "earnings" were demonstrated dramatically by the commission. Cordasco demanded a fee of one dollar for registering the name of the applicant as labourer, and ten dollars as foreman or interpreter. He subsequently also demanded two or three dollars from the labourer as additional fee for actual employment. When he could not provide employment he refused to refund the money. From November 1903 to May or June 1904, Cordasco's agency had registered 63 foremen, the greater number of whom paid ten dollars each. In the same period it registered 3,916 men, 400 of whom paid four dollars each.<sup>55</sup> Cordasco, and others like him, operated at a time when workers' collective strength through unionism was at an embryonic stage. "Orthodox labour leaders made little effort to reach into the labour camps, apart from passing occasional resolutions."<sup>56</sup> The "King of Montreal", therefore, had few impediments to exploitation of a class of workers who, though much in need of protection, were left to live like "indentured labourers."<sup>57</sup>

Cordasco's "success" was made possible not only by his own moral standards but by a society which frequently reinforced those values that generated rapid mobility. Under these circumstances one

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<sup>54</sup> Canada. Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Immigration of Italian Labourers to Montreal and the Alleged Fraudulent Practices of Employment Agencies (Ottawa: Department of Labour, 1905), pp. 20-21.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. xxxiii.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada, 1896-1921 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1974), p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

ought to be astonished not at the existence of padroni but at the moral indignation so readily expressed by many. One ought not be surprised, however, that the beast North American society spawned had another face.

### 3. The Veltri Brothers as Padroni

It would not be difficult to paint the Veltri brothers with the brush of padronism. A superficial examination of their operation would reveal that it met the three "classical" criteria for such a system. Harney identified the following components: the capitalist employer; the European worker; the intermediaries and brokers. Harney claims that all three components benefited from the system. The Canadian employer was provided with a "docile and mobile work force, a force free from the taint of unionism and willing to be shipped to remote northern sites." The European workers accepted the system because through it "they could operate as target migrants." Since they had not come to Canada to settle, the padrone system "allowed them to reach Canadian job sites for the short work season without undue delay or hardship, and a single season's campaign enabled them to save money to send home." For the intermediaries, the padroni, the system was their source of income.<sup>58</sup> Both Vincenzo and Giovanni were intermediaries, and as such, made profits. Indeed, they did serve

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<sup>58</sup>Robert F. Harney, "The Padrone System and Soujourners in the Canadian North, 1885-1920," in George E. Pozzetta, Pane e Lavoro: the Italian American Working Class (Toronto: The Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1980), pp. 120-121.

capitalist masters in providing for them the necessary labour for the many railway projects. But any further comparison to the traditional role of the padrone breaks down under close scrutiny, for the relationship of the Veltris with the workers they employed was unusual.

Giovanni Veltri (and very likely even his brother Vincenzo) was called padrone by Italian workers and referred to simply as "Mister" by non-Italians.<sup>59</sup> He, like his brother, had risen to a position of prominence by a process which, because of its frequency, represented a classic avenue of economic advancement by unskilled emigrants who did not belong to the dominant group. Allowing for a few minor variations, the Veltris' success story can be illustrated by Handlin's explanation of ethnic mobility:

The men banded together in gangs and worked together under a leader. That was a way that seemed proper to those who had once been peasants. As the scale of hiring was enlarged, and as the process became more complicated, management of the labour of the group fell entirely into the hands of the leader - "boss" he was usually called, but "padrone" by the Italians and Greeks. Ultimately he negotiated a single contract for the lot, assuming himself the expense of maintaining them, and retaining for himself a profit from the transaction. Before long, this means of organizing construction labour became so lucrative for the padrone that he turned into a species of subcontractor, built up new gangs on his own initiative, and<sup>60</sup> often recruited members from his countrymen abroad.

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Frank Jacino, October 28, 1979. Mr. Jacino met Giovanni Veltri in 1928. He worked for many years for the Welch Company in various capacities, the most important being assistant manager of the Port Arthur office. In his opinion, Italian workers who worked for the Welch Company (in subsequent chapters the transition from Veltri to Welch will be explained) referred to him as padrone as a title of respect. Mr. Jacino was significantly unaware of the negative aspects of the padrone system. Following my explanation of the Cordasco system, Jacino stated that under no circumstances could Giovanni Veltri be considered a padrone of that type. He himself referred to Ralph, Giovanni's son, as padrone in the same manner that an employee refers to his employer as "boss."

<sup>60</sup> Handlin, p. 69.



How Vincenzo Veltri (until his death the more prominent of the two brothers) rose to a position of leadership within a group of Italian navvies is not clear. His brother, Giovanni, attributed to him virtues common to peasant stock: willingness to work hard, thrift, generosity to kin, ability to inspire trust,<sup>61</sup> - qualities which can be seen in the younger brother as well. There is little doubt that Vincenzo knew how to handle his financial affairs. In less than fifteen years after his arrival to the United States, he had managed to save at least \$1,500 which he invested in a land purchase, a lot approximately 284 feet by 170 feet in the County of Umatilla in the state of Oregon.<sup>62</sup> There is also evidence that his co-workers relied on him to find work. After the completion of work on the Spokane Northern in 1888, they immediately asked him to find work elsewhere. The contractors, Keefer and Company, who (according to Giovanni) were old friends, awarded Vincenzo a contract on the new line which joined Butte to Jefferson, Montana. A few years later, in 1895, Vincenzo was so well established as the leader of his co-workers that he was able to leave Spokane with 60 workers to build a small canal 60 miles from the city.<sup>63</sup> By the year 1906, with his brother Giovanni as full partner, Vincenzo entered into agreement with William A. Dutton and Duncan F. McArthur to sublet a very important contract.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>"Memoirs," passim.

<sup>62</sup>James V. Welch Papers, "Warranty Deed," April 28, 1898.

<sup>63</sup>"Memoirs," p. 10.

<sup>64</sup>James V. Welch and John Welch Papers, "Agreement between Dutton and McArthur and Welch Brothers." Subsequently, references to either James V. Welch or John Welch's Papers will be Welch Papers.

Though the Veltri brothers suffered numerous setbacks in their business ventures - many of which will be discussed in the chapters to follow - the signing of the above-mentioned contract marked a significant achievement in their lives. Apart from the considerable responsibility inherent in the terms of the contract, it is important to note that the partnership of the two former navvies was now contractually responsible for the hiring of many labourers.<sup>65</sup> The pattern described by Handlin was complete. Obviously the Veltris would expect to make a profit but the contract also stipulated that "the contractors (the Welch Brothers) were to carry out the said works and assume all risks in connection therewith."<sup>66</sup> Nor did the Veltri brothers obtain the contract without difficulty. It appears that Giovanni, who was working as a subcontractor for Foley, Welch and Stewart near Kalmar in the vicinity of Fort Frances, had to leave immediately for Winnipeg in order that he and Vincenzo might negotiate with Dutton and McArthur. The Veltris must have considered the risks significant for they saw the necessity to take another partner, the compare Frank Cancellia, in order to "meet the initial expenses for the acquisition of all that was required."<sup>67</sup>

It is doubtful, then, that the Veltri brothers, although referred to as padroni by their workers, could be charged with exploitation of the Cordasco type. The risks that they themselves took,

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., passim.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., passim.

<sup>67</sup> "Memoirs," p. 22.

and the subsequent losses,<sup>68</sup> are indicative of an entrepreneurial set-up which cannot be described as forced tribute. Even if one allows for the innate tendency to exaggerate one's munificence, one can still discover in the navvies-turned-contractors a propensity to help co-workers, particularly kin and paesani.<sup>69</sup>

The nearly incomprehensible letter written to Vincenzo in 1906 by Frank Cappello a friend, is further evidence of the spirit of camaraderie that must have existed amongst people of that ilk. The letter is remarkable not in its content but in its tone, hardly that of a subservient worker writing to a padrone. Cappello thanked Vincenzo whom he addresses as "signor V. Welh" (sic) for the loan of \$585, offered his letter (in the unbusinesslike manner typical of a peasant) as proof of receipt of the money and concluded that he had made some good sausages and frisoli<sup>70</sup> and that he would soon send some to Vincenzo in Winnipeg.<sup>71</sup>

Other personal correspondence with former employees reveals that Giovanni as well, established amicable relationships with these people.<sup>72</sup> He had become godfather to the child of one of his workers who, years later, wrote to Giovanni asking him whether it would be

<sup>68</sup>More detailed information is to be found in chapters that follow.

<sup>69</sup>"Memoirs," passim.

<sup>70</sup>Frisoli are a mixture of boiled pork fat and meat, usually preserved for winter consumption. This food is a typically peasant dish.

<sup>71</sup>Welch Papers, "Letter to J. Welch by Frank Cappello, October 6, 1910."

<sup>72</sup>Welch Papers, "Letter to J. Welch by Fero, September 18, 1919."

possible to work, once again, for the Welch Company.<sup>73</sup> Significantly, Giovanni was also the recipient of a letter of reference from the Italian Vice-Consul in Montreal which stated that J. Welch was "highly appreciated and esteemed by the entire community and by the authorities" (e [sic] molto apprezzato e stimato da tutta la colonia e dalle autorità').<sup>74</sup>

In pursuing the work his brother had begun, Giovanni Veltri continued to exhibit those characteristics which, rather than conferring on him the role of the stereotyped padrone, confirmed him to have a shrewd business sense. Coming from a society where it was customary for the landed class and the literate middle class to dispense employment opportunities, he merely transferred the role to himself and modified the employer-worker relationship to suit the demands of a far different society. The employment of kin and paesani and the attempted partnerships with kin<sup>75</sup> - most of which ended in failure - are not indicative of exploitation but merely point to a natural inclination to work with people whose way of life was familiar. Conviviality and the willingness of Italians (as well as other ethnic groups) to work with people of their own kind<sup>76</sup> represented an addi-

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<sup>73</sup>Welch Papers, "Letter to J. Veltri by Phil Monaco, April 13, 1920."

<sup>74</sup>Welch Papers, "Letter of Reference Addressed to Sig. Wanklin by Luigi Hoz, October 21, 1914."

<sup>75</sup>"Memoirs," passim. Harney points out that: "Among all the peoples engaged in the padrone system, the line between the expedient use of kinship systems and business practices was too obscure for the North American observer to understand." R. Harney, "The Padrone and the Immigrant," p. 105.

<sup>76</sup>Bradwin, p. 110.

tional response to reprehensible working conditions.

It can clearly be argued that the Veltri brothers were not transformed into callous, greedy individuals (to padroni) who "sought to make an easy living by exploiting their peasant compatriots."<sup>77</sup> They were padroni only in the sense that they were able to exploit a socio-economic condition to the mutual advantage of employers and workers. Through the many years of a rather difficult North American experience, they managed to overcome the prejudices of the dominant group and rise to a position whereby they could compete with and gain the respect of its members.<sup>78</sup> North American business leaders made it possible for them to exploit the capitalist ethos. They recognized in the Veltris an entrepreneurial spirit which would benefit both parties. The transplanted Italian co-workers, on the other hand, responded with a recognition that was in keeping with their cultural heritage. The economic relationship with their superiors which they had experienced in their villages conditioned their response in North America. The few compatriots who had risen to a position of prominence had been, more often than not, people of their own kind. Consequently, to them the navvies attributed the role of patron-protectors. They were padroni. This type of padrone was not like the arrogant landowner or the disdainful literate person of their villages. He was a boss, an intermediary who cushioned the strain of surviving in a different

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<sup>77</sup>Vecoli, p. 412.

<sup>78</sup>Giovanni Veltri made numerous references to the elite of the railway business with whom he was on friendly terms. "Memoirs," passim.

environment.<sup>79</sup> The meaning of padrone in the capitalistic, labour-ravenous society of North America, had been divested of its inimical Old World connotations and given a more realistic definition.

It can be shown, then, that the two types of padroni, one similar to the Cordasco type and the other the Veltri, represent two different responses to a socio-economic system which engendered exploitation. Overwhelming evidence shows that the former was more prevalent. Indeed, the system that the Veltri brothers developed may have been exceptional, for, in an era when the recognition of workers' rights, was barely in its inception, humanitarian<sup>80</sup> and equitable arrangements would have been contrary to peoples' expectations. The ease with which a padrone like Cordasco accumulated wealth and power makes it the more remarkable that the Veltris did not succumb to the temptation of exploiting the ignorant and the destitute. Here lies the historical importance of the Veltri as padroni, for their experience suggests the need for a reassessment of the role of such individuals in the North American economy even though they were few in numbers.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Frank Jacino cited several cases of Giovanni Veltri's generosity and concern for his employees and the poor, not the least singular being his yearly project of asking his men to cut wood for the needy in Port Arthur just before the men would be laid off for the winter months. Interview with Frank Jacino.

In June, 1911, during one of those infrequent freak snow storms in the prairies, Giovanni's crew was suffering intense cold, since they were obviously unprepared for such an unusual occurrence. Immediately he ordered his men to cut up some beams, which were to be used for bridge work in order to provide firewood for each tent. "Memoirs," p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Both Harney and Avery suggest that the role of the padrone may have been stereotyped. See R. Harney, "The Padrone and the Immigrant," passim, and D. Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners," pp. 9-10.

Whatever the verdict of historians on the relationship between the navvies and the padrone, the experience of the Veltri brothers shows that their dealings with their compatriots and their function in the North American society were both rewarding and satisfying. Those compatriots who sought employment with their company have left few records of their feelings towards their employers<sup>82</sup> thus making it difficult to establish with any degree of historical accuracy whether the benefits accrued to the workers were commensurate with their productivity. What is evident, however, is Giovanni Veltri's own evaluation of his role in the North American society of the early 20th Century. His lament of the otiose life he was forced to lead in Grimaldi indicates the opposite of a parasitic disposition. U cavaleri would have preferred to continue a more active life in Canada.<sup>83</sup> The productive contribution of the Veltris is the subject of the following chapters.

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<sup>82</sup> Frank Sdao worked for the Veltris for many years. His, and his brother's names, appear on several payroll records. His recollections are devoid of any subjective evaluation other than that the Veltris "employed people to make money but we (the workers) made money too." Taped interview with Francesco Sdao.

<sup>83</sup> "Memoirs," pp. 71-72.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM CONTADINI TO CONTRACTORS

#### 1. Unlikely Navvies

Not many Southern Italian immigrants who came to North America at the turn of the twentieth century had had any experience as navvies. Theirs was an agrarian background ill-suited for railway construction but ideal in its habitual demands for back-breaking work and tolerance of inhuman conditions. The term itself may have been a misnomer, for many of its connotations could not apply to contadini. Though the word "navvy" originally referred to a person who worked on English canal building projects of the Eighteenth Century, it soon meant any man who worked regularly on railway building. Navvies evoked images of crude, rough-hewn men who lived together in encampments where disorderly, drunken behaviour was common.<sup>1</sup> Such epithets might apply to peasants of the Italian South only in so far as these men were members of that vast,

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<sup>1</sup>Terry Coleman, The Railway Navvies (London: Hutchison of London, 1965), pp. 26-27. Generally, in North America the image of the navvies was similar. Here, for example, is a description of navvy camp activities:

At night there'd be fights. Bare knuckle stand-up fights. John L. Sullivan stuff. Fierce. A broken nose was nothing. If you had a broken jaw you collected your pay and took the morning speeder into Battleford.

Barry Broadfoot, The Pioneer Years, 1895-1914. (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1976), p. 236.

Irish navvies working in canals and railways in the 1840's were described in much the same manner. They were crude, riotous men. See W. Nolte, The Irish in Canada, 1815-1867 (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland, 1975), passim.



uncouth and exploited segment of society. By temperament<sup>2</sup> and related experience, the contadini were not navvies.

Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri were not navvies by choice though Giovanni, before deciding to join his brother in the United States, had worked for sixteen months on railway construction in North Africa in the vicinity of Souk-Ahras, Batna and Biskra.<sup>3</sup> It was economic circumstances and necessity which fashioned this metamorphosis, for the Southern Italian peasant was so unskilled that "he could be put only to pick and shovel work in another country."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the

<sup>2</sup>The author is aware of definitional difficulties inherent in this term. However, traditionally Italian peasants have frequently been regarded as temperate, docile people. In the U.S. Eugene Schuyler wrote: "(for) they (peasants of Southern Italy) are a frugal, temperate and industrious race." E. Schuyler, "Italian Immigration into the United States," Political Science Quarterly, Vol. IV, September 1899, p. 494.

In Canada, Bradwin described Italian navvies as follows: "Invariably, the campman from Italy is peaceful, very methodical, well-behaved and drinks little." Bradwin, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup>"Memoirs," p. 1

<sup>4</sup>Foerster, p. 24. John Norris' study of ethnic groups in B.C. supports Foerster's claim about Italian peasants, even though Norris' observations are more general. He wrote that few immigrants who came to Canada at the turn of the Twentieth Century "had skills which could readily be used in the new country." He maintains that most became railway workers. See John Norris, Strangers Entertained, a History of the Ethnic Groups of British Columbia (British Columbia Centennial '71 Committee, 1971), p. 142.

A. V. Spada suggests a somewhat different explanation of the Italian immigrants "proclivity" to railway work. He wrote: "Early in this century Italian immigrants had to accept any kind of manual labour. Not that they were unsuited to other kinds of work. The possibility of finding work in the white-collar category was rare because of certain prejudices which persisted and were aggravated at the beginning of the last war." A. V. Spada, The Italians in Canada (Canada Ethnica, VI, Montreal: Riviera Printers and Publishers Inc., 1969), p. 79.

The Irish experience in Canada in the middle of the Nineteenth Century also suggests that when men are unfit for work in the most readily available occupation of the day - agriculture in this particular case - they will find employment where the least amount of training is required. See Nolte, p. 85.

nature of the manual work on railways was such that "no alchemy (was) needed to make over the farm hand into a navvy."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the early work experience of the Veltri brothers represents another page in the history<sup>6</sup> of the Italian navvies in North America, for they were merely two of the thousands who sought employment in one of the most labour-intensive and least skill-demanding industries in North America.<sup>7</sup> The magnitude of this occupational tendency is clearly evident in the statistics. In the United States, where Italian immigration was heaviest, Italian railway workers had replaced the Irish as the predominant railway labourers by the 1890's. So important were the Italian navvies that the American Industrial Commission reported in 1890 that no railway of any importance could be built without the labour of Italians.<sup>8</sup> At the turn of the century, the Union Pacific employed about 2,000 and the Great Northern between 1,500 and 9,000. About 800 worked for the Wabash and 1,100 for the Chicago, Milwaukee and Puget Sound, while in

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<sup>5</sup>Foerster, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup>With a few notable exceptions, the history of the navvies in North America has not been much studied. Historiography in the area of railway building deals more with political, financial, technological and entrepreneurial aspects, interspersed with fascinating accounts of railroad magnates. Most of these works, whether by Innis, Berton, Regehr or others, make only sporadic references to the contributions of the navvies. O. D. Skelton's eloquent early lament that behind the giants such as Van Horne, Hayes, Shaughnessy, MacKenzie and others, "loom up forgotten myriads who also were indispensable" remains a neglected insight. See Oscar D. Skelton, The Railway Builders (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook and Company, 1916) p. 247. Ironically, Skelton too, had little to say about navvies.

<sup>7</sup>The contribution of the Veltri brothers is special not as navvies but as navvies-turned-contractors, since this particular transformation has few parallels in the early history of Italian workers in North America.

<sup>8</sup>Foerster, p. 358.

Canada there were 9,000 Italian navvies, most of whom worked for the C.P.R.<sup>9</sup>

What is surprising about the Veltri brothers' experience is not their lengthy connection with the building of railways but their rise in the occupational hierarchy. As navvies they displayed qualities which insured their longevity in a rigorous environment. Giovanni's diary is interlaced with evidence of the type of endurance for which Italian navvies were renowned.<sup>10</sup> Yet one can hardly attribute their success to general characteristics which were displayed by the vast majority of people who shared the Veltri's background. The more traditional avenue for success, the padrone system, was shown above to be, by and large, inapplicable to the Veltri's set up. Therefore, one has to look elsewhere.

It is tempting to turn to the Veltri's personal attributes to

<sup>9</sup>Rolle, The Immigrant Upraised, p. 153.

<sup>10</sup>Bradwin was impressed by their willingness "to undertake the heaviest manual work." and by their persistence, their temperance and their adaptiveness. Bradwin, p. 110. Avery wrote that Italian navvies were much appreciated by the C.P.R. agents. One of the agents put it thus: "Italians are the only class of labourers we can employ who can live for a year on the wages they earn in six months.... If we have the Italians ... there is no danger of their jumping their jobs and leaving us in the lurch." Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners," p. 27. More so than navvies of other nationalities, Italian were reputed to be willing to do the work that no one else would do. See Jean F. Morrison, "Community and Conflict: a Study of the Working Class and its Relationship at the Canadian Lakehead, 1903-1913," M.A. Thesis, Lakehead University, 1974, p. 75. Assessment of Italian navvies was not always complimentary, however. In Pierre Berton's work a gang was described by an English-speaking railway worker as men who "looked like guys who would cut your throat for a dime." The same man described a team of young Englishmen as "a very nice bunch of lads." Pierre Berton, The Last Spike (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 110. On balance, one has to conclude that Italian navvies were considered desirable workers for railway construction. Bradwin's claim that "the Italian as an individual profited most from his work as a navvy" (Bradwin, p. 134) is not only a rather revealing statement but also sheds some light on the Veltri's unusual success on the railways of North America.

explain their achievement. Indeed, there is sufficient supportive evidence to substantiate this claim. Their incessant quest for work of any kind, Giovanni's adaptive and inventive skills, their shrewd readiness to diversify their investments, Vincenzo's courageous legal battle with Mackenzie and Mann (to be described later) - all point to personal characteristics which, in ordinary circumstances, insure success. On the other hand, these same characteristics frequently bear fruit only when conditions are favourable. The Veltris' particular forte lay precisely in their ability to recognize and to adapt to existing North American conditions. In typically realistic fashion<sup>11</sup> they dismissed any personal illusions of ethnocentrism and changed their names to anglicized form. Veltri became Welch. The earliest reference to this change of name occurs as follows: James V. Welche (sic) for Vincenzo Veltri on a "Warranty Deed for the State of Oregon," dated April 28, 1898; John Welche (sic) for Giovanni Veltri on a British Columbia "Record of Mineral Claim," dated March 10, 1900. The spelling of the name was subsequently changed to Welch - a name which was to be used in all their future business transactions. The earliest date for this change occurs on a \$10,000 Endowment Insurance Plan, dated November 6, 1899, which identifies James Vincent Welch, Railway Contractor as the bene-

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<sup>11</sup>Friedman wrote of the Southern Italian peasants' "nobility of response" to the objective conditions of their lives. According to the author, they display a "sense of primitive, speculative realism of acceptance of the unavoidable, of recognition of an established order, both natural and moral." A. G. Friedman, "The World of 'La Miseria'," in Jack M. Potter, May N. Diaz, and George M. Foster (editors), Peasant Society, a Reader (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 326.

ficiary.<sup>12</sup> They also realized that a pioneer, capitalist economy would give vent to their latent capabilities. In the New World even a lowly contadino could aspire to greater things if opportunities were recognized and acted upon.

It was not mere coincidence that in 1898, after working for nearly two decades on American railways, the Veltri brothers chose to work and remain in Canada. From the closing years of the 1890's to 1913 there was an improvement in economic conditions all over the world. Canada's economic outlook was described in glowing, optimistic phrases. Canada's future inspired "exuberant confidence."<sup>13</sup> In this mood of unbridled optimism, the "third great forward movement of Canadian railways was imagined and begun."<sup>14</sup> The settlement of the West made it desirable that the near-monopoly of the C.P.R. come to an end and that the pressing needs of the farmers be met with more adequate transportation facilities. Nor were these the only needs which sparked an orgy of railway building. There were also the "empire-building ambitions of the railway promoters, their financial

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<sup>12</sup>Welch Papers. Although there is no specific explanation anywhere for the Veltris' decision to change their name, one is bound to concur with the findings of the Canadian Institute of Cultural Research that the anglicization of one's name brings definite economic and social advantages. The Institute also found that "the name changers are those who are most active in the Canadian rather than minority 'ethnic' community." See "Change of Name," in Howard Palmer, Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1975), p. 133. If these findings were true in the 1960's, they would have been even more valid at the turn of the Twentieth Century when the pressures for anglo-conformity were a great deal stronger.

<sup>13</sup>Brown and Cook, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup>G. P. de T. Glazebrook, A History of Transportation in Canada (Toronto: Mclelland and Stewart Limited, 1964), p. 119.

backers, and the scores of hangers-on who thrived on the profit of contractors and sub-contractors, land speculators and just plain boodle."<sup>15</sup>

Fortuitously, Vincenzo and Giovanni found themselves in an area of North America where railway building was intense due to the capitalist ambitions of several entrepreneurs. The railway lines of British Columbia were built not as a result of local ambitions but by outside interests.<sup>16</sup> Because of the mineral wealth of B.C., particularly in the Kootenay and Slocan area, several important railways, especially the Great Northern and the C.P.R. vied with each other for commercial superiority. James J. Hill of the Great Northern had made it his policy to build "feeders" north from his main line towards the international boundary.<sup>17</sup> In Southern British Columbia these lines reach Fernie, Nelson, Grand Forks, Midway and Princeton. The C.P.R. branch lines - built to offset American penetration - produced two distinct classes of lines: those which joined with the main line to the north and those of the southern route which goes from Medicine Hat by way of the Crowsnest Pass, Fernie, Nelson, Grand Forks, Midway,

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<sup>15</sup>Brown and Cook, p. 148.

<sup>16</sup>F. W. Howay, W. N. Sage, and H. F. Angus, British Columbia and the United States (New York: Russel and Russel, 1942), p. 229.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

Penticton, Princeton and Hope to the main line to Vancouver.<sup>18</sup>

Though the C.P.R. and the Great Northern were the principal contenders in the railway supremacy, the Columbia and Western Railway financed largely by the controversial Frederick Augustus Heinze, also made its bid for part of the action. In 1897, it built a line from Trail to Rossland and from Trail to Robson. A year later, the Columbia and Western was leased by the C.P.R.

"In the middle of the 1890's the competition of the American roads became so severe that the Canadian Pacific Railway decided to strengthen its hold on the Kootenay country."<sup>19</sup> The opening of rich deposits in the Slocan induced both the Great Northern and the C.P.R. to build lines to connect with the lake and river routes. Between 1893 and 1895 the Great Northern built the Nakusp and Slocan "to draw the trade to the Columbia River." Through its control of the Columbia and Kootenay, the C.P.R. obtained another entrance to the Slocan after the completion of a branch line from Slocan Junction to Slocan City.<sup>20</sup> In 1897 the Canadian Pacific brought the line from Dunmore Junction to Lethbridge from the Alberta Railway and Irrigation company. Soon after, it began construction of the line from Lethbridge to Crowsnest Pass. The company also leased the British

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 249. It should be noted here that the C.P.R. construction policy after 1884 increased the availability of small contracts for small outfits. Instead of dealing with large general contractors who would be responsible for the entire project, C.P.R. agents split the construction work into several components such as clearing of rights of way, building embankments, roadbeds and tunnels, making rock cuts etc. See T. D. Regehr, "Contracting for the Canadian Pacific Railway," in Lewis H. Thomas (editor), Essays on Western History (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

Columbia Southern in 1898 and between 1897 and 1898, built another line from Crowsnest to Kootenay Landing. By 1898 the C.P.R. had obtained access to the Kootenays from the East. Access to the Arrow Lakes from its main line at Revelstoke was obtained with the completion of yet another branch - the Revelstoke-Arrowhead in 1896.<sup>21</sup>

It is not possible within the scope of this thesis to provide a more complete account of railway building in the American North West and the interior of B.C. in the decade of the 1890's. During this period (as will be shown subsequently) the Veltri brothers worked on several of the above-mentioned projects, profiting from this feverish activity. Vincenzo, in particular, realized that the demand for railway workers was high and acted accordingly. It is not unreasonable to speculate that news of new projects travelled from camp to camp. Vincenzo's function within this cohesive group of Southern Italians and paesani was to obtain work for them.<sup>22</sup> Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri were by no means unequalled for their ability to recognize and to exploit this extraordinary situation, but were very unusual in their breakthrough in the field of railway building which was then dominated by the prominent Anglo-Saxon group.<sup>23</sup> They were unlikely pioneers not for the contribution they made in the field of railway building but in breaking down

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 255-259. See map #3.

<sup>22</sup>"Memoirs," p. 6

<sup>23</sup>Even a rapid perusal of the names of the contracting firms mentioned in the major works on this topic and Giovanni Veltri's own Memoirs demonstrate the extent of this dominance. However, one ought to acknowledge the possibility of a name change - though not necessarily a common occurrence - for other people as well as the Veltri brothers.



the barriers of a traditional order. It was not an easy task since the risks were frequently enormous. The work they did first as navvies on American railways proved profitable.

## 2. The American Experience

Fortune had not smiled on Giovanni Veltri on the North African railways where he nearly lost his life in a serious accident.<sup>24</sup> Invited by his brother, Vincenzo, to join him in the United States, Giovanni decided to take his older brother's advice. He suffered the discomforts of a long sea voyage which lasted thirty-one days and reached his brother in the state of Montana in the year 1885. Vincenzo was foreman for the contracting company of Keefer and Larson, one of the sub-contractors working for the Montana Central Railway.<sup>25</sup> Upon completion of this contract, they went to work for "McKewon & Crackinton" of Butte City. The two brothers, several Grimaldesi and other Italians from Calabria and Abruzzi worked on numerous small lines which led to mines in the Butte district. Vincenzo was now a general supervisor (direttore capo). They were paid two and a half dollars per day and charged one dollar for room and board.<sup>26</sup> Work on these lines lasted for eleven months. Shortly

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<sup>24</sup>"Memoirs," p. 2

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 3. The ambitious project pioneered by James H. Hill "envisioned a heavy-duty road from Great Falls to Butte." The ninety-seven mile Montana Central was completed in the summer of 1886, "all except for the laying of the rails." See Albro Martin, James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 338-339.

<sup>26</sup>"Memoirs," p. 4. One has to assume that Giovanni was referring to the wages of workers. As general supervisor (no job definition is given in the "Memoirs") Vincenzo was probably paid more.

thereafter, the Veltris moved on to Anaconda where they remained until May 1887.<sup>27</sup> They digressed somewhat from their usual type of work by doing some clearing for the mills and kilns as well as building branch lines. From here they moved to Albany, near the coast of Oregon, where they took part in the railway construction of lines which linked the states of Oregon and California. Vincenzo's fortunes remained good since he was once again employed as a general supervisor and was also given an opportunity to set up his own work-yard and a goods shed (commissary store).<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, the subcontractors for whom they were working, Allen and Smith, turned out to be 'swindlers' (imbroglioni) who paid their workers with worthless cheques. The Veltris with others lost two and a half months in wages. The fraudulent coup had worked: the two were never seen again and the project came to a standstill as the navvies refused to continue work. Within two days the general contractors, Serra and Dini, two Italians from San Francisco, arrived on the scene to defuse a potentially turbulent situation. Serra and Dini entrusted the entire supervision of the line to Vincenzo and reassured all the workers that they would be paid in paper currency and gold. And they made good on their promise.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>"Memoirs," p. 4. In 1884 Marcus Daly and three partners built a smelter about twenty-five miles west of Butte, at Anaconda. Ten years later, they incorporated into the Anaconda Mining Company. In 1899 Henry H. Rogers and Standard Oil Trust purchased the company thus ensuring the phenomenal growth of Butte, "the world's greatest mining town." See Howard N. and Lucille L. Sloane, A Pictorial History of American Mining (New York: Crown Publishing, Inc., 1970), pp. 219-221.

<sup>28</sup>"Memoirs," p. 4

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

Vincenzo and Giovanni spent the winter months of 1887 in Portland, Oregon and went to Spokane in the spring. Though it is not clear why the Veltris decided to go to Spokane, one has to conclude that economic considerations were foremost in their minds. At this time, Spokane appeared to have more work opportunities,<sup>30</sup> for the city during this period was an expanding community. In a period of five years, from 1884 to 1889, it grew from a population of about one thousand to twenty-five thousand people "definitely threatening to submerge its sturdy pioneer economy."<sup>31</sup> Whatever additional motives there might have been for their move to Spokane, it is obvious that availability of work was a major consideration, for they immediately set to work on a new contract for the Spokane Northern. The contractors were Hendricks and Chapman who were building a line which ran from Spokane to Colville.<sup>32</sup>

By the end of the 1880's Vincenzo was well known not only amongst his compatriots but also by a few important contractors. As soon as he heard of a new railway being built in Montana from Butte to

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<sup>30</sup>The Review estimated that "fully five-thousand people reached Spokane Falls by the various (railroad) lines every month" between 1887 and 1888 though many of them may have been passing through. Reported by J. Fahey, Inland Empire (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 60-61.

<sup>31</sup>Lucille F. Fargo, The Spokane Story (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950) p. 161. Before 1891, Spokane was known as Spokane Falls. The town discarded "Falls" in 1891. See Fahey, p. 119. It seemed that Giovanni Veltri was not aware of this change in nomenclature since in his memoirs he referred to the city as "Spokane" at the time when it should have been "Spokane Falls."

<sup>32</sup>"Memoirs," p. 5. R. H. Meyer's work on the evolution of railways of the Kootenays shows the line mentioned by Veltri as having been begun after 1885 and completed before 1895. Veltri referred to the line as the Spokane Northern, Meyer as the Spokane Falls & Northern. See R. H. Meyer, "The Evolution of Railways in the Kootenays," M.A. Thesis, 1967, University of British Columbia. Refer to Map #2 as adapted from Meyer, also map #4.

Jefferson, he approached Keefer and Company to obtain some work for himself and Giovanni and to intercede for many paesani as well. According to Giovanni Veltri, Keefer, a "good friend" of his brother, assigned them "the best piece of rock work." Though it required a great deal of blasting and clearing with drag-boats and dump carts, this work earned the contractors an "excellent profit." On this particular contract Vincenzo was also given the opportunity to set up on his own account a provision store and work yard.<sup>33</sup>

Late in 1889, Giovanni was "called to arms" by the Italian government. His older brother "decided to send (him) home."<sup>34</sup> After a brief Christmas holiday with his family, Giovanni went to Cosenza where he was declared fit for military service. He spent nearly two uneventful years in the army and returned to Grimaldi in the fall of 1892. He got engaged and married in the spring of 1893. Shortly thereafter he was recalled to serve in the army once again. During this brief service he was granted a furlough because of the birth of his first child, Raffaele.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Memoirs," p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 6. It is interesting to note that Vincenzo, the older of the two brothers, made the decision to send Giovanni home. In the traditional family relationship, the older member of the family was expected to take responsibility for important developments. By the same token, the younger member would be expected to comply. In I Malavoglia, Verga, with the rare insight that made him one of the great Italian writers of the South, wrote of the family thus (in this passage Verga's mouthpiece is padron 'Ntoni, one of the leading characters of the novel): "Men are made like the fingers of the hand; the thumb must behave (deve fare) as a thumb, and the little finger must behave as a little finger. And padrone 'Ntoni's family was actually disposed like the fingers of the hand...." Verga, p. 55. Translation is mine.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8. Giovanni's memoirs say nothing about Vincenzo during this brief interval. One assumes that he continued to work in the Spokane area since, upon Giovanni's return to the U.S., Vincenzo was still in Spokane.

In the five years Giovanni spent in Italy a number of changes had occurred which would eventually have significant repercussions in the lives of the Veltri brothers. To begin with, though Vincenzo's basis of operation was still from Spokane, most of the actual work was done in Canada. It is unlikely that this change was intentional on Vincenzo's part. The move may have been caused by shifting economic conditions. As long as Spokane remained the centre of the "inland empire," having emerged as the "largest northern railroad center between Minneapolis and the Pacific coast,"<sup>36</sup> it was natural for navvies to remain in an area where employment was easy to find. But in 1893-1894 Spokane experienced a financial slump<sup>37</sup> while at about the same period, the mining business became quite active in Southern British Columbia. This promising economic development led to a "demand for easy transportation."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the desire of Toronto and London investors to seek profits in Southern British Columbia caused a shift in economic influence. By 1898, American domination of the Kootenays was ending.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Fahey, p. 3

<sup>37</sup> Andrew McCulloch, "Railway Development in Southern British Columbia from 1890 On and Some Reasons for Building the Kettle Valley Railway," Boundary Historical Society, Vol. 4, 1964, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 180. Other authors imply that the American dominance of the Kootenays lasted well into the first decade of the 20th Century. Canadian capital became "dominant" in this area after 1906, the year that the Trail smelter was purchased by the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada. See Howay, Sage, and Angus, p. 259.

In the latter part of the 1890's, Canada's long-standing policy of changing the north-south flow of traffic to east-west was beginning to bear fruit.<sup>41</sup> As the centre of gravity began to shift, so did some of the flow of itinerant navvies. As a result of the existence of several waterways and railways<sup>42</sup> extending into Canada, people were unaware of any boundary line and "thought they were still in Washington state."<sup>43</sup> It is very likely that Vincenzo Veltri, like many others, was not cognizant of restrictions that a boundary might place in his way. On the other hand, Canadian immigration officials were not eager to impede the influx of workers during a period of economic boom and expansionist population policies. Between 1895 and 1898 the Veltri brothers crossed the border many times. In 1898 they crossed it for the last time and Canada became their new occupational territory. The American experience had been an invaluable source of entrepreneurial sagacity. It had also transformed them from simple peasants to knowledgeable railway workers who would soon exploit this new-found expertise.

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<sup>40</sup>"At the heart of the National Policy was the determination to strengthen Canada's east-west axis by construction of a transcontinental railway." H. G. J. Aitken, "Defensive Expansionism: the State and Economic Growth in Canada," in W. T. Easterbrook and M. H. Watkins (editors), Approaches to Canadian Economic History (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1969), p. 204, first published in H. G. J. Aitken (editor), The State and Economic Growth (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1959).

<sup>41</sup>Meyer, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup>Refer to map #3.

<sup>43</sup>McCulloch, p. 38.

Their illicit<sup>44</sup> leapfrogging over the North American boundary proved that men are seldom impressed by artificial barriers. The Veltri brothers and thousands of others crossed the national boundary in search of a better future. In their eyes nationalist, economic and political restrictions made little sense.<sup>45</sup> The overwhelming concern of the Veltris and many others like them was not the promotion and propagation of unknown national policies. As immigrants, their basic preoccupation was amelioration of their economic condition and that of their families.

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<sup>44</sup> The question of legal entry must always be considered within the framework of Canada's immigration policy. One of the best sources for this period is H. Troper's Only Farmers Need Apply. In this work Troper discusses the immigration department's vigorous efforts to attract American settlers through a well planned campaign of incentives, advertising, promotional tours and strategic placement of immigration agents. It is very unlikely that immigration agents who were instructed to promote and not discourage immigration, would enter into a discussion of legality with potential immigrants be they settlers or navvies. In addition, at the turn of the century, "men and ideas moved easily back and forth across the border between the United States and Canada." A. Ross McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries; the Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> M. L. Hansen wrote: "... these North American men and women responding to pressures generated by their own numbers, by the proportions of old and young among them, or by new tides of immigration, moved about spasmodically and with little regard for political allegiance, making and breaking by their migrations states and systems of community life." M. L. Hansen, The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 1. A more specific example of people crossing the American-Canadian boundary without considering the political implications but simply pursuing their occupational interests occurred in the interior of B.C. during the 1880's. In fact, many of these people were not even aware of the existence of a boundary. A mining recorder at Revelstoke wrote to the Minister of Mines in 1887 to complain that he was receiving registration fees forwarded from Colville in the state of Washington. Such occurrences would indicate that "some of the prospectors might have thought they were still in the United States." David Scott and Edna H. Hanic, Nelson: Queen City of the Kootenays (Vancouver: Mitchell Press Ltd., 1972), p. 29.

The apolitical nature<sup>46</sup> of the navvies is demonstrated by the lack of commentary on political events in much of the existing navy literature. Giovanni's "Memoirs" reveal an individual who, though capable of some social insight, preferred to record his experiences as they related to his fellow workers, associates, family and work. His and his brother's concern was to channel their energies and talents within a North American economic set-up which would allow a profitable return for their human and financial resources. After 1898 it happened that Canada provided the best economic opportunities. At least so they believed.

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<sup>46</sup> Several works (only two of which are cited here) demonstrate that it was not unusual for Italians to be involved in labour movements. See A. Ross McCormack, p. 15. Also see Jean F. Morrison, passim. However, these labour stirrings were more the exception than the rule. To begin with, labour movements were urban in nature since it was difficult to organize navvies and other day labourers in a work camp milieu. McCormack wrote that, during the incipient stage of the Canadian labour movement, "most Europeans remained outside union ranks " (the British being the exception), p. 10. The more common experience was that of the Veltris and their co-workers. Theirs was a homogeneous, cohesive group of men who shared a common agrarian experience hardly conducive to labour militancy.



## CHAPTER IV

### YEARS OF TRIAL AND SUCCESS: MAKING INROADS IN RAILWAY BUILDING

#### 1. The Veltris' Operation in British Columbia

In 1895 the Veltri brothers began to work for the first time in Canada. Subcontracting for Guthrie, Foley and Follette, they obtained eight miles<sup>1</sup> of work building a line which went from Kaslo to Three Forks, in British Columbia. Gaetano Iachetta, another native of Grimaldi, was Vincenzo's business partner, while Giovanni had become a foreman. This contract was completed in three and a half months. Soon they obtained another segment of work on fifteen miles of line which stretched from Three Forks to Sandon in the gold mining area. The firm of Welch and Iachetta was offered half of the line, Jack O'Leary and Brothers, the other.

From this time the sub-contracting company of Welch and Iachetta began to make significant inroads in the railway building business, competing successfully against numerous other sub-contracting firms. In the five years 1895-1900, "the railway network (in the interior of British Columbia) became much denser and more complex" as the C.P.R. worked to shorten the transportation distance between the transcontinental line and such points as Nakusp and Robson.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Memoirs," p. 8. Bradwin wrote that seldom would a sub-contractor undertake more than 10 miles of work on a new grade. "Such a stretch offers about the maximum amount to be handled safely, considering the outfit and equipment usually at his disposal." Bradwin, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, p. 18. See map #3.

"The great mining district of the Kootenays was an integral portion of the 'Inland Empire,' tributary to Spokane. The railway history of this region was a struggle between American interests and the Canadian Pacific Railway." Howay, Sage, and Angus, p. 247.

The Veltri brothers profited from this railway boom and found work with relative ease, working for various railway contractors and shifting their allegiance with remarkable regularity. Between June 1897 and June 1899, for example, railway building in British Columbia increased from 878.79 miles to 1128.74<sup>3</sup>. They worked on one important C.P.R. project which was designed to build a branch line between Revelstoke on the main line and Arrowhead. During the execution of some rather difficult work, Giovanni witnessed a fatal accident when a mine exploded in a twenty-foot shaft, killing two workers.<sup>4</sup> This memory served to preserve his link with the project.

Upon completion of this project, Giovanni Veltri and Gaetano Iachetta returned to Spokane. On their arrival, they learned that Vincenzo, who had departed earlier, had sixty men building a small canal in the County of Pelus sixty miles from Spokane. Giovanni decided not to join his brother in order to spend the winter months going to school. His tutor was a woman who demanded five dollars per month for her services. But his laudable attempt to improve his proficiency in the English language lasted less than one month, for he concluded that "it was better to quit school and go to work"<sup>5</sup> - probably not a difficult decision for a twenty-six-year-old to make. Giovanni preferred to leave the pleasant but trying and unremunerative environment for a harsher but more lucrative venue. He thus spent the winter months of

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<sup>3</sup>Canada, "Sessional Papers," No. 13, 1899, p. xxx, also "Sessional Paper," No. 13, 1900, p. xxxvii. These figures do not include the 182.75 mile section of the Crow's Nest Pass.

<sup>4</sup>"Memoirs," p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

1896 working with paesani and relatives in a mine in Moline, Idaho. In April, he rejoined his brother, who was now working for Foley, Larson and Company on a branch line from Northport to Rossland.<sup>6</sup> The railway led into "the largest mining centre," the location of the Le Roi Mine, Eureka Mine, St. Mary's Mine and St. Joseph's Mine, all employing a large number of workers "most of whom (were) Italians."<sup>7</sup>

In October of the same year, lured by a paesano turned speculator (affarista), Giuseppe Iacoe Dilio, Giovanni Veltri went back to Spokane to set up a "bar" with his new business partner. This proved to be an unproductive undertaking for "everybody was short of money." The few drinks they sold were to Italians and on credit. During one of his absences, Giovanni's partner sold everything; the dream of setting up a small business had vanished. He had learned a costly lesson.<sup>8</sup>

Fortunately, Vincenzo had continued his work as a sub-contractor in the area where D. C. Corbin (whose name Giovanni Veltri wrote as "Corbet") and F. A. Heinze - the two entrepreneurial colossi of the Inland Empire - were attempting to set up their financial empires.<sup>9</sup> The Spokane Northern gave Welch and Iachetta a contract on a branch of the Trail Creek-Robson line. This new branch would serve the smelter at Trail Creek.<sup>10</sup> During the construction of this line, Vincenzo learned that Giovanni's business undertaking was not going well. As a consequence

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 10. Refer to Map #4. For a detailed account of the linking of B.C. mines with the Northport smelter, see John Fahey, Inland Empire (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 167-179.

<sup>7</sup> "Memoirs," p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Fahey, pp. 167-179.

<sup>10</sup> "Memoirs," p. 11

Vincenzo went to Spokane to convince his venturesome brother to return with him and go to work on the railway. Under the circumstances, Giovanni was in no condition to disobey his brother. He returned and was promptly given a small station. He was also entrusted with the set-up of a provision store and with the bookkeeping for several station men. Everything here went well.<sup>11</sup>

In the spring of 1897, the Welch-Iachetta sub-contracting company was awarded a new 10 mile stone-clearing contract by O'Leary, McLean and Company, a contracting firm which was building a branch line for the C.P.R. on the Nelson-Slocan line.<sup>12</sup> The work-- three quarters of which had been assigned by Welch-Iachetta to station men<sup>13</sup> - was carried out with dump-carts and drag-boats. It was completed by the middle of October, 1897.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 11. It is not clear whether the success of this contract was of a monetary nature or whether Giovanni was pleased with the ultimate outcome which may have enhanced the reputation of the Veltri brothers. It may have been both.

<sup>12</sup>With the completion of this line, the C.P.R. would rival the Great Northern in tapping the resources of the region, for now, along with the Nakusp and Slocan railway, it had both a northern and a southern entrance to the Slocan valley. See Mayer, p. 38. See Map #3.

<sup>13</sup>The Veltri brothers realized that their operation was not large enough to undertake the entire project on their own. They, therefore, sub-let most of the work to station-men. Indeed, this was a common practice. Bradwin wrote: "A subcontractor cannot afford to imperil his relationship with the head-contractor by being behind with his particular contract when the steel creeps towards his work." See Bradwin, p. 114.

It would appear that the Welch-Iachetta sub-contracting company, at the stage when its operation was still small, began to sublet its contracts not out of design, but out of necessity.

<sup>14</sup>"Memoirs," p. 12.

In the same year, after Cornelius Van Horne, president of the C.P.R., had decided to pursue a "more energetic policy in the Kootenays,"<sup>15</sup> the company took a decisive step to gain direct access to the Kootenays from the east by building the Crow's Nest Pass. The Welch-Iachetta Company was given a 14 mile contract from Kootenay Landing to Goat River near the village of Kuskanook. Giovanni Veltri and a relative of his, Giovanni Albo, obtained a "beautiful piece, the best of all the work." They built their own encampment and were the first to finish with "excellent earnings."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, tragedy struck once again when one of the workers, Raffaele Greco, Iachetta's uncle, was hit by a rock during a mine explosion and died on Giovanni's knees. The hapless victim was later buried in Nelson.

In his next contract, Giovanni experienced one of the limitations of sub-contracting when he completed his work without "any profit."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, these early contracts provided valuable business experience.

<sup>15</sup>Howay, Sage and Angus, p. 254. The Canadian Government subsidized the construction of this line which went from Lethbridge, Alberta via the Crow's Nest Pass to Nelson, B.C. See Canada, Department of Transport, A Statutory History of the Steam and Electrical Railways of Canada, 1836-1937 (Compiled by Robert Dorman, 1938), p. 130. The Crow's Nest Pass Railway was considered a "necessity for the successful development of the mining interests of British Columbia." In 1897, the Canadian Government granted subsidy of \$11,000 per mile to the C.P.R. Canada, Sessional Papers, No. 20, Vol. XXXVI, 1902, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup>"Memoirs," p. 12. In his memoirs, Giovanni Veltri very infrequently quoted figures to indicate profits for any given contract. In this respect, Giovanni was not unlike many of his own background. G.E. di Palma Castiglione wrote: "the Italian peasant in general, and the Southern Italian in particular, is diffident towards strangers and obstinate in refusing to make known his personal affairs, and still more so when it is a question of money in his possession." Castiglione, p. 197.

<sup>17</sup>"Memoirs," p. 13.

Crude business entries appear for the first time amongst the Welch papers.<sup>18</sup> These entries, in pocket-size monthly time books, demonstrate that the two brothers found their metier arduous. Giovanni's entries betray considerable difficulty with the English language, though he found the use of English more reliable than his native tongue, for he resorted to the latter only when he lacked the corresponding English term.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Giovanni had to become conversant with the daily needs of the station-men whom he supplied with both provisions and tools. The entries for the year 1897 show that most of his clients were contadini, some of them paesani. Undoubtedly, this homogeneity made his task easier. His needs were identical to those of the men with whom he worked. The entry for his own provisions for the month of September 1897 might have been that of any other navvy who was in his employ. The well known frugality of Italian navvies is confirmed by Giovanni's monthly provision list: 3 cans of tomatoes, 10 pounds of potatoes, 14 pounds of flour, one can of milk, 9 pounds of ham, one pound of lard, and one bar of soap.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>The Welch Papers contain no personal entries by Vincenzo though one has to assume that he, like his brother Giovanni, must have kept records for his early contracts. His subsequent business transactions were carried out through his solicitors.

<sup>19</sup>The spelling errors are typical of one with an Italian background. The following are some examples: poetoas, mathes, aneons, shavales, overols. See Welch Papers, "Daily Record Books," 1897, pp. 84-85.

<sup>20</sup>Welch Papers, "Daily Record Book, 1897." See p. 86. A decade later, Bradwin wrote that Italians tended "to grub in pairs," and that by doing so, they could minimize the cost of food. To prove his point, he listed a month's supplies for two as follows: one large wooden box macaroni, a bag potatoes, a loaf of bread each per day, 10 pounds of lard, 22 pounds of bacon, tea and incidentals - all costing \$18.50. See Bradwin, p. 134.

# Mont of Dec. 93

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T. V. V. V. V.

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13 d. 4/15 Camp

14 d. 4/15 Camp

15 d. 4/15 Camp

Box kept

Front powder

2 d. 4/15 Camp

3 d. 4/15 Camp

4 d. 4/15 Camp

5 d. 4/15 Camp

6 d. 4/15 Camp

7 d. 4/15 Camp

8 d. 4/15 Camp

9 d. 4/15 Camp

10 d. 4/15 Camp

11 d. 4/15 Camp

12 d. 4/15 Camp

13 d. 4/15 Camp

14 d. 4/15 Camp

15 d. 4/15 Camp

16 d. 4/15 Camp

17 d. 4/15 Camp

18 d. 4/15 Camp

19 d. 4/15 Camp

20 d. 4/15 Camp





12

July 1899

4	1 Can ...	✓
10	1 Can ...	✓
	" "	✓
	14 + ...	✓
11	1 Can ...	✓
17	1 ...	✓
	9 ...	✓
21	" "	✓
	1 Can ...	✓
	" "	✓

July 1899

	3 ...	✓	45
	1 ...	✓	35
10	1 ...	✓	20
14	1 ...	✓	35
20	1 ...	✓	45
			<u>180</u>

Giovanni was also required to supply his men with the tools of the trade. Some of the 1897 records show sales of the following items: kegs of black powder, S.H. lamps, crow bars, hammers, handles, sledge hammers, picks, shovels, axes, blasting caps, etc.<sup>21</sup>

The following year, in 1898, they went to work for the Columbia and Western Railway Company which had been incorporated in 1896 to build a line from the mouth of Trail Creek to Penticton in order to provide transportation to the mines.<sup>22</sup> The general contractors for the project were Foley, Larson and Company, but Veltri obtained his five-mile section from a "third hand" - Burns and George.<sup>23</sup> This assignment was executed in much the same fashion as previous contracts: the rock cut<sup>24</sup> was cleared with dump-carts and drag-boats pulled by horses and mules. The Veltri brothers remained on the same line for some time, having obtained more work, about ten miles east of Grand Forks. Profits would now go

<sup>21</sup>Welch Papers, "Daily Record Book, 1897." See p. 88.

<sup>22</sup>Dorman, p. 170. In his memoirs, Veltri refers to this railway as the "Columbia Western."

The Columbia and Western would serve to provide a southern route towards the coast, provided, of course, that the line ran on from Penticton. It could also link at Penticton with sternwheelers on the Okanagan chain of lakes and thus provide another route to the C.P.R. main line.

<sup>23</sup>"Memoirs," p. 13. It was not an uncommon practice to have a contract awarded to subcontractors by "third hands." Bradwin wrote: "A railway contract once obtained is not unlike a valuable franchise; it may be dickered, sold and resold .... Contractors have undertaken three hundred to four hundred miles of new line then sub-let a half of it, or a third, to another contracting company, making clear profit without touching the work." Bradwin, p. 199.

<sup>24</sup>It was Foerster's opinion that Italian navvies "specialized in rock work, including blasting." Foerster, p. 360. Bradwin also speculated about ethnic adaptability in the following fashion: the Slavs became labourers and helpers, the English delighted in machinery, the Finns excelled in blasting and the Italians displayed "an adaptiveness for work with cement" and worked as well in ballast pits or railway maintenance. Bradwin, p. 110. This occupational stereotype was, indeed, widespread. Italians were known as "rockhogs," a term given to drillers and blasters. See F. A. Talbot, "The Garden of Canada," in Abella and Millar (editors), p. 59.



almost entirely to Vincenzo since he had bought out Iachetta who, a month earlier, had decided to return to Italy. Vincenzo had also frustrated Giovanni's hope that he might be made a full partner in the Welch Company.<sup>25</sup> Upon completion of the ten mile section, Vincenzo obtained more work - twelve miles - near Phoenix, one of the copper producing mines on the Columbia and Western. Giovanni, with the assistance of a sectional engineer, received three miles of work which unfortunately proved unremunerative.<sup>26</sup>

In the autumn of 1898, the Veltris established their operations near Grand Forks where they worked for the duration of the winter on lines built to transport minerals to the smelters. The following spring they loaded all their equipment and moved to the vicinity of Nelson which became their base of operations for nearly a year. Competing against subcontractors such as Big Red Jack Martin, Pat Welche (sic) and others, the J. V. Welch sub-contracting company was awarded a five mile contract on the line which went from Fivemile Point to Balfour.<sup>27</sup>

The Veltri brothers stayed in the Kootenay region until December 1899, during which time they remained indefatigable in their quest for railway work. Having spent four years in an area where mining

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<sup>25</sup> "Memoirs," p. 16. Giovanni's tone betrays a sense of disappointment. For, instead of a partnership, he received a \$60 monthly salary. Nevertheless, Giovanni managed to earn about one thousand dollars on this project.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 15. See map #3 for location.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. This was incidentally an important addition to the C.P.R. system enabling rail lines to displace the sternwheelers on the West Arm of Kootenay Lake and to make direct contact at Balfour with the vessels on the main lake. The railway company also used ferries to transport cars from Balfour to near Creston in the vicinity of Kootenay Landing, at the south end of the Lake there to make contact with the Crow's Nest Pass line to the east. See map #3.

was the leading industry, they also became interested in mineral claims.<sup>28</sup> Giovanni's claim near Nelson, the length being 1500 feet, was recorded in March 1900.<sup>29</sup> Appropriately, he called the claim "Italy." A Free Miner's Certificate was issued to Vincenzo in June 1899, but no record exists of any mineral claim in his name at this particular date.<sup>30</sup> He did, however, enter into an agreement with an Italian from Nelson to develop a mineral claim called "Carlotta" located about three miles northwest of Pass Creek.<sup>31</sup> Vincenzo also purchased a half-interest in another mining claim, "Young George," from a certain Jachetta, Poggi's prospecting partner. This last purchase proved troublesome; the transaction was done improperly, perhaps even fraudulently, since Vincenzo's solicitor discovered that Jachetta had transferred only a one-half interest in the claim.<sup>32</sup> In spite of an inauspicious beginning and uncertain returns, Vincenzo maintained a considerable interest in the potential of minerals. It is also likely that both brothers resorted to such diversification to ensure themselves a margin of financial security should their railway building venture fail, though Giovanni would ultimately show only a modicum of interest in mining. To be sure,

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<sup>28</sup> Many people made fortunes from the Slocan region, a "wealthy and hard country." Others "lost and became discouraged." Clara Graham, Kootenay Mosaic (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1971), p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Welch Papers, "Free Miner's Certificate, 1899."

<sup>30</sup> The possibility that such claims may have been misplaced exists.

<sup>31</sup> Welch Papers, "Letter to Andrea Poggi, 1901."

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., "Letter by McLeod and Brown, Barrister, Solicitors 1903."

one can well imagine that Vincenzo's interest was speculative. He might just "strike it rich," but he would hardly give up railway work to go prospecting or mining.

## 2. The Veltris' Operation in Ontario and Manitoba

Late in 1899, possibly lured both by J. W. Stewart, a contractor for whom they had done some work, and the desire to improve their financial prospects, the Veltri brothers decided to move their operation from British Columbia to Ontario.<sup>33</sup> Their move coincided with yet another intense railway building period during which Canada went from coast to coast for the third time. In British Columbia, the Veltris had found employment as a result of both American and Canadian lines competing for commercial supremacy in the "Inland Empire." Less than a decade later,

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<sup>33</sup>The explanation of the move from B.C. must remain speculative because of the lack of any specific reference for such a decision. It appears, however, that speculation as an explanation of business decisions is not unusual. The following lends support to this necessarily tentative approach. "The business historian must (however) try to understand and explain how and why the businessmen he writes about make important decisions. This task is made difficult by the fact that most business records, such as minute books, contracts, stock registers, and official correspondence rarely include detailed and forthright explanations of the decisions made." T. D. Regehr, "A Backwoodsman and an Engineer: An Examination of a Divergence of Entrepreneurial Practices in Canada at the Turn of the Century," The Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers, 1977, p. 159.

One can also explain the Veltris' move in terms of availability of railway contracts. The completion of the Crow's Nest Pass line in 1898 represented a watershed in railway building in B.C. The intensity of railway construction could be expected to diminish. On the other hand, 1898 marked the emergence of the Canadian Northern as the "C.P.R.'s only substantial competition in the west." See R. A. Phillips, Canada's Railways (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Company of Canada Ltd., 1968), p. 44. It is no coincidence that the Veltri brothers obtained one of their biggest contracts with the Canadian Northern in the area where Canada's third largest railway system was most active.

the Veltri construction company was able to profit from another favourable railway building period. Agricultural conditions in Canada's prairies taxed heavily the C.P.R.'s transportation facilities. The grain crop of 1901 and 1902 "put an enormous and sudden strain on the railway at harvest time."<sup>34</sup> The clamour for better service in the West was matched by the Liberal government's desire to cash in on railway fever<sup>35</sup> just as the Conservatives had done earlier with their backing of the C.P.R. The pleas of Mackenzie and Mann, founders of the Canadian Northern, for government subsidies found receptive ears. In 1898, they began their second railway building project (the first was a 123 mile line from Gladstone to Winnipegosis). The line they built ran from St. Boniface to the Lake of the Woods. By 1900, they moved into Saskatchewan. They also amalgamated with the Winnipeg Great Northern and called their company the Canadian Northern. In 1901, the Manitoba government obtained a 999-year lease on all the lines built into the province by the American company, the Northern Pacific. Desirous of creating competition for the C.P.R., the Manitoba government turned down the C.P.R.'s more "favourable terms" and leased the newly acquired lines to the Canadian Northern.<sup>36</sup> To these 313 miles in Manitoba they added another 131 miles of new construction. "The Canadian Northern suddenly emerged as the C.P.R.'s only substantial competition in the West."<sup>37</sup> By 1902, the Canadian Northern became the third largest railway system in Canada with 1300 miles in operation between Lake Superior and Saskatchewan.

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<sup>34</sup>Phillips, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup>Hansard, "House of Commons Debates, 1903," p. 320. ( )

<sup>36</sup>W. Kaye Lamb, History of the Canadian Pacific Railway (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1977), p. 231.

<sup>37</sup>Phillips, p. 44.

Because of the expansionist mentality of the time, the Canadian Northern's ambitious railway programme was bound to clash with the expectations of the Grand Trunk. The latter looked to western expansion to improve its financial outlook. The former, on the other hand, was planning to extend its existing lines eastward for the same reasons. The would-be arbiters of these corporate, troublesome aspirations, the Liberals, opted for more railway construction rather than promoting a more realistic policy - that of joining the Grand Trunk and the Canadian Northern to form a second transcontinental (A.G. Blair, Minister of Railways, was the only notable exception). Laurier's plan called for an entirely new line from Moncton to the Pacific coast. The 1800 miles from Moncton to Winnipeg would be built by the government and then leased to a new corporation called the Grand Trunk Pacific.

With the Canadian Northern ambition to become a competing transcontinental, the government's commitment to a new line and the C.P.R.'s pressing need to double-track - particularly the section between Winnipeg and Thunder Bay<sup>38</sup> - the Veltri company had ample opportunity to find work.<sup>39</sup> Moving from British Columbia to Canada's geographical

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<sup>38</sup>Lamb, p. 262.

<sup>39</sup>The following chart provides a clearer picture of railway construction in the years immediately after the Veltris' move from British Columbia.

	<u>1901-02</u>	<u>1902-03</u>	<u>1903-04</u>
Miles of railway completed (track laid)	664	211	534
Miles of siding	119	124	374

Sessional Papers, No. 20, Vol. XXVII, 1903, and Vol. XXXIX, 1905.



centre may have been a shrewd decision, for a great deal of the railway construction would take place in this area.

The statements concerning salaries and number of navvies working for the Veltri company in the years 1900-1903 and Giovanni's remarks indicate that their operation was small, homogeneous and mobile. These same features made their search for work relatively easy and undoubtedly reinforced the navvies' motives for their acceptance of the work gang conditions. They were there to make money quickly. It can be argued that the move from British Columbia to Northern Ontario was dictated by expediency - a kind of incessant anxiety for what the future might have in store for them. To these men without families, it made little sense to sink roots anywhere. It was more important to exploit to the limit their strength in order to procure for themselves and their families a reasonably secure future. For these unskilled, unschooled proletarians, security could only be achieved by peddling their labour wherever the demand was high. Furthermore, railway builders have no choice but to go where the railways are being built. In less than two years they had moved from British Columbia, worked for the Canadian Northern in the vicinity of Fort Frances (Giovanni at station number 3 near Cash Point) for about a year, and then moved west once again to work near Moosimin.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps it was this fierce determination for betterment which prompted Vincenzo Veltri to do battle with powerful interests. Ironically, the cause célèbre evolved from Vincenzo's desire to mine on property owned by his employer, the Canadian Northern. While the Veltris worked in Rainy Lake on two islands crossed by the Canadian Northern

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<sup>40</sup>"Memoirs," pp. 17-19.

Railway, Vincenzo discovered some "valuable mineral" and promptly sent \$28.05 through his solicitor, H. J. F. Sissons of Fort Frances, to the Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands in Toronto as payment for the purchase of the two islands. The Assistant Commissioner, Aubrey White, replied: "At present, I am unable to say whether it would be in the interest of the public to dispose of these two islands for mining purposes or not." He also stated that he would have to hold the matter in abeyance until he heard from the Canadian Northern engineer and that, in any case, the total price for the two islands would be \$47.00 (\$3 per acre) and not \$29.05. He also felt that it seemed "scarcely possible that a mine could be operated on the small island which only (contained) about two acres and not endanger either the bridge or its approaches."<sup>41</sup>

The legal battle which followed, and the ultimate outcome, was certainly not in keeping with the traditional image of a navy. The two decades he had spent in North America had changed Vincenzo: he was no longer a contadino-turned-navvy. Instead of a docile spirit, Vincenzo displayed a courageous resolution in asserting his rights. On January 18, 1902, Vincenzo received a discouraging letter from the Assistant Commissioner advising him that the objections of the Canadian Northern "appeared satisfactory" to the Department. A refund would be made and the plan would be placed on file. He was further advised that "if at any time in the future it should be decided that there was no danger, or that the minerals could be worked without danger, to the public or to the railway, then (his) application would be considered prior to that of anybody else."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Welch Papers, "Correspondence between Aubrey White, Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands and H. J. F. Sissons, Barrister, 1902."

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

The ensuing correspondence through his lawyers shows clearly that Vincenzo Veltri felt that he was being victimized by two of the shrewdest entrepreneurs in Canada: William Mackenzie and Donald Mann. To begin with, he furnished affidavits by H. G. Fetter and D. J. Gillon, engineers, who had much experience in rock work in the district, testifying that the islands and the bed of the surrounding lake were solid rock and that mining could be carried out without danger. His solicitors further pointed out that it was not unusual for the Department to reverse its decision. This claim was documented: the Department had ruled in favour of W. A. Preston and had granted him mining rights along the right-of-way of the Canadian Northern near Nickel Lake. Vincenzo even alleged that Mann had sent a certain Mr. Campbell, said to be a mining expert, to the larger of the two islands "a few days after his discovery became known." This, he maintained, was in keeping with the company eagerness for "getting everything they can." His lawyers concluded by pointing out that Mackenzie and Mann, when working on the Crow's Nest Pass and other railways in British Columbia, "took up mineral adjacent to the right of way from indications found in their cuttings, exactly as Mr. Welch (sic) here seeks to do." The Department was reminded that the reason for the objection to Mr. Welch's mining plans was groundless, and that Mackenzie and Mann's real concerns were dictated by self-interest - "a general policy to let no one get any rights which they may possibly at any time get for themselves."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Welch Papers, "Correspondence between H. J. F. Sissons, Barrister and Aubrey White, Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands, 1902."

There is no doubt that Vincenzo may have been bitter in his condemnation of Mackenzie and Mann. However, it is equally clear that the two railway promoters of the Canadian Northern "bargained unethically, resorting to trickery, bribery and corruption when it suited their purpose." T. D. Regehr, "William Mackenzie, Donald Mann, and the Larger Canada." in Anthony W. Rasporich (editor), Western Canada, Past and Present (Calgary: McLelland & Steart West, 1975), p. 73. On the other hand, one cannot discount the possibility that Mackenzie and Mann were genuinely concerned about safety.

The Department of Crown Lands maintained a cautious, legalistic stand and suggested that Mr. Welch see Mackenzie and Mann personally in order to arrive at a mutually satisfactory solution to the problem. Vincenzo's stubborn determination to win this fight led him to fall into an intricate web of bureaucratic entanglements and business contrivances. One can only speculate about the outcome of the meetings among Vincenzo Valtri, the contadino-turned-railway-builder and mining speculator, and Mackenzie and Mann, two of the most astute businessmen in the annals of railway construction. The records show only that Aubrey White acknowledged receipt of a letter from Mr. Moore, Secretary Treasurer of the Canadian Northern, who stated that "Mr. Welch did not quite understand the position that Messrs. Mackenzie and Mann took in reference to these islands."<sup>44</sup>

The fruitless attempt to persuade the Canadian Northern to reverse its stand that a mining operation on islands G621 and G622 (as they were designated) would endanger the roadbed did not deter Vincenzo. He reminded the Department that he had already referred in earlier correspondence to his own competence as a miner and railway builder and to the potential value of the minerals.<sup>45</sup> Now he also emphasized that the assays

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., June 9, 1903.

<sup>45</sup> Welch Papers. "Sworn Affidavit, Fort Frances, February 3, 1902." In the affidavit Vincenzo cited two cases where he successfully built railway lines adjacent to mine shafts. One had been built in 1886-87 near Butte City for the Union Pacific railway, the other in 1899 at Ironwood, B.C. for the Canadian Northern Railway.

The latter is a most puzzling statement indeed. Ironwood, B.C. cannot be found in any modern Atlas, but Ironwood, Michigan does exist. It is unlikely that Vincenzo worked on any railway construction in the vicinity of Ironwood, Michigan at a time when his operation was in British Columbia. Of course, it is possible that Ironwood may have been only a railway stop thus precluding inclusion in an Atlas. However, one other problem remains. The work described by Valtri could not have been done for the Canadian Northern. Work by this company in British Columbia did not begin until 1911 and not 1899. There remains, therefore, one possible explanation. In 1899, the Valtri brothers were working in the vicinity of Grand Forks, not far from a Great Northern line. Vincenzo's work may, indeed, have been done for the Great Northern which was building feeder lines into the interior of British Columbia. However, since much of the correspondence at the time that the affidavit was submitted was directed to the Canadian Northern, the stenographer may inadvertently have typed Canadian Northern rather than Great Northern.

showed gold as well as "good indications of both nickel and copper." Again, he attempted to demonstrate to the Department that his mining operations would in no way endanger the railway lines. He wrote: "Any opposition to my getting this rock for mineral purposes must be based either on insufficient knowledge of the structure of the rock, or on the idea that I will conduct operations without the slightest regard for the most ordinary mining safeguards." He demanded that the Department send its own engineer to determine the validity of his claims. Failing this, he would resort to court action unless a fair hearing before the Commissioner were granted.<sup>46</sup>

Had Vincenzo Veltri, like his brother Giovanni, dictated his memoirs, it is reasonable to assume that the year 1904 would have merited special attention. On January 27, 1904, the long battle which had begun in December 1901 was over. Elihu James Davis, Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Province of Ontario, gave "leave and license and due and full permission unto James Vincent Welch, of the town of Fort Frances Railway Contractor, to mine and take minerals that may be found under the Right of Way of the Canadian Northern Railway on Island G621 containing 2 21/100 acres and G622 containing 9 acres, situated at the southwest end of Rainy Lake, South of Squall Point, District of Rainy River."<sup>47</sup> The significance of obtaining the licence to mine became obvious a few months later when Vincenzo proceeded to found The New Ontario Gold

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<sup>46</sup>Welch Papers, "Correspondence between Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands, and H. J..F. Sissons, May 21, 1903."

<sup>47</sup>Welch Papers, "Licence of Occupation, No. 348, from Commissioner of Crown Lands, January 27, 1904."

Mining Company, with head office at Fort Frances. This was a major venture, for Vincenzo controlled the company de facto. The one million dollar capital stock was divided as follows: James Vincent Welch owned 650,000 dollars; William George James Stephen, H.J.F. Sissons, Douglas John Gillon and C.J. Holland, owned twenty-five hundred dollars each.<sup>48</sup> The Company's "Memorandum of Agreement and stock Book" designated Vincenzo as the owner of an undivided fourteen-fifteenths and the other parties together, the owners of an undivided one-fifteenth. Until the passing of the bylaws of the Company, stock would be allotted at the price of twenty-five cents.<sup>49</sup>

On the surface, it appears that this remarkable development<sup>50</sup> - control of a gold mining company - contradicted Giovanni's claim that four years earlier the two brothers and Vincenzo's crew had arrived in Winnipeg with little money. A closer examination, however, reveals that Vincenzo's equity consisted largely of real estate, namely the two islands. Indeed, the terms of the incorporation act suggest that Vincenzo's property was the only valuable asset, hence his nearly total control with fourteen-fifteenths of the stock.<sup>51</sup> The somewhat token financial backing by

<sup>48</sup>Welch Papers, "Charter Obtained by Letters Patent Under the Provisions of the Ontario Companies Act, June, 1904."

<sup>49</sup>Welch Papers, "Memorandum of Agreement and Stock Book, May, 1904."

<sup>50</sup>Vincenzo Veltri's successful struggle against Mackenzie and Mann was in itself a feat of considerable import, but a business venture with four of the elite of the dominant group: a book-keeper, a barrister-at-law, a civil and mining engineer and a judge was an extraordinary coup for a navy. One can only conclude that the opportunity for profit reduced those socio-cultural prejudices so common at the time.

<sup>51</sup>Welch Papers, "Memorandum of Agreement and Stock Book, May, 1904."

professional members of the community served an essential need. Vincenzo had to establish credibility for his gold mining company and, at the same time, gain access to that accounting proficiency which was not his ken. These men would provide the necessary competence in exchange for potentially substantial profits.

The years 1902 to 1905, years during which Vincenzo managed the affairs of the mining and railway construction companies without his brother's support,<sup>52</sup> took their toll on Vincenzo's well-being. In August 1905, Giovanni received word from J. W. Stewart that his brother was in "dire conditions" (tristi condizioni) and that he "had sold everything to Parson for three thousand dollars."<sup>53</sup> The disturbing news hastened Giovanni's return from Italy. He found his brother in Winnipeg in rather precarious circumstances. Vincenzo was under the "surveillance of private police."<sup>54</sup> Giovanni and his son Raffaele<sup>55</sup> took residence in a room near the hotel where Vincenzo had lived in order to keep an eye upon the troubled older brother. Giovanni's anxiety was soon vindicated. Vincenzo disappeared. A brief search proved fruitless; but the following day, he was found by the banks of a river. The authorities committed him to the psychiatric hospital at Selkirk where he remained as a patient for more

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<sup>52</sup>In December 1902, Giovanni returned to Italy for the second time and remained for two-and-a-half years. The visit was marred by his mother's death. "Memoirs," p. 20.

<sup>53</sup>"Memoirs," p. 20.

<sup>54</sup>This is a puzzling statement, indeed. The lack of any other additional comment makes it impossible even to attempt a speculative interpretation.

<sup>55</sup>Giovanni had decided to take his son to Canada with him. "Memoirs," p. 20. His family would join them in 1923.

than six months.<sup>56</sup>

Realizing that work is frequently a good antidote to depression and anxiety, Giovanni invited his brother to join him on a contract he had received from J. W. Stewart. It was a vain attempt, for Vincenzo refused to leave the city. As a consequence, Giovanni was now compelled to take on a different partner. On October 15, 1906, the firm of Welch and Amantea was founded. It was immediately given a contract by Foley, Welch and Stewart, who were general contractors for the C.P.R. The partnership with Amantea (he too was a Grimaldese) was shortlived, however. Upon completion of their contract on the line from Busteet to Deception, west of Kenora, the two terminated their agreement because, in Giovanni's words, they "could never get along."<sup>57</sup>

Undeterred by the failure of the partnership with Amantea, Giovanni made another attempt to continue the subcontracting work without the valuable assistance of his older brother. He struck a new partnership with his nephew, Fedele Nigro, and again went to work for Foley, Welch and Stewart on the doubletracking contract between Winnipeg and Fort William. The contract, near Kalmar, involved heavy rock work which was cleared with stone boats running on wooden rails and pulled by horses.<sup>58</sup>

During the brief interval in which Giovanni was left without the benefit of his brother's tutelage, Vincenzo had recovered and resumed his activities. By now, Winnipeg had become his home and his operation

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<sup>56</sup>"Memoirs," p. 21.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 22.



was given a permanent headquarter. The letterhead on his business correspondence was set up as follows: J. V. Welch, Railway Contractor and Mining Broker, Rooms 19-20-21, Clarendon Hotel, P.O. Box 2194, Winnipeg, Manitoba.<sup>59</sup> Vincenzo also was able to obtain a substantial contract from Dutton and McArthur, Winnipeg contractors. The work involved clearing, grubbing, grading and embankment protection and all other works below subgrade, necessary to complete the embankment on the line of the National Transcontinental Railway from the east bank of the Winnipeg River, eastward to mile 80, a distance of approximately 58 miles.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> None of the sources indicate the reason why Vincenzo chose Winnipeg to be his company's headquarters. No doubt, the major consideration was economic and not social. There were comparatively few Italians in Winnipeg at the turn of the Century. But Winnipeg was a booming centre, and most importantly for Veltri, it continued to develop as a major railway centre. See Alan F. J. Artibise, Winnipeg, a Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), p. 159. Also see p. 142 for ethnic distribution.

<sup>60</sup> Welch Papers, "Memorandum of Agreement between Dutton & McArthur, and James V. Welch and John Welch, November 27, 1906."

Dutton and McArthur, a company with which Vincenzo was to have considerable difficulty, does not appear to have enjoyed a good reputation with railway workers. The following is an eye-witness reminiscence of the way this firm operated:

There was every kind of men on the job you can remember and we high balled her. One man told me, a fellow who thinks he's a historian out of the University, he said that they put it through so fast that they were putting the tracks on the naked grass, right on the prairie, but I can't say it isn't so. We did lay down a grade and the ties and steel were to specifications. But if old McArthur - he was from Winnipeg and in charge of the line, building from Winnipeg right on through - if he could have got away with it I think he would have. Man, he was a terror. A real terror.

Broadfoot, p. 233. The author is aware that there will be some overlapping in this section which deals with the McArthur contract. However, whereas in this particular point, the sources are used to emphasize the chronological development of the company, in chapter V they will be used to illuminate the nature of its internal structure.

This contract was of particular importance to Vincenzo because he would now have to prove his reliability after his unfortunate commitment to a psychiatric hospital. He would also have to regain solvency. This he did by forming a partnership with his brother and Francesco Cancellata, both of whom provided the capital necessary to buy the equipment needed to complete the work on the project. Vincenzo's contribution to the contract was his reputation as a railway contractor. The terms make this understanding abundantly clear. Giovanni Veltri (the second party) and Francesco Cancellata (the third party) agreed "that all losses and expenses of any kind of the said co-partnership shall be borne out and paid in equal shares by all the parties, it being understood that the first party (Vincenzo) has at the present time no ready funds."<sup>61</sup> What is more, Vincenzo, under the terms of the contract, was entitled to an initial 20% of the profits and would share equally in the remaining 80%.

During the execution of the work near Rennie, Vincenzo discovered traces of gold and other metals in a rock cut. He quickly staked a claim and, after completing all legal requirements, became the owner of the property.<sup>62</sup> An assay certificate was rather encouraging: the sample indicated 11.57 ounces of gold per ton, so that the value per ton of ore was \$231.40.<sup>63</sup> Giovanni's entry in his "Memoirs" shows that "word

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<sup>61</sup>Welch Papers, "Indenture Made between James Vincent Welch and John Welch and Frank Cancellata, May 1906."

<sup>62</sup>"Memoirs," p. 22. Obviously, Vincenzo's interest in minerals had not waned despite his apparent failure in the gold mining venture. The curious lack of reference to his newfangled undertaking, the New Ontario Gold Mining Company, likely points to an unrealized dream. It was not unusual for mining ventures of this sort to fail. "On the whole," wrote G. P. de T. Glazebrook, "the whole story of mining in the period (turn of the 20th Century) was one of disappointment." G. P. de T. Glazebrook, Life in Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 151.

<sup>63</sup>Welch Papers, "Assay certificate, November 23, 1907."

spread about this rich mine in both Canada and the U.S.A." Experts from Chicago and New York came to examine the mine. A New York trust company offered Vincenzo \$450,000 for half the mine. He would receive a \$50,000 down payment, with the balance to be paid upon completion of the necessary drilling to determine the depth of the vein. Unfortunately, - so wrote Giovanni - Vincenzo followed some "bad advice" and attempted to develop the mine himself having been promised financial backing by his friends. The promised backing did not materialize, however, and Vincenzo was forced to spend \$19,000 of his own assets.<sup>64</sup> On October 23, 1908, Vincenzo entered upon an agreement with J. Hartnett and W. Diggins, both from Kenora. The two men agreed to sink two shafts of fifty feet each in depth and seven by five in width at \$12 per foot. While Hartnett and Diggins were to provide themselves with the necessary explosives and food supplies, Veltri would furnish all the mining and blacksmith tools and cooking outfit.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, Vincenzo's second attempt to mine gold ended in another dismal failure as the vein was soon exhausted and the hapless navvy had neither the money nor the energy to drill for other veins.<sup>66</sup>

Fortunately, the ill-fated mining speculation did not prevent the Veltri brothers from organizing their railway construction company on a more professional basis. For the first time, the records show a business competence which was wanting from their previous dealings. Books

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<sup>64</sup>"Memoirs," pp. 22-23.

<sup>65</sup>Welch Papers, "Memorandum of Agreement between J. V. Welch and J. Hartnett and W. Diggins, October 23, 1908."

<sup>66</sup>"Memoirs," p. 23.

were kept by a professional bookkeeper. This new direction - a turning point in the history of the company - is a further indication that, although Vincenzo could not resist mining schemes, their bread and butter was still derived from railway building. Indeed, upon completion of the Rennie contract, they obtained another from W. T. Dutton, who in turn, was subcontracting for J. D. McArthur. The work was near Kenora, on the National Transcontinental Railway line. As it turned out, the entire project proved inauspicious. To begin with, the three encampments which the Veltri brothers were required to build and the road from Kenora to encampment #2, which was to be used to carry provisions to their main camp, were costly. A fire which got out of hand at camp #3 cost them \$12,000 in provisions and material. They also incurred a \$1,000 loss in paying for the voyage of English navvies who were less than enthusiastic to work on the railway and lasted less than a week. By the end of the summer, the road to camp #2 was complete but frequent rain often made it impassable. Horses went up the road half way and returned without shoes or hooves. The road became a "real economic disaster." The entire venture might have turned out even worse had they not prudently transported most of their material to camp #2 the previous winter so that they were able to complete the work in spite of all the adversities.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, their losses were significant: before they began receiving

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<sup>67</sup>"Memoirs," pp. 30-32. This section of Giovanni's "Memoirs" is possibly the most interesting from a human angle. In it, there is a wealth of anecdotes, some humorous, some tragic - all part of the lives of people who worked on Canada's frontier. One amusing incident occurred when Giovanni and two Swedish workers lost their way in the bush and were forced to spend an entire day in the wilderness. The Swedes, who had not eaten since the morning of their departure, were forced to satisfy their hunger by clubbing fish in a stream and then roasting them while Giovanni, who had filled his pockets at camp, dined on ham and biscuits. "Memoirs," pp. 32-33.

payment for the work, they had placed their company in debt to a total of \$52,000 - \$40,000 for the road and \$12,000 for the fire damage.<sup>68</sup>

In the spring of 1909, upon completion of the work, the Veltris paid off their sub-contractors, all of whom made a profit. They also moved their equipment to Kenora where they rented a storehouse and three stables for their ninety horses.<sup>69</sup> They were now in a position to settle their account with J. D. McArthur. Before returning to Winnipeg, Giovanni and Amantea (the two had by now settled their differences) went east to a place near Cochrane in order to assess a new contract on the National Transcontinental. Vincenzo, meanwhile, preferred to go West. Giovanni soon joined his brother after he and Amantea turned down the work because of the poor condition of the road which led to the work site. After their return to Winnipeg, they divided their profits as follows: Vincenzo; \$17,023; Giovanni, \$14,823; and Frank Cancellia; \$6,000. J. D. McArthur retained from the Veltri brothers \$5,000 for unspecified reason.<sup>70</sup> This contract, which in many ways represented a turning point for the two brothers, was a financial disappointment though the Veltris may have reduced some of their losses by making a profit in supplying provisions and equipment to station-men and subcontractors.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the entire business

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 38. The Veltris' professional handling of their company is also evident in their sensible plan to insure their holdings. They took out an insurance policy for the amount of \$7,500 to protect their two story frame warehouses (situated on the west side of Matheson Street in Kenora) and its contents. Welch Papers, "Insurance Policy Issued by St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance, May 22, 1909."

<sup>70</sup>Welch Papers, "Copy of Memorandum of Agreement between J. D. McArthur Co., Ltd., and Welch Brothers, September 14, 1909."

<sup>71</sup>This procedure will be analysed in more detail in chapter five.

relationship with J. D. McArthur proved to be a rather knotty affair.

In the fall of the same year, Vincenzo accepted a contract which involved 16 miles of clearing and excavation near Camrose in the vicinity of Edmonton. He soon began planning for this project. Several teams of horses were shipped from Kenora. On their arrival at the railway station in Winnipeg, the animals "roused the admiration of many," Giovanni wrote in his "Memoirs." "Nearly one hundred horses of such strength had never been seen." This admiration proved ironic, however, because, shortly after they arrived on location, most of these magnificent beasts contracted a disease (Giovanni referred to it as the "swamp disease") and perished.<sup>72</sup> This costly set-back happened during the nine months that Giovanni spent in Grimaldi visiting his family.<sup>73</sup>

Giovanni returned from Italy in June 1910. He found Vincenzo perturbed as their work in the west was not going well. More horses were required even though they had already spent \$19,000 on animals and equipment prior to Giovanni's departure for Italy. Nevertheless, the younger brother left Winnipeg with forty workers and fourteen horses to continue work on another project, a branch line which went from Regina to Melville on the Grand Trunk Pacific. The heavy clay work was "badly planned and executed." It also proved too strenuous for the horses most of which died.<sup>74</sup> These expenses (according to Giovanni, most of the money had been borrowed

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<sup>72</sup>"Memoirs," p. 41.

<sup>73</sup>During his visit in Italy and while he was away on work projects, Giovanni's son Raffaele attended Le College de St. Boniface. The records show that between September 1908 and February 1909, Giovanni paid \$197 in tuition fees. Welch Papers, "Receipts for Tuition Fees, September 1908 - February 1909, Le College de St. Boniface."

<sup>74</sup>"Memoirs," p. 42.

from banks) were compounded by additional expenditures incurred by further mining explorations and work. In July 1910, Vincenzo had signed another contract with two Italian workers, Andrea Villani and Louis Scala, to excavate a shaft for mining purposes in his property near Rennie. The two workers were to be paid at the rate of five dollars per cubic yard of excavation.<sup>75</sup>

The heavy drain on Vincenzo's financial resources may have prompted him to terminate his mining ventures and to concentrate on his railway business. In October 1910, he reached a tentative agreement with L. Augstein, who was acting on behalf of Gustav P. Eisenschiml of Vienna, Austria. The terms of the contract specified that the Austrian entrepreneur would buy a three-quarter interest in four mining claims - "J. V.," "St. Mary," "Winnipeg," and "St. Joseph" - for the sum of \$150,000. This amount would buy only the mineral rights and not the property. Two other stipulations were added: that Augstein be paid 10% of the total amount of the contract for his services and that the contract be validated only after Eisenschiml's experts examined and accepted the property described in the contract.<sup>76</sup> Surprisingly, the most dramatic rearrangement of Vincenzo's business affairs occurred concurrently with his decision to end the partnership with his brother. Whatever the motives behind this unexpected move, Giovanni was now thrown into an unwilling partnership with Amantea and Giovanni's own nephew, Fedele.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Welch Papers, "Memorandum of Agreement between James V. Welch and Andrea Villani and Louis Scala, July 25, 1910."

<sup>76</sup>Welch Papers, "Agreement between J. V. Welch and G. P. Eisenschiml, October 3, 1910."

<sup>77</sup>"Memoirs," p. 42.

The dissolution of the Welch Brothers Company induced Giovanni to assume a degree of financial responsibility to which he was not accustomed. Nevertheless, Giovanni accepted the challenge and set up future financial deals and contracts in such a way as to assume total control. He would authorize all contracts, loans and disbursements.<sup>78</sup> He obtained his first contract from D. F. McArthur<sup>79</sup> for the construction of a 12 mile line east of Regina. Upon completion of this work, Giovanni went to an undisclosed location near North Bay to examine a piece of work for the Algoma Central Railway. The type of work required disappointed him and he promptly turned down the project. On his return west to Winnipeg, by chance he met a friend, a railway engineer who introduced him to Walsh and Nelson, two contractors who had recently obtained a substantial contract between Nipigon and Port Arthur on the Canadian Northern Ontario Railway Company line between Port Arthur and Sudbury. After a brief negotiation, Giovanni accepted a piece of the work. He stopped in Port Arthur and sent a telegram to his brother informing him that he had agreed to work for Walsh and Nelson on a contract between Ouimet and Loon. Vincenzo forthwith came to Port Arthur and signed the contract as well.<sup>80</sup> After the most significant details of the contract had been resolved, Vincenzo returned to Winnipeg to invite Cancelli once again to join the Welch Brothers and to arrange for the financing of the necessary equipment. Shortly thereafter, Giovanni was also required to go to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>79</sup> Not to be confused with J. D. McArthur.

<sup>80</sup> Though Giovanni provided no explanation, it appears that the two brothers had decided to revive the partnership.



Winnipeg to take part in the financial arrangements. The firm of Welch Brothers borrowed \$11,600 from banks in order to purchase several teams of horses and other construction implements. To this new equipment was added all the Veltris had stored in Kenora since their 1909 contract. Vincenzo, Giovanni and Francesco Cancellia retained the best portion - about one third - of the contract for themselves and sub-let the remaining to other contracting firms such as Ostenburg Brothers Company. According to Giovanni, the sub-contractors did well financially while the earnings for Welch Brothers were meagre.<sup>81</sup>

During the course of this contract, Vincenzo Veltri, like many other contractors who had done work for the National Transcontinental Railway, was requested by the Transcontinental Railway Investigating Committee "to furnish certified copies of all sub-contracts" which the firm had made with other sub-contractors, outlining portions of the work he sub-let, costs and the names and addresses of such sub-contractors.<sup>82</sup> Vincenzo replied almost immediately through his solicitors indicating the construction he had done: firstly, part of division 7 from mile 109 to mile 115½ north of Kenora; and secondly, 7.4 miles between Raetor and Brereton near Rennie, including a spur line from the National Transcontinental Railway to the C.P.R. line. He also stated that his records were in a state of disarray but that copies certainly existed in the office of Dutton and McArthur. In his concluding statement, he took the opportunity to mention to the Committee that, even though his workers and sub-contractors had been paid in full, an amount due his company was still outstanding and that he had also failed to receive compensation

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<sup>81</sup>"Memoirs," p. 49.

<sup>82</sup>Welch Papers, "Letter by the Transcontinental Railway Investigating Committee to James V. Welch, July 2, 1912."

for the \$4,000 loss he had incurred in building a road from Kenora north to the railway, a distance of 30 miles. He reminded the Committee that it had been his understanding that, should the government fail to pay for the road, the costs would be shared equally by his company and Dutton's and McArthur's.<sup>83</sup>

Vincenzo was attempting to disentangle himself from an imbroglio with McArthur by voicing his concerns to an official committee of the government. He was by now involved in a legal battle against his former employer. Documentation shows that Vincenzo's own paper war was closely linked to McArthur's own battle with the government.<sup>84</sup> Neither was destined to put an end to this affair. They both died shortly thereafter thus avoiding a troublesome court action. Nevertheless, Giovanni claimed that his brother's legal struggle against McArthur and his ill-fated mining venture caused his premature death.<sup>85</sup> Giovanni would continue his brother's claim that J. D. McArthur's firm still owed the Welch Brothers \$5,000<sup>86</sup> but without success since, although he eventually won his cause against McArthur, he could not collect as the latter had allegedly transferred all his holdings to his wife.<sup>87</sup> Soon after the court decision, McArthur died. Giovanni preferred not to pursue the

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<sup>83</sup> Welch Papers, "Letters by J. V. Welch to The Transcontinental Railroad Investigating Committee, July 12, 1912."

<sup>84</sup> J. D. McArthur's own sub-contracting practices were being questioned in the House of Commons. As the recipient of the largest contract on the National Transcontinental, his estimates were placed under serious scrutiny. Allegations were made that his firm had intentionally over-estimated an excavation work totalling nearly half a million dollars. Hansard, "House of Commons Debates," 1914, Vol. III, p. 2320.

<sup>85</sup> "Memoirs," p. 52.

<sup>86</sup> Welch Papers, "Statement re: Welch and McArthur file #1419, Issued by H. W. Whitla, Barrister, June 12, 1914."

<sup>87</sup> "Memoirs," p. 52.

matter any further.

The McArthur's dispute and the Transcontinental inquiry caused a temporary diversion but did not inconvenience the Veltri brothers significantly. It was the availability and location of work that conditioned their plans, to a far greater degree than any legal dispute. In the past, they had moved their operational headquarters from the interior of British Columbia to Winnipeg and eventually to Kenora. In 1912, the work at Pearl and the procurement of another contract necessitated another move, this time to Port Arthur. Their headquarters were established in the Prince Arthur hotel.<sup>88</sup> That summer, the Welch Brothers Company was awarded another contract by The Dominion Construction Company, a rather large contracting firm from Toronto. The work was located on the Schreiber section of the C.P.R. and it involved double tracking nine miles between mile 55 and mile 64. Before moving their outfit to the new location, they took an inventory of all their stock at Pearl. It amounted to a total of \$13,518.89.<sup>89</sup> Additional equipment, tools and food were purchased as required from various suppliers such as Cameron Heaps Company, Matthew Laing Company, Fitzsimmons Fruit Company and others. Much of the work was sublet to other contractors, particularly the stone work west of Heron Bay. A number of Italian workers were employed in the handling of hard-pan.

Less than a month after the completion of the C.P.R. contract, Vincenzo was struck by peritonitis and, after five days of severe pain, died on January 31, 1913. He was given a dignified funeral service in

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>89</sup> Welch Papers, "Company Ledger, March 1913."

Port Arthur by the Knights of Columbus, an organization to which Vincenzo had belonged for many years. A few days later, his corpse was sent to Winnipeg where the Knights honoured him a second time at his burial. The death of Vincenzo dealt a crushing blow to Giovanni. Though Giovanni had proven himself a capable, shrewd and cautious individual, less inclined than his brother to reckless, get-rich schemes, he could no longer rely on Vincenzo's reputation and popularity. If the Welch Brothers Company were going to survive, he would now have to rely on his own resources.

## CHAPTER V

### THE COMPANY'S GROWTH DURING THE BOOM YEARS

There is little doubt that Vincenzo Veltri had been the driving force behind the company. Unencumbered by familial or ancestral longings - he never married, nor did he once return to his native land - Vincenzo devoted his energies and talents to the company. The occupational handicaps he had to overcome, however, were considerable. Because of his peasant background, he was ill-equipped<sup>1</sup> to found a railway construction company even of the smallest sort. Though he left no biographical records to examine, we can be certain that Vincenzo shed his peasant image during his early years on the American railways. His first "break" may have come when Serra and Dini recognized his leadership qualities and entrusted him with the task of re-establishing order among a disgruntled group of railway workers. His ascendancy among his compatriots and paesani was rapid. Within a year, many of his co-workers relied on him to find work. His brother, Giovanni, credited him with the establishment of business connections within railway building circles as early as 1889.<sup>2</sup>

By 1895, he had taken his first significant step in setting up a small construction company with Gaetano Iachetta as partner.

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<sup>1</sup>In describing the peasant mien Farb wrote: "Almost everywhere that peasants are encountered, they are likely to give the same impression of being conservative, individualistic, prone to suspicion, jealous, violent, superstitious and thrifty." Peter Farb, Humankind (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), p. 133. A.G. Friedman found peasants from Lucania and Calabria to be superstitious, suspicious, uncooperative and resigned to their lot in life.

<sup>2</sup>"Memoirs," p. 6.

Giovanni himself was employed by the Welch-Iachetta Company as a foreman. After three years of work in the interior of British Columbia, Iachetta, decided to return to Italy. Vincenzo promptly bought his share in the company without informing his younger brother of this important transaction. Rather than forming a new partnership with Giovanni, Vincenzo took sole possession of the company.<sup>3</sup>

In this early stage of development, Vincenzo must have speculated that taking a fledgling as a partner might not necessarily be an advantageous move, for he needed to expand his connections and operation. In typical business fashion, he ignored his brother's desire for a partnership and formed an association with J. W. Stewart, superintendent of the construction east of Grand Forks, B.C.<sup>4</sup> Giovanni was left on his own, but he did not allow his disappointment to interfere with his plans. He soon befriended a sectional engineer who assigned Giovanni a piece of work on which he earned a thousand dollars. Unfortunately, Giovanni could not continue to take advantage of this situation as "the books were taken away" from the engineer.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 14. There are no records to illuminate the arrangement between Stewart and Vincenzo Veltri. Evidence points to an understanding more than a formal contractual arrangement. The work done in the Grand Forks area was awarded to J. V. Welch (and not to the Welch-Stewart partnership). In one of its frequent references to railway development, The Grand Forks Miner wrote: "About one mile and a half north of Pat Welche's (sic) camp will be found J. V. Welch's (sic) layout. Where he has a mile and a half of the heaviest work on the line of the road, which includes one open cut sixty-five feet deep from which 90,000 cubic yards of rock had to be removed." The Grand Forks Miner, October 2, 1898.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 14. It is not clear what Giovanni meant by "books." Likely, he was referring to the blueprints prepared by engineers. According to Bradwin, these blueprints "show in detail the profile of the road, the mud cuts, the fills, the trestles, the rock work, the ditching, and all other extras required on the whole contract." Bradwin, p. 48. It is also interesting to speculate as to what Giovanni meant by his phrase "taken away." The possibility exists that the engineer may have disclosed information and assigned contracts which he was not authorized to assign.

In 1897 company records, in the form of pocket-size day books first appear amongst the Welch Papers. Yet reconstruction of the company's progress has to be tentative. There is little logic or method to the entries. There is no concept of credit or debit; there is no payroll entry. It is possible that, since Vincenzo knew personally most of the men he employed, some business deals may have been carried out by verbal agreement, but as his transactions grew, he could not rely entirely on his memory. He, therefore, began to commit his dealings to paper in a selective though crude fashion. In December 1897, the number of working days was recorded for 12 men, all of them Italian. A number of them bought provisions from the Welch's store: plug smoke, sugar, potatoes, flour, coffee, beans, salt, etc. Tables on pages 123 and 124 shows the price charged for the various items. Giovanni Veltri himself purchased one pair of overalls from his brother's store.<sup>6</sup> Two other entries for the month of December show either receipt of tools and equipment or sale of same.<sup>7</sup> This list includes most of the equipment that was necessary for the type of work done on the railways of the British Columbia interior: drills, crow bars, picks, shovels, lumber, handles, kegs of powder, fuses, blasting caps, bales of hay, cooking pots, etc.

By 1900 the British Columbia sojourn had come to an end. Vincenzo had moulded a group of paesani and compatriots, who shared some ethnic and occupational experiences, into a productive organization. During the five years the company had operated in British Columbia, it had competed successfully against other outfits and had acquired a degree of credibility.

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<sup>6</sup> Welch Papers, Day Books, 1897-1898.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., passim. Entry does not specifically state either sale or purchase.

Month of November 1899

1899

Land Transactions

1	11 " Beef	1	37
"	5 " Lamb		91
"	1 " Potatoes		46
"	1 Can Tomatoes		27
13	5 " Beef	1	41
"	2 " Lamb		37
18	10 " Potatoes	3	60
"	3 1/2 " Beef		35
19	1 " Coffee		100
"	100 " Beans		27
"	2 " Sugar		16
"	2 " Beef - 1/2 mutton		10
"	2 " Beans		40
"	9 " Potatoes		35
15	1 " Butter		72
"	1 " Soap		25
"	1 " Can Tomatoes		63
"	18 " Potatoes		17
17	10 " + Potatoes		15
"	3 " Lamb		10
"	3 " Lamb		10

10 26 5 " Beef

" 1 " Beans + mutton

" 2 " Potatoes

" 27 26 " Beef

" 1 " Can Tomatoes

" 11 " Potatoes

18 5 " Lamb

" 5 " Lamb

" 5 1/2 " Sugar

" 1 " Can Milk

" 5 " Beans

" 100 " Beans

20 11 " Potatoes

" 1 " Can Tomatoes



June 1898

June 25	3 # Bacon	1 75
	pruner	10
	10 meal	2 50
29	10 meal	2 50
30	12 meal	3 00
	2 # Pruners	2 50
	1 ply smut	2 50
	2 meal	5 00
		<hr/>
		15 50
		0 90
		15 90
		3 75
		16 85
		<hr/>
		5 05

June 1898

June 1	1 # Bacon	15
6	4 # Bacon	60
	Pruner	10
	2 # Pruners	30
8	Bacon	10
14	1 Ply smut	30
	2 ferrina and	20
	1 meal	20
	1 # matter	10
16	10 # Soy	50
	1 # Soy	40
19	1 Ply chum	15
25	6 # Bacon and	40
26	1 Soy pan	60
	1 Bacon	100
	1 Ply chum	100
4	Bacon	4 25
28	1/2 # butter	20
	1 can butter	25
27	16 meal	4 00
		<hr/>
		15 75

The sources do not indicate the extent of the Veltris' financial success. One curt, revealing statement in Giovanni's "Memoirs" could be used to substantiate the earlier claim that the Veltris had not inordinately exploited their advantageous position vis a vis their paesani, though they had fared relatively better. When they and their workers arrived in Winnipeg, they spent the Christmas holidays as best they could (alla meglio) since "those who had more than one-hundred dollars in (their) pockets were few."<sup>8</sup> The records for the year 1900 do show, however, that the Veltri operation had become a close-knit, if modest, capitalistic enterprise employing a total of 135 workers. Italian navvies, - many of them Grimaldesi - made up by far the largest proportion of the workers.<sup>9</sup> The wages paid to the workers compared favourably to those paid by others in the working camps and extra gangs across Canada. The Veltri Company paid seventy-five dollars per month to its foremen and two dollars per day to the navvies.<sup>10</sup> The Veltri enterprise may have made money on the

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<sup>8</sup>"Memoirs," p. 17. This statement is puzzling. Did Giovanni include his brother as one of the people with relatively little cash? One would have to conclude that that was the case. Otherwise why would his crew leave the interior of B.C. to continue working for him, had his workers felt that they were being exploited by Vincenzo?

<sup>9</sup>It is tempting to conclude from this that the Veltris managed to retain the loyalty of many compatriots, since a significant number of paesani remained with them for several years. Nevertheless, one has to consider, as well, the tendency of immigrant workers who came from the same village to stick together and frequently work on the same project. See A. F. Rolle, The Immigrant Upraised - Italian Adventurers and Colonists in an Expanding America, p. 155.

<sup>10</sup>See pp. 120-121. Under similar conditions, navvies earned from one dollar fifty to two dollars per day. See Barry Broadfoot, pp. 229-33. See also Bradwin, p. 59, 72 and Abella and Millar, taken from The Voice, 1905, p. 60. On the Crow's Nest Pass, railway construction wages were as low as one dollar per day and never more than \$1.75. See W. Kaye Lamb, History of the Canadian Pacific Railway, p. 212.

TIME—For the

NAMES

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

6	John. Moore Jr.											
7	Joe Goodell											
17	W. B. B. B.											
18	John Moore											
20	John Moore											
21	Joe Goodell											
22	John Moore											
23	John Moore											
24	John Moore											
25	John Moore											
26	John Moore											
27	John Moore											
28	John Moore											
29	John Moore											
30	John Moore											
31	John Moore											

Harro  
Carr  
Hamm

Month of April

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

Total AMOUNT.  
Rate per Day. \$ Cts.

24	John Moore	79.60	
25	John Moore	45.60	
26	John Moore	46.60	
27	John Moore	38.10	
28	John Moore	20.00	
29	John Moore	199.00	
30	John Moore	47.20	
31	John Moore	40.00	
1	John Moore	44.20	
2	John Moore	47.00	
3	John Moore	49.00	
4	John Moore	49.00	
5	John Moore	49.00	
6	John Moore	49.00	
7	John Moore	49.00	
8	John Moore	49.00	
9	John Moore	49.00	
10	John Moore	49.00	
11	John Moore	49.00	
12	John Moore	49.00	
13	John Moore	49.00	
14	John Moore	49.00	
15	John Moore	49.00	
16	John Moore	49.00	
17	John Moore	49.00	
18	John Moore	49.00	
19	John Moore	49.00	
20	John Moore	49.00	
21	John Moore	49.00	
22	John Moore	49.00	
23	John Moore	49.00	
24	John Moore	49.00	
25	John Moore	49.00	
26	John Moore	49.00	
27	John Moore	49.00	
28	John Moore	49.00	
29	John Moore	49.00	
30	John Moore	49.00	
31	John Moore	49.00	
		636.20	

78  
38  
232

1900

18

TIME For the

NAMES

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

13 Joe Cimantea  
 14 F. Proterro  
 23 F. Potechie  
 24 F. Rompello  
 26 F. Alessio  
 27 Sami Muro  
 28 F. Cimantea  
 29 Augy Pechio  
 30 Mike Rossi  
 31 Mike Cimantea  
 32 S. Rompello  
 33 A. Alessio  
 34 Joe Muro

Month of *Jan*

1900  
 18

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

Total  
 Rate  
 per  
 Day

AMOUNT

\$ Cts.

Hours  
 Cents  
 Amount

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	Total Time	Rate per Day	AMOUNT \$ Cts.
Joe Cimantea																																18	75.00	1350.00
F. Proterro																																22	36.40	802.80
F. Potechie																																24	49.00	1176.00
F. Rompello																																7	14.00	98.00
F. Alessio																																23	47.60	1094.80
Sami Muro																																19	35.00	665.00
F. Cimantea																																23	47.60	1094.80
Augy Pechio																																16	32.60	521.60
Mike Rossi																																19	38.40	729.60
Mike Cimantea																																8	17.00	136.00
S. Rompello																																23	46.50	1073.50
A. Alessio																																12	1.00	12.00
Joe Muro																																4	8.00	32.00
																																4	8.00	32.00
																																3	7.00	21.00
																																100	635.20	63520.00
																																100	200.00	20000.00
																																49	34.50	1690.50
																																81	27.50	2227.50

services it provided to the navvies.<sup>11</sup> The tables (see pp. 123-124) show that the supply and sale of equipment was more lucrative than that of provisions. They also show that some items were sold at cost, but most others were marked up, the larger increase being on supplies rather than provisions. On the latter, the average margin was approximately 20%, whereas on the former, it more than doubled that percentage. It appears that Vincenzo Veltri, as sub-contractor, made substantial profits; but the head contractors, from whom all supplies had to be purchased, obtained the lion's share. Indeed, when freight charges against the sub-contractors are taken into account,<sup>12</sup> one is less inclined to consider the prices charged by Veltri to be excessive. There is no reliable way of determining the extent of total profits Vincenzo earned through the early contracts and the services which he provided for his clients. A general indication, however, might be obtained from a sale. In 1905, Vincenzo unexpectedly sold his equipment to Parson, another sub-contractor, for the sum of three thousand dollars.<sup>13</sup> Even if one makes allowances for cash assets which were not recorded in the Veltri papers, the sum realized through the sale of equipment is indicative of rather moderate earnings when one considers it had taken Vincenzo more than six years to acquire such resources.

The period 1902-1905 is a period of relative obscurity in both

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<sup>11</sup>The inferential conclusions drawn for this period are unavoidable since the Veltri brothers left no records of purchase they made during this initial stage of their operation.

<sup>12</sup>Bradwin, p. 188.

<sup>13</sup>"Memoirs," p. 20. This business transaction occurred in the year when Vincenzo was experiencing serious strain and may not have been a good deal.

Chart Showing Margin of Profit on Supplies and Equipment

Cost of Some Common Equipment to R. F. Welch Co.

1. Axe Handles	\$ .13 each
2. 14' exploders	\$ .07 each
3. 20' exploders	\$ .14 each
4. rubbers	\$ 1.70/pair
5. 1 box detonators	\$ 1.25
6. felt insoles	\$ .17/pair
7. bellows	\$ 5.00 each
8. anvil	\$10.00 each
9. pinch bar	\$ .90 each

Price Charged by R. F. Welch Co.

1. axe handles	\$ .40 each
2. 14' exploders	\$ .09 each
3. 20' exploders	\$ .14 each
4. rubbers	\$ 3.00/pair
5. 1 box detonators	\$ 1.25
6. felt insoles	\$ .25/pair
7. bellows	\$ 7.00 each
8. anvil	\$10.00 each
9. pinch bar	\$ 1.30 each

Chart Showing Margin of Profit on Provisions

Prices Paid by R. F. Welch Co. to Cameron Heaps Co. Ltd.

1. candle 12"	\$ .09 each
2. potatoes	\$1.10/bag
3. flour	\$2.25/bag
4. bacon	\$ .145/pound
5. ham	\$ .165/pound
6. cheese	\$ .1475/pound
7. lard	\$ .1075/pound
8. beef (quarter)	\$ .875/pound
9. macaroni	\$1.55 box
10. butter	\$ .2725/pound
11. soap	\$4.15/case

Prices Charged to Ostenberg Brothers (Stationmen) by R. F. Welch

1. candle 12"	\$ .15 each
2. potatoes	\$1.50/bag
3. flour	\$2.80/bag
4. bacon	\$ .20/pound
5. ham	\$ .22/pound
6. cheese	\$ .16/pound
7. lard	\$ .17/pound
8. beef (quarter)	\$ .13/pound
9. macaroni	\$1.85/box
10. butter	\$ .29/pound
11. soap	\$4.15/case

the personal life of Vincenzo Veltri and the company's fortunes. Giovanni had gone to Italy for his second sojourn which lasted two and a half years. During this interval, there appears to have been no communication between the two brothers.<sup>14</sup> Very likely, Vincenzo saw little need to keep Giovanni informed of any business dealings since, up to this point, only he could take credit for any successes the company had achieved. Ironically, he alone was also responsible for the near collapse of the company when he inexplicably sold its equipment to Walter T. Parson.<sup>15</sup>

Giovanni's hasty return may have ensured the continuity of the Welch company name. Though preoccupied by his brother's infirm state, Giovanni did not hesitate to accept a contract from Foley, Welch and Stewart who were doubletracking for the C.P.R. In a move that showed his cautious nature, however, he compensated for his brother's temporary loss by taking on a new partner, Giuseppe Amantea. While the J. V. Welch Company languished, Giovanni was making his first attempt to continue in his brother's footsteps. Though the Welch-Amantea partnership was short-lived,<sup>16</sup> it provided Giovanni an opportunity to move out of his brother's shadow. Giovanni's comments on the Deception project (his work was located between Busteet and Deception west of Kenora) are meagre, as he referred only to "fair earnings."<sup>17</sup> But a report in the Kenora Miner and News indicates that Giovanni and his partner worked on a "hard contract." It also states that the two camps at Deception - that of Welch

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<sup>14</sup>The "Memoirs" are almost silent on the company's development at this time. Indeed, Giovanni's only comment is his acknowledgement of J. W. Stewart's letter which described his brother's unfortunate condition.

<sup>15</sup>Welch Papers, "Statutory Declaration, October 12, 1903." This declaration establishes clear title to goods and chattels, but the original list has been lost.

<sup>16</sup>"Memoirs," p. 21. The association was terminated because of personal conflict between the two partners.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.



and Amantea and that of Johnson - employing 150 men were "making good way with it, mostly all rock cut."<sup>18</sup>

Vincenzo's recovery ended Giovanni's attempt to start his own construction company. It appears obvious that Giovanni was not yet confident enough to continue on his own and that he was conscious of family lines of authority for, as soon as Vincenzo obtained a sizeable contract from J. D. MacArthur on the Transcontinental, he once again joined with his brother. The 58 mile contract was too large an enterprise to be undertaken by the two brothers since their combined resources were insufficient. It seemed expedient that they seek out a partner in order to meet the substantial expenditure of funds required to outfit three camps. Giovanni and Frank Cancellia provided the necessary funds.

Despite the financial difficulties incurred in bringing the Transcontinental project to a close, and the disappointment of unrealized monetary gains, the Welch Company profited from this enterprise. The magnitude of the project induced the Welch Brothers to give their operation a more business-like management in order to compete successfully against similar outfits. The Kenora Miner and News report on construction on the Transcontinental describing the Welch operation provides very useful detail:

On the construction work of the G.T.P. and about twenty-nine miles due North of Kenora, we find the 6 mile contract of the Welch Brothers. They have some very heavy rock work and two long earth fills. About 500 men are employed here. There are 5 camps, but No. 2 the headquarter's camp is the largest. It stands on a dry portage between Star and Cache Lakes, there are several large buildings and stables (sic). The fifty-one teams of heavy horses were well worth seeing and are well

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<sup>18</sup>Kenora Miner and News, January 26, 1906.

worth being proud of.... The camps and equipment are insured for \$100,000.<sup>19</sup>

It is unfortunate that few documents exist for the entire Welch Brothers operation, thus making it difficult to assess the complete structure of the company at the time of the McArthur contract. One ledger - possibly the most important for this contract - has survived the trials of time. In the "Memoirs" Giovanni described the unusual arrangements made to render the project more manageable. The 58 mile contract was awarded to the Welch Brothers, but the section which was under Vincenzo's supervision was contracted to Welch and Company.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the sticker on the cover of the extant ledger reads: J. V. Welch, "Rennie Work."

This ledger is an invaluable source of information, for it reveals the inner workings of the company. One realizes immediately that the Welch enterprise had by now become a rather complex undertaking. The first entries, beginning January 1, 1907, give a clear picture of the stores account. It appears that, in order to expedite the bookkeeping, this account was used as a general, all-encompassing entry which included the kitchen, stable; outfitting, cash and explosives accounts. Evidently, most of the workers employed at the Welch's camp availed themselves of the kitchen services, although these are, unfortunately, not detailed in

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<sup>19</sup>Kenora Miner and News, May 13, 1908. Unless the writer was referring specifically to a portion of the Welch contract, he has erred (the possibility of a typographical error exists) in reporting the size of the contract. Giovanni's "Memoirs" refer to a sixty-mile project while the actual contract specifies 58 miles. One additional discrepancy ought to be noted: whereas the writer mentions 5 camps were set up, the "Memoirs" states three. Both sources indicate camp No. 2 as being the headquarters of the operation.

<sup>20</sup>"Memoirs," p. 30.

the ledger. A cash value only was entered here, but it can reasonably be assumed that the entries refer to meals and occasional purchases. Undoubtedly, the kitchen account generated some profit for Vincenzo, but it may have been modest. A tally of figures entered for the month of January 1907 shows that revenues amounted to \$2,254.92 while purchases were \$2,061.18. The sum of \$193.74 - the difference between revenues and expenses - does not account in total for the profit since the figures do not show the value of inventory.<sup>21</sup>

Following the kitchen account, one finds the J. D. McArthur Company Limited account covering the period May 31, 1906 to July 31, 1907. These entries clearly demonstrate the relationship between a large head-contracting company and a smaller sub-contracting enterprise. This relationship was described by Bradwin thus:

All supplies for each of the sub-contractors are furnished at headquarters camp. Thus, when outfitted, the sub-contractor is often under obligations to the head-contractor for many thousands of dollars: his van goods, his cookery supplies, his feed, his machine parts, have all been advanced him from the huge stores at headquarters camp. Even the freighting may be handled by the head-contractor and a further indebtedness be thus incurred.<sup>22</sup>

Quite obviously, J. V. Welch's Company relied heavily for supplies on the head contractor. In a period of fourteen months, the total value of supplies furnished by J. D. McArthur to J. V. Welch amounted to

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<sup>21</sup>Because ledgers for the years 1907-1910 are missing, it is impossible to determine the extent of accumulated stock.

<sup>22</sup>Bradwin, p. 49.

\$116,548.57.<sup>23</sup> During the same period, Welch received - primarily in estimates of work done - \$79,561.37. One would have to infer, of course, that additional monies would be paid to the Welch Company upon completion of the contract. The sum owed to McArthur also included other charges than those for supplies. These were freight charges, insurance premiums and medical dues.

Because of the incompleteness of the records and the obvious difficulties encountered when one attempts to arrive at a monetary value for accumulated stock, it would be risky to try to determine the total earned by the Welch brothers through the McArthur contract. A few general observations are possible, however. Giovanni's pithy comment that "all went well"<sup>24</sup> may be an indication of the financial success of this project. Nevertheless, the terms of the contract furnish some evidence that the Veltris may have fared comparatively better than did standard contract-holders on the National Transcontinental Railway. Bradwin's figures prove that the head contractor made money by sub-letting to sub-contractors at a rate lower than that accorded to him.<sup>25</sup> No doubt the employers of the

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<sup>23</sup>The list of goods and supplies received by Welch provides a detailed account of all that was needed to run a sub-contracting company. The following are some of the more common items needed for the various components of the operation: kitchen outfit and tinware (pots, pans, cutlery, etc.); blacksmith shop (anvils, vices, bellows, tools, etc.); grade outfit (hammers, sledges, mattocks, picks, shovels, wheel barrows, etc.); store (scales, boots, shirts, gloves, etc.); stable (H.S. nails, horse shoes, toe calks, axle grease etc.). Bradwin wrote that in order for a sub-contractor to function effectively, he would require a small plant which would include "steel rails, of light weights, a donkey engine or two, several horses, some carts, a blacksmith outfit, and considerable lesser equipment, probably, from a former work." Bradwin, p. 49.

<sup>24</sup>"Memoirs," p. 22.

<sup>25</sup>Bradwin, p. 195. See Appendix B.

Welch Company profited from this common practice, but it appears that Vincenzo and Giovanni were able to get slightly better terms when one compares Bradwin's rates to the ones in Welch's contract, though the areas of comparison are unhappily few.<sup>26</sup> Even though the rates for grubbing and clearing are almost identical, the Veltri brothers did better in grading and ditching. Bradwin's figures for rock work (\$0.90 to \$1.05 per cubic yard) and loose rock (\$0.45 per cubic yard) compare to \$1.45 and \$0.50 respectively in Welch's contract. It should be made clear, however, that Bradwin's figures were for the period 1910-1912, about five years after the Veltri's contract when one might have expected the earlier ones to be still lower. As was to be expected, the Veltris made some of their profits by subletting work to stationmen and paying them at a lower rate. The chart below gives a more accurate indication of the profit made by the Veltris:

<u>Rate paid to Welch Company</u>		<u>Rate paid by Welch Company</u>	
Common excavation	\$0.25 / cu. yd.	Common excavation	\$0.17 - 0.20
Clearing	\$30 / acre	Clearing	\$10 / acre
Grubbing	\$60 / acre	Grubbing	\$50 / acre
Solid rock	\$1.45 / cu. yd.	Solid rock	\$1.40 / cu. yd.

The portion of the Rennie contract under Vincenzo's supervision provides some clear evidence of the desirability of sub-letting to stationmen. This piece of work - costing the National Transcontinental Railway

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<sup>26</sup>The paucity of comparable items makes this conclusion somewhat tentative. One should not infer, therefore, that the Veltri's contracts obtained from head-contractors were particularly lucrative.

\$135,274.04 - was divided into several stations,<sup>27</sup> all of which were in District F. Division 9, Residencies 35 and 36. Because of the difficulties described earlier, it is impossible to determine the portion of profits realized through the process of subletting. It would be safe to assume that some of Vincenzo's earnings (his account was credited with \$7,318.20 for the year 1907) must have come from subletting.

The next significant contract for the Welch Company was the doubletracking between Loon and Ouimet. Reflecting a period of minor activity, the records for the years 1909 and 1910 are scanty. The company's records for 1911, however, demonstrate the company's need for additional equipment and provisions to execute the work for the Loon-Ouimet project. From Cameron Heaps Company Limited, the Welch brothers bought the necessary victuals for their usual food services. From August 5, 1911, to August 29, 1911, the total purchases made from Cameron Heaps amounted to \$2,977.85.<sup>28</sup> Fife Hardware Company Limited furnished additional kitchen utensils (one can assume here that the above-mentioned equipment supplemented what the Welch brothers had previously stored in the Kenora warehouse) which amounted to \$3,484.82.<sup>29</sup> The 1911 account

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<sup>27</sup> A station is a stretch of 100 feet. In writing about his experiences on the Transcontinental at about the same time that the Veltri brothers were working on their project, Bradwin wrote that stationmen would frequently take five, eight or eleven stations. "The agreement which the stationmen enter into is a replica in substance of that which the sub-contractor has already signed with the head-contractor, with the exception of the rates paid for yardage and the prices charged for goods. The subcontractor sees to it that his margin of both is sufficient to help defray his debt at the headquarter's camp and to insure a safe return on the work he had already undertaken." Bradwin, p. 52.

<sup>28</sup> Welch Papers, Company Ledger, 1911.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., It would be tedious to list all the equipment needed to provide meals to workers. The following list will, nevertheless, provide some insight: pails, tubs, cutlery, pie plates, dishes, pans, tea pots, dippers, ladles, griddle, potato mashers, rolling pins, egg beaters, etc.

also shows that the company was using petty cash (a practice which was not utilized in their earlier contracts) in order to expedite matters. It appears that any supplies not included in the large order from Heaps or Fife was purchased subsequently with petty cash. Stamps, tobacco, snuff, soap, matches, and the like were bought in this fashion. The Welch Brothers also used this account for daily business transactions such as telegraphing for emergency equipment and the hiring of personnel. In August 1911, telegrams were sent for the shipment to their camps of such equipment as lumber, carts, wagons, etc., as well as for soliciting workers. In September, 1911, amongst various telegraphed requests, one was for a cook, others for labourers F. Deluca, C. Rizzuti, P. Dibari and D. McEwan and another for "Soo Italians."<sup>30</sup> Giovanni himself drew small sums from this account on a regular basis. In a period of six months, Giovanni's advances amounted to \$166, but Vincenzo's name does not appear in the ledger for the same purpose.<sup>31</sup>

For undisclosed reasons, Vincenzo and Giovanni decided to handle the Ouimet-Loon project in a rather different way than they had previously done.<sup>32</sup> The Transcontinental contract was executed primarily by themselves. Now they preferred to sublet most of the doubletracking work to several sub-contractors. The Veltris had moved into the main contractor's position and work. The Schreiber project, as well, shows that the company profited from subletting parts of the contract. Though

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., passim.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., passim.

<sup>32</sup> The "Memoirs" offer little explanation for this departure. It appears that the Veltris were content merely to keep the "lightest" portion of this work for themselves. "Memoirs," p. 48.

The possibility that the Veltris realized that sub-letting could generate additional revenues cannot be discounted. In any case, it was worth a try.

profit figures are not available, comparison of the rates can give a fairly accurate appraisal.<sup>33</sup> Profits from sub-letting notwithstanding, the Veltri brothers realized that there would be as much profit in providing commissary stock, building and construction material, as well as meals for the sub-contractors, as in actual railway building. They had also become contractor-commissaries. The Pearson-Rodin sub-contracting firm, for example, employing seven men in all, had spent \$327.40 in less than two months at the Welch's provision store, this amount not including \$14.00 medical dues and \$3.50 mail service. The ledger shows that during the same period the Pearson-Rodin crew had cleared just over 33 acres of land at \$24 per acre. On balance, the Welch company owed the above-mentioned workers \$459.58 collectively.<sup>34</sup> Similar arrangements were made with the three other sub-contractors working on this particular project. The largest of the three was the Ostenberg and Schweig account which totalled \$31,039.13 for four months - a considerable sum spent at the Welch's stores and kitchen. From August 1911 to March 1912, the Welch company realized \$57,122 in gross charges to sub-contractors and stationmen. Disbursements in payroll deductions amounted to \$48,153 approximately. In order to replenish the store and kitchen equipment and

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<sup>33</sup>See Appendix C. Bradwin gives a clear explanation of the sub-letting practices of contractors. He wrote: "in any ten mile section, the bigger clay-cuts and much of the rock work, requiring as they do horses and machinery, are usually completed by the sub-contractor himself. He will build his camps centrally near the biggest cut on his piece of work and the heavier operations will thus be undertaken by his local foreman with gangs of men employed at day work but whenever possible the sub-contractor hastens to let out in station-work all the lighter pieces of the grade." Bradwin, p. 114.

<sup>34</sup>Welch Papers, 1911 Ledger.



provide provisions for this contract, the company spent \$3,484.<sup>35</sup>

The ledgers also show that the company had undergone some modification in terms of the ethnic background of its employees. Though many of the stationmen were still Italian, a good number of these appear to be Friulani and not Southerners.<sup>36</sup> Aside from the Santin crew, which was made up entirely of Friulani, the remaining stationmen and subcontractors were non-Italians. Indeed, and in this matter the Veltri brothers would have little or no say, these sub-contractors also employed many non-Italians. Ostenberg and Schweig, for example, employed 12 workers, two of whom were Italian.

Vincenzo's death did not precipitate major changes in the management of the company. Since Vincenzo did not have a family, Giovanni inherited all the assets and liabilities<sup>37</sup> and promptly changed the name of the company to John Welch Company. But the 1913 RosSPORT doubletracking contract for the C.P.R. demonstrates that Giovanni continued in his brother's footsteps. The company was still largely dependent on Italian labour. It employed 29 workers, all but one of whom were Italian.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> If last names can be considered a reliable source of one's extraction, it can be concluded that such names as Belluz, Santin, Zanetti, Pigat and Cinat are Friulani. Indeed, several of these family names can be found in the city of Thunder Bay today.

<sup>37</sup> Nowhere do the documents reveal the extent of the estate. One cannot even speculate, for example, as to the outcome of that potentially lucrative sale of mining properties. Indeed, silence on the matter may point to the ultimate failure of the sale. The last year for which accurate references to Vincenzo's estate are available (January 31, 1914) show that his liquid assets were very modest - \$1,211.25. (Welch Papers, Company Ledger, 1913-1914). It is virtually impossible, on the other hand, to ascertain the value of his construction equipment since, after Vincenzo's death, all company's equipment is listed under John Welch Company. Undoubtedly, a good portion of the total value of equipment (entered as \$6,738.56) would have been part of Vincenzo's estate.

Only three of these men - Greco, Maura, and Sdao - had been previously employed by the Welch Company at the Rennie contract.<sup>38</sup> Oddly enough, whereas many of the workers on the previous contract had been Friulani, those on the next were southern Italians. Giovanni also continued with the practice of sub-letting some of the work to stationmen and small sub-contractors. He allotted his contract to eight other outfits, one of them managed by his son, Raffaële.<sup>39</sup>

Giovanni's own account reveals some rather shrewd manouevers on the part of the man who evidently had learned the tricks of the trade. He realized that, ultimately, his company would profit from carefully placed and measured "contributions" to people who might be useful during the various stages of the operation. There are, as a result, innumerable entries for such small items as cigars, a few for unspecified donations, to C.P.R. officials and engineers, and one revealing entry totalling \$120 for the purchase of three suits of clothes - a gift to C.P.R. engineers.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Giovanni did not neglect his personal attire - a consi-

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<sup>38</sup> Welch Papers, Company Ledger 1913. It should be remembered that at Rossport Giovanni needed considerably fewer workers because of the size of the contract. Also, the Welch Papers do not contain all the names of the navvies employed on the National Transcontinental project, but only those under Vincenzo's supervision.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., passim.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., More than 40 years later, the author witnessed a recourse to similar unconventional business practices which augmented the efficiency of the catering services provided by the R. F. Welch Company. Perhaps providing free meals to a roadmaster or donating groceries to a train crew may have seemed unethical. Indeed, as a result of these practices, many minor infractions were overlooked by C.N.R. agents such as roadmasters, but, by-and-large, these favours represented an exchange of services: a good meal in reciprocation for prompt service. A dissatisfied train crew could certainly deliver a bumpy ride when moving the gang from one location to the next. A well-fed roadmaster might be able to deliver an ice car sooner than was customary. For a railway catering company, the popular dictum "a squeaky wheel gets the grease" made perfect sense.

deration on his part which provides proof of his savoir faire. Entries show that Giovanni was aware of the businessman's image: a new suit, a travelling bag and expenses claimed for a trip to Port Arthur with railway officials were all indications of the metamorphosis which had occurred. Giovanni had long ago shed the navy tradition: he expected returns for his brain as well as his brawn. The income from the Rossport contract disappointed him. "I found myself worse off than anyone else," he would recall in his "Memoirs," "My profit was minimal."<sup>41</sup> He drew \$1,350 in salary for a period of nine months in addition to \$3,000 which he received by share in the company's profits. His partner, Frank Cancellà, received \$1,500.<sup>42</sup>

A study of the available records for the few succeeding years after 1913 - the year of Vincenzo's death - shows that the company followed a proven and well-established pattern. The pre-war years had brought growth and a degree of prosperity. The ledger for 1918, however, shows that the company was experiencing some difficulties. The contracts were considerably smaller. The company employed only 23 workers during a ten-month period beginning September 1918 and ending April 1919. Ten of these were Italian, four of them former employees.<sup>43</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that any minor management changes initiated by Giovanni after his brother's death were necessitated by changing economic circumstances and not by any intentional shift of policies on the part of Giovanni. Adapt or perish - this was an obvious

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<sup>41</sup>"Memoirs," p. 58.

<sup>42</sup>Welch Papers, Company Ledger, 1913.

<sup>43</sup>Welch Papers, Company Ledger, 1919.

economic reality which both brothers had learned well. The lean war years prompted a diminution of the scale of operation, so much so that the 1918 ledger shows Giovanni taking charge of some aspects of bookkeeping. In addition, his own account shows that his cash revenues and his gifts to railway engineers had been reduced substantially.<sup>44</sup> When compared to the pre-war years, investment in store supplies and equipment was also reduced considerably and reflected the small size of the contracts. From Wells and Emerson, Giovanni purchased tools and equipment worth \$467.32 for a period of three months. The kitchen account expenditures amounted to \$2,493.26 for the same period.<sup>45</sup>

In spite of the paucity of work contracts during the war years, the company did not collapse. Vincenzo had given it the impetus and managerial expertise it required in order to survive even without the benefits of his considerable talents. Giovanni, wisely recognizing the effectiveness of Vincenzo's methods, did not deviate from a reliable course. He continued to employ immigrant labour, to provide commissary service, to feed workers on the work camps, and to sublet some of the work wherever it was profitable to do so. Any change in the company occurred as a result of Giovanni's own family situation, his more cautious nature and the economic circumstances of the day. The practice of ingratiation may have stemmed from Giovanni's sense of insecurity and from a learned cultural pattern. In his native land, a person seldom obtained his due without giving up part of what was legitimately his. As well, in Canada, he had to compensate for handicaps, particularly his difficulty in language proficiency and the self-effacement of the parvenu. No doubt,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Vincenzo had had to face the same problems but he was better equipped to cope with such impediments since he possessed a fighting spirit which may have been the essential catalyst in the critical stage of the company's growth. Giovanni's more cautious approach, guiding the company through less propitious times, would prove a perfect complement to his brother's more venturesome disposition.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE COMPANY'S SURVIVAL DURING UNSETTLED TIMES - 1913-1931

Vincenzo's death ushered in a period of transition for the Veltri enterprise. Giovanni was the sole executor under the last will and testament of his brother Vincenzo.<sup>1</sup> He carried on with the management of the company in the same manner as it had functioned since its first significant contract. The company continued to employ predominately Italian workers though, by now, there were few Grimaldesi left.<sup>2</sup> Giovanni revived the partnership with Amantea and his nephew, Fedele Nigro and, for the first time, included his own son Raffaele as a full member of the new company. According to the terms of the agreement, Giovanni credited the partnership with three thousand dollars from his own resources in order to have his son included as a partner. Nigro was entrusted with the supervision of potential contracts in the West, while he and his son would work in Ontario.<sup>3</sup>

So constituted, the Welch Company continued to work for the C.P.R., most of the contracts being provided by R. C. Hoffman, manager of the Dominion Construction Company Limited. In 1914, the latter paid out nearly \$120,000 to the Welch Company for work done on the C.P.R. line on various locations between Port Arthur and Sudbury<sup>4</sup> but their earnings

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<sup>1</sup>Welch Papers, "Statement by Keefer, Keefer and Towers, Solicitors, March 29, 1913."

<sup>2</sup>See p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>"Memoirs," p. 58.

<sup>4</sup>Welch Papers, "Statement of Account, February - March 1914."

List of Station-men Employed by the Welch Company in the 1913 Contracts:

Alampi	Muto
Aquino	Mazzei
Anselmi	Mauro*
Andrea	Palmarini
<u>Bowman</u>	Perfetto
Copelli	<u>Ross</u>
Cugliandro	Roberto
Colistro*	Rizzuti
D'Ambroso	Ricitelli
Divisti	Sdao*
Fero	Tisini
Fazzari	Vitullo
Grano	<u>Young</u>
Gentile	Zuchetti
Greco*	
Gattuso	
<u>Hoorigan</u>	
<u>Johson</u>	
Larosa	
Monaco	
Macri	

NOTE: Asterisk indicates possible Grimaldese worker. Underlined names are non-Italian.

were very modest.<sup>5</sup> In spite of the small earnings, Giovanni received immense satisfaction from proving to several C.P.R. high officials that experience is often more efficient than bookishness. During the work on a difficult rock cut, the C.P.R. engineer - an explosives expert - was causing numerous train delays on account of the frequent blasting. Giovanni asked permission to complete the job his way. His plan was simple: rather than blast small chunks of rock, why not remove the entire obstruction by one glorious explosion. The C.P.R. engineers were naturally worried that such a violent blast might rip out the entire line. Giovanni guaranteed the integrity of the line by promising to remove the rails first, and then cover the roadbed with tree trunks. The experts were convinced; the order to proceed with the plan was given. After twenty days of preparation, R. C. Hoffman received the signal to pull the switch to activate the explosion. "It was a great spectacle," as Giovanni later remembered it, "to see the huge mass of rock slide down into the lake where it was intended to go."<sup>6</sup>

Towards the beginning of the summer of 1914, Giovanni became involved in one of the biggest projects undertaken by the city of Winnipeg - the building of the Shoal Lake aqueduct.<sup>7</sup> Sub-contracting for Tomlinson and Fleming, the Welch Company was assigned the part of the project which involved the building of a dam at the mouth of the lake.

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<sup>5</sup>"Memoirs," p. 58.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-57.

<sup>7</sup>For more details on the Shoal Lake project, see Artibise, pp. 218-221.



Soon after the signing of the contract in Winnipeg, Giovanni returned to Port Arthur where he hired nine workers. From there he went to Pays Plat, the location of his last project, in order to ship his equipment to Shoal Lake. In the summer of 1914, while he was absorbed in his preparation, Giovanni was unexpectedly jolted by a different kind of reality. "Suddenly, like lightning from a serene sky came the news of the outbreak of World War I,"<sup>8</sup> was how Giovanni recalled the tragic news. The conflict brought war-unrelated activities to a grinding halt. Giovanni was compelled to buy two plots of land at Pearl, less than 30 miles from Port Arthur, in order to provide a temporary warehouse and stables for his equipment and horses.<sup>9</sup> This was to be only a provisional measure since Giovanni, like everyone else, expected the war to be of short duration. He remembered the next months sadly: "times were bad: work was scarce and many were unemployed."<sup>10</sup> In typically pragmatic fashion, he began to utilize what he had: the railway builder turned farmer at Pearl. He cleared enough land to carry out a considerable spring seeding

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<sup>8</sup>"Memoirs," p. 61.

<sup>9</sup>The first official reply to his request for the land purchase came to Raffaele (who had probably written on behalf of his father) on March 2, 1915 from the Crown Land agent in Port Arthur. The letter stated that it would be necessary "that the lot be inspected for the purpose of ascertaining if it (was) fit for settlement purposes." Welch Papers, "Letter from W. A. Burrows, Crown Land Agent to Raphael Welch, March 2, 1915." Correspondence from the Department of Lands, Forests and Mines indicates that not only was Giovanni able to purchase the land (N ½ Lot 4, Con. 2, Twp. McTavish), he also obtained a loan for the purchase. Welch Papers, "Letter from the Settlers Loan Commissioner to John Welch, June 10, 1919."

<sup>10</sup>Of course, Giovanni was right. Canada channelled most of its energies and resources to the war effort. The spectacular growth which had taken place during the Laurier years was halted by the war. This shift of priorities had a pronounced impact on the building of railways as well. "The war generated traffic of certain kind but it stopped the sort of development on which a solid future could be built." R. A. J. Phillips, Canada's Railways, p. 58.

of fodder.<sup>11</sup>

Giovanni's unexpected agrarian venture as a response to the sudden termination of railway work represents a curious mixture of survival techniques and recrudescence of peasant activity. One can well conjecture that Giovanni soon realized he might utilize the land for something other than storing equipment. He would minimize the hardships of a potentially lengthy period of inactivity by falling back on the resources he possessed: willingness to work and reliance on peasant experience. Giovanni did not become a bona fide farmer - the land he had purchased did not lend itself to an agricultural production nor, as subsequent developments would show, was he thinking of becoming a farmer. He simply could not afford to remain inactive for any period of time. The land would provide a temporary escape from the doldrums of the war inertia. The blend of agriculture and self-sufficiency has long been a mainstay of peasant societies.<sup>12</sup> Giovanni simply followed the dictates of his own experience. He had been raised in a society where sloth would lead to ruin. His hasty return to the more lucrative railway venture when more favourable conditions recurred demonstrates that Giovanni's temporary flirtation with the land was a measure of survival and not a serious commitment.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>"Memoirs," pp. 61-62.

<sup>12</sup>Potter, Diaz, Foster, pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup>Spada's explanation of the Italians' disenchantment with farming ("The Italian is not a farmer. He is the enemy of the soil which in turn is his enemy."), though somewhat sententious, does contain a certain measure of truth. Spada, pp. 80-82.

In 1917, Giovanni hired a tenant, Peter de Luca, to manage his farm. According to the agreement, de Luca would be responsible for the maintenance and use of the farm implements and buildings while engaging in some husbandry. Veltri would simply share on a 50% basis in the sale of any farm produce. Welch Papers, "Agreement between John Welch and Peter de Luca, May 1, 1917."

The summer of 1915, work on the Shoal Lake project was resumed. Giovanni immediately left his bucolic setting at Pearl and returned to Shoal Lake where he and his gang worked assiduously. In the spring of 1917, the mayor of Winnipeg gave him permission to establish a store near the work site and to farm as much land as he wanted. Not surprisingly, Giovanni succumbed to his love for horticulture. Soon, with the help of some of his workers who aided in the clearing of the land, he had a garden in which he grew several kinds of vegetables. One can surmise, however, that there was not much profit in keeping a garden nor in running a store in a captive market aggravated by war inflation. As a result, he left Raffaele to mind the store while he continued the work on the canal and dam.<sup>14</sup>

In the autumn of 1917, Giovanni decided to return to Pearl to increase the productivity of his farm, to take stock and to repair some of the equipment stored in the sheds. He must have been disappointed with de Luca's management of the farm, though his recollections in the "Memoirs" are ambiguous. Unfortunately, his efforts went for nought for one night, fire broke out (Giovanni suspected arson by an acquaintance whom he does not name) and his barn and sheds burned to the ground. In the blaze, he lost all his horses. It was a demoralizing experience mitigated only by the help given him by some friends who lent him horses for the spring seeding. In the fall, his farming venture was further aggravated by the loss of harvested potatoes which froze as a result of his leaving a barn window open overnight. Disgruntled by the whole affair, Giovanni decided to rent the farm to two Italians and their families for

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<sup>14</sup>"Memoirs," p. 63.

five hundred dollars per year. The same winter he left Pearl and returned to Shoal Lake.<sup>15</sup>

In June 1918, W. H. Carter, president of Carter-Hall-Aldinger Company of Winnipeg, offered Giovanni a contract to build a stream tunnel at mile 41.3 in District 3 of the Fort William sub-division of the Canadian National Railway.<sup>16</sup> This work, undertaken by Giovanni in copartnership with B. Olson, another contractor, ultimately proved to be very difficult indeed, as the incessantly rising water in the tunnel delayed its completion.<sup>17</sup>

The following year, 1919, brought a period of relative under-employment - an unexpected development which alarmed Giovanni. He could ill afford to leave his equipment stored unproductively. He did not foresee the depression of the early 1920's nor could he cope with the adverse economic forces at work in the post-war period. Though Canada entered a period of more apparent than real economic progress,<sup>18</sup> the nation was

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> In December 1918, an Order-in-Council authorized the use of the term "Canadian National Railways" for the lines now owned by the Canadian government. The Canadian Northern Railway had been nationalized in 1917. The other lines were the Eastern Division of the National Transcontinental Railway, the Intercolonial Railway and the Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick short lines.

<sup>17</sup> Welch Papers, "Letter by Carter-Hall-Aldinger Company Ltd., to A. V. Redmond, District Engineer, Canadian National Railways, April 7, 1919." The difficult nature of this work was described by the contractor thus: "Three hour shifts was as long as the men would work, then going to camp and securing change of clothing due to getting wet."

<sup>18</sup> Morton wrote: "The first thing that stood out for all to see in 1920 was the post-war boom, a boom that had become an inflation. An abundance of money could not, after the expenditure of war and demobilization, purchase a sufficiency of goods. Agricultural and industrial prices were unprecedentedly high. Wages also were high, although salaries had not kept pace with rising prices. All seemed to prosper; few were really prosperous." W. L. Morton, "The 1920's," in J. M. S. Careless and R. Craig Brown (editors), The Canadians, 1867-1967 (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1967), p. 207.

actually headed for another cycle of deflation which would have direct consequences for working men and small businessmen.<sup>19</sup> The situation was even worse in Giovanni's own business, for railway building was uncertain and stagnant as the building programmes were largely completed. With a high per capita railway mileage (1 mile per 200 people), with the financial collapse of the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific and with operating costs escalating from \$1.98 to \$3.36 per train mile in a period of three years (1916-1919),<sup>20</sup> railway building came to a halt. It is not surprising, then, that Giovanni sent the following request to his former employer, Foley, Welch and Stewart (Giovanni had written a similar message two weeks before to J. D. McArthur with no results):

Some time ago I wrote to you at Winnipeg regarding obtaining a piece of rock work, but have had no reply. Perhaps my letter has gone astray in the mail.

May I again ask you to be kind enough to let me know if there is any possibility of our obtaining a piece of your rock work? I have done practically nothing since the outbreak of war and are very anxious to come back again and work for you.<sup>21</sup>

Giovanni's solicitation received no response. Fortunately, with the help of friends and good measure of luck (Giovanni attributed his luck to divine intervention - "per la volonta' del signore") he was able to obtain a contract from the C.N.R. for work on the Winnipeg-Port Arthur line.<sup>22</sup> Paid on a percentage basis, Giovanni's company

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 208-09.

<sup>20</sup>Phillips, p. 58. During the same time, mileage earnings had decreased from \$709.08 to \$671.63. (p. 58).

<sup>21</sup>Welch Papers, "Letter from John Welch and Company to Foley and Stewart, May 20, 1919."

<sup>22</sup>"Memoirs," p. 67.

performed various types of work - drainage, excavation, rock clearance, maintenance, etc. - from 1919 to 1924. Though his crews now had fewer men, Giovanni still employed a large number of Italians<sup>23</sup> - more than half. It should be remembered, however, that before the war more than 80% of the company's employees had been Italian. The ethnic composition of the Southern-Italian-managed company had been altered by the war. The Great War had caused a labour shortage which in turn increased the occupational mobility and the geographical range of Italians.<sup>24</sup> The company could no longer rely so heavily on Italian labour. The Veltris had adapted to changing circumstances before, however. They had endured precarious business cycles and fluctuations. Indeed, they had survived two recessions of the first decade of the Twentieth Century. In the 1920's Giovanni and his son, Raffaele, would have to guide their company through a decade when "in construction the emphasis was on highways rather than railway."<sup>25</sup> Diversification, perseverance and that frequently undervalued quality, industry, would see the company through difficult times again.

Having done mostly maintenance work from 1919 to 1924, the Welch Company was now given a contract reminiscent of the pre-war years. In 1925 the St. Paul firm of Backus and Brooks awarded Welch and Company a contract to build a branch line to Crilly.<sup>26</sup> in order to transport the

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<sup>23</sup> See p. 146

<sup>24</sup> Harney, Italians in Canada, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> A. W. Currie, Canadian Economic Development (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1942), p. 345.

<sup>26</sup> Crilly is situated on the C.N.R. line between Fort Frances and Fort William. It is merely a railway stop with no inhabitants, hence one does not find it on a map.

Work Crew - R. F. Welch & Company, 1919

B. Sdao  
G. Notti  
M. Sysick  
J. Devanney  
J. Jackson  
O. Hagberg  
J. Vescio  
F. Sdao  
Joe Fero  
James Fero  
J. Scalado  
J. Mauro  
J. Rizzuto  
J. Scalzo  
J. Widmark  
J. O'Connors  
A. Nelson  
A. Johnson  
N. Stenberg  
J. Guarasci

Welch Papers, Payroll Book, 1919 (order of names as they appear in the book).

necessary material to build a dam there. It was a challenging and dangerous enterprise in which Giovanni, once again, proved his mettle as a railway builder. The material necessary to build the dam could not be removed from the trenches for fear that the process might endanger the line. The engineers felt that a quarry would be the answer. Soon they organized a fruitless search for a suitable location. Unexpectedly, and with an unfailing sense of timing and a flair for the dramatic (perhaps relishing the moment when the self-taught man summons his experience to astonish the expert), Giovanni casually announced the "discovery" of the quarry to the C.N.R. engineers. Work was resumed immediately, and within one week, Crilly became a yard of "much activity and importance" equipped with all the heavy machinery required to do the job. Six months later the work was completed.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most difficult assignments was the work done at Hartley Bay near Toronto in 1926. Here Giovanni's task was to replace a trestle with a more permanent embankment which would allow the line to cross a swamp safely. "Expert" opinion pointed to the near impossibility of filling the swamp. Giovanni was not discouraged. Working with W. T. Moodie, C.N.R. superintendent, he brought the laborious project to a successful conclusion.<sup>28</sup>

The work done by Welch and Company subsequent to the contract at Hartley Bay was very limited. Company records are sketchy and ledgers non-existent. It appears that after the arrival of his family from

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<sup>27</sup>"Memoirs," pp. 69-70.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 70.



Grimaldi in 1923<sup>29</sup>, Giovanni became more and more preoccupied with family matters. Raffaele, his son, was beginning to play a more prominent role in the company.<sup>30</sup> It was inevitable that the fifty-three year old contractor would have to devote more of his time to facilitating the integration of his family into Canadian life. Though his company operated from Port Arthur, he and his family initially settled in Winnipeg. This choice may have been influenced by the fact that he had relatives living in the Manitoba capital. Whatever the reason, their stay was actually a brief sojourn - one winter during which time one of his daughters was married. The following spring, the entire family moved to Port Arthur where they resided for six years.

Little is known of the Veltri family during these years. Vincenzo, Giovanni's son, became consular agent largely responsible for immigration services for Port Arthur (Corrispondente del Regio Servizio d' Emigrazione). In this capacity he became well acquainted with the

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<sup>29</sup> Neither the "Memoirs" nor any personal correspondence indicate why Giovanni made the decision to bring his family over. No doubt Giovanni considered Canada to be his home (several comments in his "Memoirs" suggest this interpretation) and wanted to settle here permanently.

<sup>30</sup> In 1925, the Company's address was Room 11, Ruttan Building, Port Arthur. The business card now bearing the name of John Welch and Sons, Railway Contractors, featured himself and his two sons. (The records do not show when Giovanni dissolved his partnership with Amantea and Nigro). Vincenzo Veltri, Giovanni's second son, probably named after his uncle, came in 1923 with his mother and three sisters. One would assume that Vincenzo's role would be more titular than real for though he had a great deal more education than Raffaele (he had a diploma in Agrarian Sciences and had three years of University training - "Affidavit by the Regio Esercito Italiano"), his expertise was incongruous with the business of railway building. Furthermore, he could hardly have been conversant with Canadian life or with the language..

small Italian community of this period.<sup>31</sup> In 1929, both Vincenzo and Raffaele became founding members of the Italian Mutual Benefit Society.<sup>32</sup> In 1930, soon after Raffaele got married, Vincenzo decided, with his father's blessings, to go to Italy to seek an Italian bride. Not only had Giovanni agreed to his son's amorous plans; he financed it generously. Unfortunately, the groom-to-be returned empty handed. Furthermore, the journey to his native land had rekindled a nostalgia which particularly afflicts those immigrants whose integration is tenuous. Vincenzo began to talk incessantly with his mother and sisters about Italy, describing "its vivid colours, its natural artistic beauty and mild climate."<sup>33</sup> Soon, the lure of home recaptured the entire Veltri family, with the exception of Giovanni and Raffaele, who were powerless to prevent the others' return to Italy in 1931. One cannot be sure whether by late 1931 Giovanni felt or even comprehended the detrimental impact of the depression since his "Memoirs" are silent on this point. However, it should not be surprising if the Veltri family, like thousands

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<sup>31</sup>Welch Papers, "Letter from the Consul General in Ottawa to V. Veltri, April 15, 1926." The Consul General had requested that the local consular agent, Vincenzo Veltri, submit to Ottawa a resume regarding the Italian community. Vincenzo's submission was a valuable historical document detailing accurately assessment of living conditions, numbers, occupations, organizations, labour affiliations etc., of Italians in Port Arthur. ("Report to Dr. Comm. E. Bonardelli, R. Consigliere de Emigrazione, April 20, 1926").

<sup>32</sup>The original minutes of the Societa' Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso, founded in 1929, are not in existence. However, it is generally acknowledged by older members of the society that the two brothers were founding members. Their photographs are currently displayed amongst other founding members in the office of the society. Raffaele Veltri, after a long and distinguished association with the society, was made honorary president in 1957 because of his "splendid assistance rendered (by him) to the Italian people here and abroad." "Minutes of the Italian Mutual Benefit Society, January 6, 1957."

<sup>33</sup>"Memoirs," p. 72.

of others, experienced serious dislocation and insecurity at a time of economic and social upheaval.

At sixty-one Giovanni may have had more to contribute to the growth and development of Canada, but the failure of his family to integrate<sup>34</sup> made it certain that the company that his brother had founded and he had continued would be left in the hands of Raffaele. Giovanni reluctantly accepted the reality of his life and prepared to return to his native land. Before doing so, he left all his affairs in order. On July 29, 1930, he wrote his will in his own hand. Armed with an entirely paternalistic attitude, he disposed of his goods with an eye to the future, making Vincenzo the sole executor of his possessions in Grimaldi and Raffaele of those in Canada.<sup>35</sup> In December 1931, all but Raffaele left Port Arthur. Giovanni would begin the new year in his native town. Age and circumstances would prevent his ever again returning to Canada.

Perhaps it was fortunate timing that Giovanni left before he could feel the full impact of the depression years. Raffaele (Ralph) would now have to guide the company through the politically knotty war years. The company eventually grew, thanks to a mutually advantageous arrangement made possible by the large influx of Southern Italian immigrants in the 1950's. In these years the company was able to recruit

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<sup>34</sup>The process of integration, Janus-like, has two faces. The one looking to the past, generates psychological blocks which make the acceptance of a new life difficult. The other, forward-looking, makes promises for a better life. Successful integration can take place only when the hope of better things to come outweighs that often-illusory life the immigrant left behind.

<sup>35</sup>Welch Papers, "Giovanni Veltri's Last Will and Testament, July 29, 1930."

workers in many towns in Southern Italy - several hundred came from Grimaldi<sup>36</sup> to work on the C.N.R. For many impecunious contadini of the fifties, the Veltri contract was the only way they could have come to Canada since the company paid for their voyage and assured them a job on the railway.<sup>37</sup> In earlier years immigrant labour had provided the basis upon which the company grew. Both Vincenzo and Giovanni had used their knowledge of immigrant needs, capabilities and concerns - in particular those of Italian navvies - to act as intermediaries for the railway contractors who, as a consequence, were able to employ immigrant

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<sup>36</sup>It is no coincidence that the highest concentration of Grimaldesi anywhere in Canada is in Thunder Bay. An unofficial count was taken in the early 1970's by a committee of Grimaldesi established to organize a testimonial for Raffaele Veltri (the author was one of the committee members). It was found that more than 125 families live in this city. Many of these families settled here because the head of the family was employed by the R. F. Welch Company, which operated from the Port Arthur headquarters.

<sup>37</sup>Between 1950 and 1960 hundreds of Grimaldesi, including the author's father, came on work contracts provided by the Welch Company. The contract stipulated two basic conditions: that the Company pay for transportation costs to the place of work, anywhere on the C.N.R. lines; and that the immigrant work for at least one year for the Company. Many honoured the terms of the contract; others left the work gangs seeking better jobs elsewhere. As far as the author knows, in talking to people who did not honour the terms, the Welch Company did not resort to any legal sanctions to compel workers to remain for the duration of the contract, though in some cases, workers were required to pay for their voyage.

labour without serious unrest.<sup>38</sup> In the late 1940's and early 1950's, Raffaele resorted to the same expedient; to expand his operation with immigrant labour. His task was facilitated not only by the dire post-war economic conditions in Southern Italian towns, which made recruitment possible, but also by his father and brother who screened many of the potential emigrants. In this sense, a degree of family continuity was established. It was shortlived, however. The economic "miracle" of the 1960's made it possible for emigrants to acquire enough money to pay for their transportation and thus seek landed status without any restrictions. Others could emigrate thanks to the sponsorship method. Few would now need the assistance which the Welch Company had provided previously. Attrition had also taken its toll. Vincenzo had become infirm; Giovanni died in 1953.

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<sup>38</sup> There was, of course, a great deal of labour unrest in Canada's railway camps - an unrest which seldom culminated in labour organizations, largely because itinerant workers could not be brought into the mainstream of labour movements (See A. Ross McCormack, "The Industrial Workers of the World in Western Canada: 1905-1914," The Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers, 1975, p. 181). Italian navvies were no less dissatisfied with their working conditions (see D. Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners," p. 50), though Harney suggests that their dissatisfaction occurred because of fraudulent wage promises or attempts to reduce pay and not because of working conditions. [See R. F. Harney, "The Padrone System and Sojourners in the Canadian North, 1885-1920," in G. E. Pozzetta, Pane e Lavovo: The Italian American Working Class (Toronto: The Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1980), p. 132]. Giovanni and Vincenzo appear to have had no difficulty with their workers - even though kin squabbles did occur and partnerships were made, dissolved and remade - largely as a result of their function within the work camps. Theirs was not a privileged position: for many years they had worked side by side with their employees sharing their frustrations and accomplishments. Where they employed paesani the village bond may have kept these men contented.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The story of the Veltri brothers lends credence to Harney's claim that the primary contributions of Italians to North American society are to be found in individuals and not institutions. Controversial as this statement may seem - one finds it difficult to disassociate himself completely from historiography written from various vantage points save that which might have examined the role of humble people - it would be difficult to discount the legacy left by Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri. Apart from this, it is refreshing to discover evidence of success at a time when the record shows that immigrant labour was universally exploited no matter what its origin. Their ethnicity renders their success even more significant, for at the time in which the Veltris left their mark in life, this particular reality weighed heavily upon them. However, in many ways, their experience and ascendancy cut across cultural lines. In this sense, they ought to be recognized as two of the many unsung heroes who helped build Canada in a period of our history when, more often than not, men such as they, - navvies, miners or farmers - were the unwilling victims of an unregulated, capitalistic, frontier society.

That they survived at all was in itself remarkable, for in the early frontier conditions in which the two brothers found themselves, severed from family ties, men could and did succumb to the pressures of uncivilizing forces.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps their survival and their ultimate success was fashioned by such old world values as industry and thrift,

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<sup>1</sup>Clark makes it clear that, in the absence of traditional institutions and family influence, men fall prey to "personal disorganization." S. D. Clark, The Developing Canadian Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 11.

and the Turnerian opportunity provided by the frontier.<sup>2</sup> Still, one has to guard against the intellectual trap of fitting individuals into pre-conceived moulds. In certain special circumstances it is relatively easy to find in most men "acuteness and inquisitiveness," the "inventive turn of mind," or "the masterful grasp of material things." Unquestionably, Vincenzo and Giovanni Veltri displayed many of those qualities identified by Turner. Furthermore, these two contadini, in spite of the tradition-rooted nature of their environment, willingly espoused the new milieu which fostered self-reliance and materialism. One of the fascinating aspects of their lives lay precisely in their ability to unbind the shackles of the Old World; perhaps their unlikely transformation was possible only in the frontier milieu. Indeed, the careers of both Vincenzo and Giovanni seem to prove the early Twentieth Century adage that "in Canada talent and ability could overcome the humblest of origin."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, this pioneering self-sufficiency, by itself, cannot fully explain the rise of two navvies. Ill-equipped to cope with the socio-political and cultural milieu of the receiving North American continent, they could hardly become entrepreneurs in a demanding environment. The Irish experience in Canada half a century earlier suggests that underprivileged, unskilled, illiterate groups find it difficult to avail themselves of the conventionally acceptable avenues of respectability.

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<sup>2</sup>Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1962,), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>Allan Smith, "The Myth of the Self-made Man in English Canada, 1850-1914." : Canadian Historical Review, Vol. LIX, No. 2, 1978, p. 192. In this enlightening article, Smith points to the erroneous but widely-held view at the turn of the century that Canada had been built by the individualism of enterprising people.

Their acquisition of wealth and power must, perforce, come from their own resourcefulness and willingness to utilize their personal superiority vis à vis their compatriots and their skill in manipulating these men. These "unscrupulous" individuals found it easy to operate within a homogeneous world which had been created as a defense against the harsh frontier conditions and the exploitation of the more dominant groups.<sup>4</sup> Their means do indeed appear questionable, but that is more a moral than a historical consideration - sanctimonious history is, in the end, an academic conceit. The Italian experience was not far different: there are obvious cultural parallels. Some Italians, too, had to resort to dubious activities.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it would not be difficult to accuse the Veltris of padronism. What is more probable, however, is that entrepreneurship stemmed from their superior position within the circle of compatriots rather than a calculated plan to exploit them. All that was needed was better education and an ability to recog-

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<sup>4</sup>See K. Duncan, "Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West," in M. Horn and R. Sabourin (editors), Studies in Canadian Social History (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Ltd., 1974), pp. 140-163. Also see M. S. Cross, "The Shiners' War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830's" in Canadian Historical Review, 1973, Vol. 54, pp. 1-26.

<sup>5</sup>It is interesting to note that the Welch Company's hiring practices were questioned by a few members of Parliament in 1954. See Hansard, "House of Commons Debates, 1953-54," Vol. VI, pp. 6643-44, and p. 6835.



nize and seize opportunities.<sup>6</sup> In addition, in these European-based work crews, it may have been inevitable that some would rise to leadership and direction. Indeed, the evidence points to Vincenzo's primacy amongst his paesani and other Italian navvies as far back as the 1880's work experience in the state of Washington. The transition from navy to contractor was a logical consequence of his role within that small community of workers whose overriding concern was the availability of work. Vincenzo was able to get them work; they, in turn, would give him their allegiance and gratitude. Eventually, the navvies' feeling of indebtedness would have some monetary rewards. It did not require a great deal of imagination on the part of Vincenzo (or his brother, for that matter) to realize that he could provide the equipment as well as the work contracts.

What followed, then, was neither a master-servant relationship - that type of peonage to which many navvies were subjected - nor an altruistic service to kinfold and compatriots.<sup>7</sup> The Veltris' operation was

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<sup>6</sup>At a time when most Italian peasants were illiterate, both Vincenzo and Giovanni must have appeared veritable intellectuals. No records written by Vincenzo exist, so that it is impossible to assess his educational training. Yet, his dealings with lawyers in terms which seem to suggest that he was the agent and the driving force behind many legal matters, and his courageous clash with Mackenzie and Mann would suggest that, at the very least, he possessed a keen mind and innate shrewdness. His brother, Giovanni, through his memoirs and personal letters, displays an amazing memory for people and detail, and a way of phrasing that goes beyond rudimentary training.

In a revealing article on the padrone system, Harney writes: "in a strange way, the chief power of the intermediary, just as in the old country, lay in his literacy." R. F. Harney, "The Padrone System and Sojourners in the Canadian North, 1885-1920," p. 126.

<sup>7</sup>The Veltris may, indeed, have been two unconscious promoters of capitalism, as identified by the Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotti. That is, they were former peasants who became Nineteenth Century capitalists, "the boorish type who (did) not care whether (they) were loved or not." Reported in Time, April 21, 1980. Ferrarotti is a leading sociologist with Marxist leanings.

a capitalist enterprise whose purpose was to improve the material wealth of the two brothers. The profit was not derived from exploitation but from an exchange of goods and services. In fact, the operation might have been similar to the many other sub-contracting railway companies which sought the same end - profit. Two key elements made it different: the management and the homogeneity of people who worked for the firm. In spite of the anglicized name, the company remained essentially ethnic in its reliance on Italian labour.<sup>8</sup> Its progress was contingent largely on the availability of this labour force and its willingness to remain mobile and flexible. If the brothers thrived on old world village cohesiveness and values, they were no less insistent on the application of the same values in their own lives. Theirs was not the management of distant exploiters. On the contrary, their involvement was immediate and tangible. Their company's financial success notwithstanding, the two brothers toiled with their workers, shared the same accommodations and ate the same food, at least during the initial stage of their operation.

In this sense, namely the mutual interdependence of employer and workers, the Welch Company belied somewhat the traditional, capitalistic perception of an entrepreneurial venture. The changes which occurred were external, imposed on the company by changing economic conditions and the company's own success. The more it grew, the more it had to assume a professional structure. The company that Ralph Welch directed was far different from that which his uncle had started and

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<sup>8</sup>The Dufferin Construction Company, one of the largest of its kind in Canada, also founded in 1918 by two Italian brothers, employed in the past and still continues to employ a disproportionate number of Italians - up to 80% of its labour force. E. La Riccia, "La gigantesca impresa di due fratelli abruzzesi," in Messaggero di Sant' Antonio, March, 1981, p. 39.

which his father had nurtured. The southern Italian braccianti who worked for the Welch Company in the post-World War II period were no longer part of that Old World solidarity. It may be that this transformation was inevitable. Had Giovanni remained in Canada longer, this process might have been delayed. His decision to spend the remaining years of his life as a pater familias (the bleak prospects of the 1930's undoubtedly made his decision easier) rather than a railway contractor set the company on a new course. Age and distance would no longer permit Giovanni to influence seriously the new course the company would take. Survival and growth in years ahead would depend on the one individual whose upbringing and outlook had been fashioned by a society that was far different from that which his father and uncle had known.

APPENDIX AEMIGRATION RECORDS FOR THE COMUNE DI GRIMALDI - 1901 - 1915

	<u>1901</u>	<u>1902</u>	<u>1903</u>	<u>1904</u>	<u>1905</u>
Number of males	100	141	58	80	100
Number of females	9	19	5	12	12
Total number	109	160	63	92	112

Age Groups

20 and under	46	50	13	30	32
21 - 30	25	35	21	26	35
31 - 40	23	30	15	15	18
41 and over	13	43	13	19	27
Number of families	0	4	2	2	6

Major Occupations

Peasants and day-labourers	88	130	58	78	107
Shoemakers	1	3	1	3	2
Carpenters	0	1	1	1	1
Tailors and dressmakers	4	2	0	1	0
Others	16	24	3	9	2

Destination most frequently  
Mentioned

New York	60	134	28	53	64
Colorado	13	20	20	29	23
Canada	2	0	0	4	10
Others <sup>1</sup>	28	6	6	6	5

\* Some columns may not add up to the total number because some figures were illegible.

1 In order of frequency others were: Washington, Utah, Idaho, Brazil.

APPENDIX A (Continued)EMIGRATION RECORDS FOR (THE COMUNE DI GRIMALDI - 1901 - 1915)

	<u>1906</u>	<u>1907</u>	<u>1908</u>	<u>1909</u>	<u>1910</u>
Number of males	79	86	45	67	83
Number of females	17	16	3	6	8
Total number	96	102	48	73	91

Age Groups

20 and under	26	34	20	18	21
21 - 30	35	24	11	20	32
31 - 40	19	20	10	18	22
41 and over	15	34	7	17	36
Number of families	3	3			2

Major Occupations

Peasants and day-labourers	75	83	43	62	82
Shoemakers	3	5	3	2	1
Carpenters	1	2	0	2	1
Tailors and dressmakers	3	1	1	2	1
Others	14	11	1	5	7

Destination most frequently  
Mentioned

New York	42	18	7	23	46
Colorado	17	44	16	25	16
Canada	13	4	7	5	11
Others	24	36	18	26	18

APPENDIX A (Continued)EMIGRATION RECORDS FOR THE COMUNE DI GRIMALDI - 1901 - 1915

	<u>1911</u>	<u>1912</u>	<u>1913</u>	<u>1914</u>	<u>1915</u>
Number of males	63	40	77	49	7
Number of females	8	6	14	1	0
Total number	71	46	91	50	7

Age Groups

20 and under	16	21	31	13	0
21 - 30	21	11	22	18	2
31 - 40	23	8	20	6	1
41 and over	11	6	18	13	4
Number of families	1	0	2	2	0

Major Occupations

Peasants and day labourers	60	37	83	42	5
Shoemakers	2	3	3	1	1
Carpenters	1	1	1	0	1
Tailors and dressmakers	1	1	0	2	0
Others	7	4	4	5	0

Destination most frequently  
Mentioned

New York	20	12	13	12	1
Colorado	17	14	25	12	1
Canada	6	6	19	7	1
Others	28	14	34	19	4

APPENDIX BExample of Profits Made by Head-Contractors by Sub-letting

	<u>Price Allowed Head-Contractor</u>	<u>Price Paid Final Sub-Contractor</u>
Cutting right-of-way (per acre)	\$100 to \$125	\$56 to \$70
Concrete	\$5 / cu. yd.	\$3.50 / cu. yd.
Tie-making	\$.60 / tie	\$.45 / tie
Trestle and pile driving	\$.65 / ft.	\$.40 / ft.
Grading and ditching	\$2.00 to \$2.25	\$.90 to \$1.05 / yd.
Rock work	\$.60 / yd.	\$.45 / yd.
Loose rock	\$.40 / yd.	\$.33 / yd.
Muskeg	\$.33 / yd.	\$.27 / yd.
Clay	\$.40 / yd.	\$.32 / yd.

Adapted from Edmund Bradwin, p. 195.

APPENDIX CExample of Profits Made by the Welch Brothers by Sub-letting

<u>Rates Paid by Dominion Construction Company to Welch Bros.</u>		<u>Rates Paid by Welch Bros. to Sub-Contractors</u>
Solid rock	\$1.60 / cu. yd.	\$1.35 - 1.40 / cu. yd.
Loose rock	\$ .40 / cu. yd.	\$ .32 - .35 / cu. yd.
Hardpan	\$ .38 / cu. yd.	\$ .30 - .32 / cu. yd.
Common excavation	\$ .24 / cu. yd.	\$ .20 / cu. yd.
Rip rap	\$2.50 / cu. yd.	\$1.50 / cu. yd.
Overhaul (500 ft. free haul)	\$ .01 / 100 ft.	
Laying concrete pipe - Pipe to be delivered on cars by Railway Co.		
12'	\$.25 / lin. ft.	\$.20 / lin. ft.
18'	\$.25 / lin. ft.	\$.20 / lin. ft.
24'	\$.75 / lin. ft.	\$.50 / lin. ft.
30'	\$.75 / lin. ft.	\$.50 / lin. ft.
Clearing	\$35 / acre	\$20 - 25 / acre
Grubbing	\$30 / sq. of 1000 sq. ft.	\$25 / sq. of 1000 sq. ft.

Source: Welch Papers



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