

UP FRONT



ITALIAN AMERICAN COLLECTION

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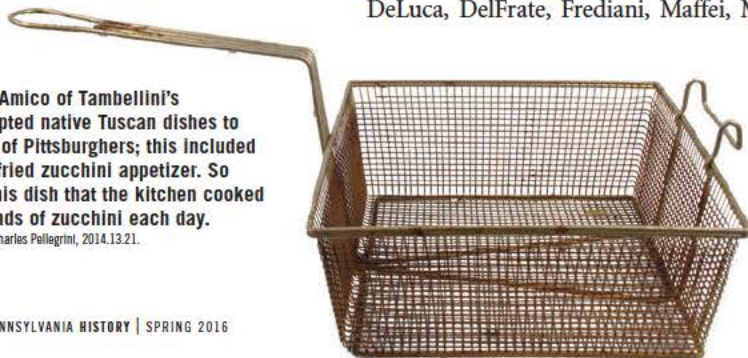
Tradizioni Toscane: Tuscan Immigration to Pittsburgh

There is a misconception that Italians emigrated to America exclusively from southern Italy; while it's true that during the Great Wave of Immigration nearly 80 percent of Italian immigrants originated from the south, a sizeable number are also descended from northern Italy. Western Pennsylvania attracted Italians from several regions in the north such as Piedmont, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, but one region left a remarkable footprint in metropolitan Pittsburgh: Tuscany.

The story of Tuscans in Pittsburgh takes root at the end of the 19th century in the Lower Hill District, a neighborhood that saw an influx of Italian immigrants from multiple regions of Italy. Concerned about the congestion and smog that lingered over the Hill, Tuscan families migrated south, following the South

Chef Franco D'Amico of Tambellini's Ristorante adapted native Tuscan dishes to suit the tastes of Pittsburghers; this included his legendary fried zucchini appetizer. So beloved was this dish that the kitchen cooked nearly 50 pounds of zucchini each day.

IHAC Collections, gift of Charles Pellegrini, 2014.13.21.
Photo by Liz Simpson.



Artist Ivo Zini recreated the Porta San Pietro, one of the entrances to the walls of Lucca, for Tambellini's Ristorante's Puccini Room. The fortified walls separate the city of Lucca from the countryside. They consist of a series of rings, the earliest of which dates back to the Roman era and the most recent erected in the 16th century.

IHAC Collections, gift of Charles Pellegrini, 2014.13.1. Photo by Liz Simpson.

Hills street car tunnel into the neighborhoods of Beltzhoover, Beechview, and Brookline.¹ In 1915, the men of the community established the *Lega Toscana*, or Tuscan League, at 800 Montooth Street, a lodge that was central to the Tuscan community until it disbanded in 1971. Like other mutual beneficial and aid societies, the *Lega Toscana* offered sick and death benefits to its members, promoted the welfare of members and their families, and functioned as a social center for the community.² Unlike similar organizations, it focused much of its energy on philanthropic and civic efforts, and educational opportunities for its members.

The History Center's Detre Library & Archives is now able to provide access to the records from the *Lega Toscana* thanks to donor Laura Baccelli Vondas. The collection is one of the most complete assortments of records from an Italian lodge, containing minutes, membership information, and financial records from the men's organization and the Ladies Auxiliary. Names of notable Pittsburgh families appear throughout the records: Barsotti, DeLuca, DelFrate, Frediani, Maffei, Malfatti,

Poli, Silvioni, Sodini, Tambellini, and Zini. A sampling of the minutes from the 1940s reveals the various fundraising efforts of the Ladies Auxiliary. Founded in 1933, the women contributed to the cultural landscape of the organization, hosting picnics, dances, and other gatherings, and raising money for relief efforts in Italy and Pittsburgh. In response to a plea from the Italian Counsel, the Auxiliary collected medicine from Italian American doctors to ship to Italy "where the need is great indeed."³

Mutual beneficial societies, like churches, aided in the establishment of deep ties between members. Many in the *Lega Toscana* traced their lineage to small villages outside the walls of the city of Lucca.⁴ The connections built between club members played a role in how the Tuscan community found viable jobs; while a majority of Italian immigrants found work in the mills of Pittsburgh, the *Lucchesi* mainly worked in the restaurant industry. Entrepreneurial immigrants first established fruit stores, candy shops, ice cream parlors, bakeries, butcher shops, and cafes. Those with businesses nurtured their fellow *Lucchesi* by apprenticing them in the restaurant industry, transferring businesses to one another, and loaning funds to open new stores and restaurants. Those who owned the restaurants offered employment opportunities to new immigrants as wait staff, bartenders, doormen, dishwashers, and cooks.⁵

One of the most prominent and



Performances by the *Lega Toscana* raised money for various charities, including the Memorial Home for Crippled Children and St. Anthony's Village Orphanage (also known as St. Anthony School for Exceptional Children), and post-war relief efforts in Italy.

Laura Baccelli Vondas.




recognizable names among *Lucchesi* restaurateurs in Pittsburgh is Tambellini. The Italian American Collection acquired a selection of artifacts from F. Tambellini's Seventh Street Ristorante after its closing in 2013. A staple in Pittsburgh's Cultural District for 63 years, it was founded by sisters Mary Tambellini Pellegrini and Frances Tambellini D'Amico and their uncle Frank "Memo" Tambellini. This branch of the Tambellini family operated one of the eight independently-owned Italian restaurants in the Pittsburgh metro area bearing the Tambellini moniker. Their partnership began in 1950, when they, along with Charles Tambellini and Charlie, Joe, and Paul Sodini, purchased the Seventh Street Café at 106 Seventh Street from Leo Tambellini. Their regulars were mill workers who enjoyed sandwiches and pasta dishes with their boilermakers.

In 1967, Mary, Frances, and Frank bought Carl's Bar at 139 Seventh Street and moved their café into a larger building, allowing restaurant-style seating and a bar area for their full-time bartender, Nello Pellegrini. The new location served Italian dishes prepared in the Tuscan style. F. Tambellini's Seventh Street Ristorante capitalized on its location in the heart of the Cultural District and became the go-to fine dining restaurant for patrons of the nearby theaters. Donor Charles Pellegrini, son of Mary and Nello, began working as a busboy at the restaurant as a teenager. Beginning in the late 1980s, he and his wife Janet ran the establishment for another 25 years.

A common thread between these two collections, beside their links to the Tuscan community, is the connection to Italian arts and culture. Tuscany—home to Florence, with its iconic Renaissance works, and the birthplace of author Dante Alighieri (1265-

1321)—reinforces a reverence for high art in its customs. The *Lega Toscana* regularly hosted plays and operas produced by its troupe *Filodrammatica* and performed on the lodge's outdoor stage in Beltzhoover. Member Lorenzo Malfatti (1923-2007) rose to prominence internationally as a premiere vocal coach for opera singers. F. Tambellini's Seventh Street Ristorante dedicated a dining room to Italian composer Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), also from Lucca.

In 1979, the Seventh Street Ristorante commissioned artist and fellow *Lucchesi* Ivo Zini (1919-2008) to cast four large fiberglass reliefs of *Madame Butterfly*, *Pagliacci*, *Puccini* composing at his piano with Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, and a scene of Lucca to decorate the walls. The celebration of Tuscan culture is clear; through their activities in the community and the establishment of institutions throughout Pittsburgh, Tuscan immigrants exhibited pride in their distinct traditions that laid a foundation into the 21st century. 



In a joint fundraising effort between the *Lega Toscana* and its Ladies Auxiliary, an ambulance was purchased and shipped to Calabria after World War II. According to member Lorenzo Malfatti, "We weren't ... prejudiced. All we knew is that Calabria needed an ambulance and we did it." On the far right is Danilo "Romeo" Franchini, vice chairman of the *Lega Toscana's Filodrammatica* and longtime doorman at the Duquesne Club.

Laura Baccelli Vondas.

¹ *A Tuscan Legacy*, DVD, directed by Laura Baccelli Vondas (Pittsburgh, 1998), 2015.0079, HHC Detre L&A.

² *Lega Toscana By-laws*, *Lega Toscana Records*, 2015.0079, HHC Detre L&A.

³ *Lega Toscana Women's Auxiliary Minute Book*, *Lega Toscana Records*, 2015.0079, HHC Detre L&A.

⁴ Tuscans from Lucca and the surrounding villages refer to themselves as *Lucchesi*.

⁵ *A Tuscan Legacy*.