

EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS HISTORICALLY

**Interview with Katri (Laakkonen) Saari, conducted on March 4, 1981, by Velma Doby;
Minnesota Finnish American Family History Project,
Immigration History Research Center (IHRC)**

KATRI: From Finland, there was a strong desire on everyone's part to [immigrate to] America. America was then, in Finland, longed for and beautiful in everyone's mind. America only as quick as in some way you can get there.

I got an opportunity as a twenty-year-old [to go to the United States]. But this opportunity was difficult to fulfill for the reason that I didn't have any money myself [to pay for a trans-Atlantic voyage]. The ticket had to be gotten from America. I happened then to learn that some farmer wanted to bring a girl from Finland. I knew that a girl sometimes went to work for him, and I [also] knew the person who could help in this matter [of arranging work]. So, I went to talk to him and asked, "Do you want a girl on Hill's farm?"

He responded right away that they wanted a girl. I said that he should give me this chance so that I could get to America, that I felt that in no way could I continue to get along in Finland, [and] that I had to do something for myself and live independently. And so he wrote, and there came right away a letter that a ticket was being sent as soon as they got my name and address. An exchange of letters started, and it wasn't a long time before I was ready to leave. This happened in the year 1913.

**Interview with Luigi Sella, conducted on April 12, 1985, by Mary Ellen Mancina-Batinich;
Mary Ellen Mancina-Batinich Papers, IHRC**

INT: What made you decide to come to America?

LUIGI: Well, my dad decided to buy a new farm [in Italy], a different place where the land would be irrigated and would be a very productive country. So, he had to have promises from the boys—that would be myself and my oldest brother, Peter—that we would help him to pay [for] the farm. That's how we both came here and tried to do the best we could to send money [back to Italy] every month.

INT: I'm not sure I understand about the farm. When you had to do best by the farm, what did you mean by that?

LUIGI: We'd do the best we could to help pay the balance of the farm because in those... This farm was near Padua, Italy, where land is irrigated. They buy the right of the water, so to be irrigated.

INT: Why did you come to America?

LUIGI: Because my dad came here before I did, in 1902. So did my oldest brother. He went to school here in 1902 to 1907, and then he came back to Italy and they took him in the service and of course that was then. I was young, went to school in Italy, and I made up my mind that I'm going to help him if he wants to buy the farm.

INT: In other words, you came to this country to earn money to help your father buy a farm in Italy.

LUIGI: That's right.

INT: Where did your father settle when he came to America?

LUIGI: Nashwauk [a city in northern Minnesota]. No, he came to Bessemer, Michigan in 1902.

INT: Why did he go to Bessemer?

LUIGI: Because this country [around Nashwauk] was not developed yet...

INT: How did he come to...

LUIGI: Well, you see, this is a long story. He went to South America. There wasn't anything there. So from there he came through connection by the consul—Italian consul—and they directed him to come to this country to work in the mining, which it was in 1892 during Franklin—no, McKinley—administration for ninety-eight cents a day, ten hours' work. And then from there in 1903 he came to Nashwauk. He and my uncle were both here and they came to Hibbing [another city in northern Minnesota]. They didn't come directly to Nashwauk. From Hibbing, my uncle started a saloon with a partner by the name Bretto. But Bretto upsmart him, so he came to Nashwauk, and he started a saloon in Nashwauk in 1903...he worked here—him and my brother—until 1907. Then they came back to Italy...

Luigi immigrated to the United States in 1909. He worked as a miner, grocer, and restaurant owner in northern Minnesota.

INT: Did you write home often?

LUIGI: All the time.

INT: And who answered you?

LUIGI: My mother and dad and then, after they were gone, my sister and my brother used to write. In fact, we still write.

INT: Do you have any of the old letters that you used to receive?

LUIGI: Not old, not that far back. You know during my time I was [a] pretty busy guy trying to make [a] living for five, [no] seven of us, plus some other that I helped to raise [of] my sisters' whatnot. I had nine people live off my earnings for many years and that was no picnic.

INT: Did you get a chance to go to school in Nashwauk?

LUIGI: Just night school. It was just to learn how to talk and arithmetic a little bit. Of course, I kept up all the time. I read books—Italian books—and I kept my language up real good, and I did a lot of help for these Italian people who couldn't write or read.

INT: What did you do?

LUIGI: I used to write letters for them and write to the Italian consul and all of those things.

Note: The transcripts have been edited for clarity.