



ing Italian-language classes. It also operated the long-dreamed-of Dante Hospital (also called the Dante Sanitarium) at Broadway and Van Ness Avenue. It tried to develop an Italian Cultural Center, but failed. The time was not yet ripe for a Leonardo da Vinci Society or a *Museo Italo Americano*.

The Vittoria Colonna ladies did much good work, establishing a kindergarten at Washington Irving School, donating a Carrara marble bust of Galileo Galilei to the high school named after him, and distributing financial aid to young mothers and needy families. (The club has continued its social and philanthropic program in recent years by awarding college scholarships to high school students of Italian descent and raising funds for various causes, such as the San Giuseppe party for elderly residents of the Laguna Honda Home.)

An interesting phenomenon was North Beach's plunge into two areas of life that were almost terra incognita before the Fire—sports and politics. An early sign of an athletic revolution was the organization of an Italian Touring Club of San Francisco (1902) for cyclists as well as motorists. Its membership later included the likes of Bank of Italy men Armando Pedrini and Attilio Chiapparini. The opening of the North Beach Playground was important, but more so was the founding of three Italian sports clubs—the Virtus Club, the *Unione Sportive Italiana*, and the Italian Athletic Club. They merged into one by 1926, Clay Pedrazzini's *Unione Sportiva Virtus*, the largest Italian sports club in the entire country. (In 1946 it became the San Francisco Athletic Club.)

Probably even more important to North Beach athletics was the (1914) arrival at Saints Peter and Paul of Reverend Orestes Trinchieri, the city's original "street priest." He became a local folk hero. According to old-timers like Eugene Semenza, everything changed when Father Trink hit town. He was a padre who started out as a social worker, but ended up as a coach and promoter of sports, a true catalyst for North Beach athletics.

Each morning, Father Trinchieri would visit the Police Department's North Beach station. There the officers would release into his custody the petty criminals hauled in the night before. They were usually jailed for minor offenses, like gang fights (with fists, no knives or other weapons), drunkenness, or theft. The transgressors were mostly young boys, half-Americanized and already rebellious, separated by what would later be termed "the generation gap" from what they saw as the authoritarianism of their hardworking, old-fashioned (and bewildered) parents. By night, Trink would patrol the streets and alleys around notorious saloons, not to lecture juvenile delinquents but to rescue them, to head off trouble before the youthful drunks could get mired in it.

The reformer-priest used a mixed bag of tricks to win youngsters away from the temptation of a life of crime. He organized picnics, fairs, games and prizes, debates, plays, a newspaper, and a band for the kids. His use of music to fight delinquency was an early success. Al and Ray Cicerone and Angelo Grosso went on to play with big bands of the era. Perhaps Carl Ravazza, Muzzy Marcellino, and Sal Carson (brother of "Greengrocer" Joe Carcione) owe something to Trinchieri's work in bringing popular music to the quarter.

"Trink" also introduced scouting to North Beach, his three Boy Scout troops eventually mustering three hundred boys. They sold war bonds in a stiff competition to win an American flag and made campfire-hikes to Marin County's Camp Taylor. But when patriotism flagged after World War I, so did scouting. The street boys, older now, began scrounging metal to sell to the junkman—at the same time their pals were stealing stuff from the back of his wagon for later barter. Semenza's Union Street Gang was particularly skilled at this form of recycling. As he said, "Our gang was never out of things to sell."

To combat this recidivism, Trinchieri turned to athletics, seeking to cure delinquency with sportsmanship. It worked like a charm. Organizing the Salesian Boys Club in 1919,



Dillon

# FATHER TRINCHIERI

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V.F. "TRINCHIERI"

MANHOLE FILE BR. 26

he soon had youths digging foundations for a gymnasium. He shortly suited up his charges in classy green and white basketball uniforms. The effect was almost miraculous in terms of self-respect and personal pride. Soon the players were so victorious on the courts, having won a state championship, that Semenza's team became one of the new glories of "the Beach," its members local heroes like Trink himself, now called the Priest of Basketball by the press. (The greatest of all Bay Area Italian basketball players, Stanford's three-time all-American, 1935-38, Hank Luisetti, was inspired by Trinchieri.)

The priest then switched to baseball games in an empty lot next to his church, paying for the glazing of occasional windows (broken by homerun hits) out of his own pocket, with the usual help of his silent partner in the crusade against juvenile delinquency, Giannini. Semenza's Union Street Gang was soon able to field a nine that was good enough to be sponsored by the *Examiner* and the *Call* for the season's inter-city championship games.

Sadly, Trinchieri died at the beginning of 1936, the year of Joe Di Maggio's brilliant rookie season in the big leagues. Huge crowds filed past the padre's coffin at Saints Peter and Paul for a final *ciao* as the church bells clanged a last salute to the man whose twenty-two years of dedication and service to his community not only changed the lives of hundreds of boys, but also put San Francisco on the sports map of the world.

As early as the 1920s, Italians were winning California's important cross-country races, and Eleanor Garatti was an early swimming champion. Boxing's welterweight challenger of the 1930s, Young Corbett III, was actually Raffaele Giordano. Like boxer "Joe Roach," he had to anglicize his name for supposed fan appeal. By the time of Fred Apostoli and Pat Valentino, this silly custom was no longer necessary. Much later, college and professional football would bring fame to the city via such players as Leo Nomellini and Gino Marchetti and owners like A. J. (Tony) Morabito and Franklin Mieuli, but it was baseball that became an addiction in North Beach. It started in the late 1920s and reached its peak in the 1930s, with "Ping" Bodie (actually Francesco Pizzola), Babe Pinelli, Tony Lazzeri, Frankie Crosetti, Dominic (The Little Professor) and Vince Di Maggio, and others. The greatest of them all was the "Yankee Clipper" of the New York Yankees, Joe Di Maggio.

Americanization produced strange bedfellows in North Beach—a "rising generation" of jocks, politicians, lawyers and labor organizers, all bundled up together. The precursors of today's Joseph Mazzola of the union plumbers and Leonard Stefanelli of the scavengers were Daniel DelCarlo of the glaziers, Harry Bigarini of the painters, and the garbagemen's own Emilio Rattaro and Paolo Bianchi. The predecessor of today's successful and flamboyant attorney Mel Belli was Walter De Martini. During a half century of law practice after being admitted to the bar in 1899, he won fourteen straight murder acquittals.

For decades, Italian-Americans, unlike their Irish immigrant counterparts, remained leery of politics and government, bench and bar, even police work and the civil service. But after World War I, things changed at both the local and state levels. Not only were there Italian legislators at Sacramento, the chief justice of the state Supreme Court from 1905 to 1921 was Marin County's Frank M. Angelotti. The first Italian candidates nominated for San Francisco's board of supervisors were Frank Marini, Theodore Bacigalupi, Joseph Pescia, Dr. Guido Caglieri, Attilio Giannini, and Angelo Rossi. The latter four were elected. In the 1920s, most Italians were conservatives who registered Republican but voted Independent, choosing individuals in both major parties. In the 1930s, because of the depression and Prohibition, many switched to FDR and the Democrats.

Angelo Joseph Rossi was a protégé of the perennial mayor of San Francisco, James A. (Sunny Jim) Rolph. He eventually served longer as mayor (1931-44) than anyone save his mentor, Rolph. Although born in the Mother Lode mining town of Volcano in 1878,

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