Room Three: Work and Economic Integration

Wine and Agriculture

Perhaps even more famous than California's Italian banking is its Italian wine-making. The ability of California's climate to sustain wine-making operations was a primary reason for many of the Ligurians to immigrate. Some of the more famous wineries such as the Italian-Swiss colony, which was presided over by Pietro Rossi, and Sutter Home were founded in the 1880s and 1890s. Families would often either send their sons to university or hire a graduate of University of California, Berkeleys programs related to venting. Although they initially met success in the Italian immigrant community, Californian wineries began to experience financial success outside of it as well. There were, however, two major setbacks to this success story. The first was the devastation of the southern Californian wineries in the 1890s by Pierce's Disease. The second was the passage of the 18th Amendment in 1920. Wineries were forced to scramble for their economic lives and some were forced to close. Those that survived marketed their products as sacramental wine or medicinal elixirs. But the repeal of the 18th amendment in 1932 made the wineries that did survive profitable again and cemented the perception of the general public that the wine industry was most closely tied to California's Italian-Americans.

Italians in California did not confine themselves to winemaking. The Giardinieri (or gardeners) developed a thriving industry growing produce on the outskirts of San Francisco. The size of the gardens ranged from small plots on the edge of town to large ranches. The small plots often grew smaller vegetables that were sold at the daily market, while the larger properties grew heavier vegetables for export. In 1874, the Colombo Market was organized on Davis Street between Front and Pacific. Farmers would bring their vegetables by horse-drawn wagon past grocers, hotels, ships, and private residences before setting up shop in their market stalls. In the 1930s, at Little Italy's population peak, approximately 50 percent of its inhabitants were involved in agriculture. Not all of these people were able to afford their own plots. Many "birds of a feather," especially young, single men, would work in California as agricultural workers during the spring and summer, and travel to South America to perform the same services in the winter and fall.