

**Mormino, Gary Ross. *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986. Pp. xi, 289. Illustrations, tables, bibliography, index**

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trepreneurial, the result, initially, of foreclosing on its mortgage with the Cornwall Electric Street Railway. This 1899 acquisition led by 1905 to amalgamation with Stormont Light and Power and the creation of Cornwall Electric. An unprofitable gas company was also purchased in the process to get rid of a rival.

The story of how Sun Life got into the utilities business is testimony both to the enthusiasm for electricity at the turn of the century and to its pitfalls. The electrical utility alone proved profitable and the company for many years was forced to subsidize a transit service that could neither be abandoned because it constituted a public service, nor be made profitable in part because Cornwall was not big enough to support it. Even as late as 1947 the fare remained at 5 cents because the company feared that people would walk rather than pay more.

Sun Life's dilemma shows the extent to which people had become dependent upon electricity and tended to see it as a public service. It also suggests that the issue of public vs. private ownership was not as important to the city as local control. Despite many efforts by Sun Life to unload the company, either on the city or private interests, it was not until a Kingston-based company made a serious offer to purchase that the city in 1972 finally took over the transit and electrical services.

Like most business histories, this book pays little attention to the domestic applications of electricity. No explanation is given as to why Cornwall Electric dropped out of the domestic appliance sales business as soon as stores began carrying these lines. This was clearly not the case with the Hydro towns, where Hydro Shops raised resentment among private dealers with their aggressive promotion of appliance sales. We are told that Cornwall Electric promoted electric ranges as early as 1919 (presumably so that it could get out of an unprofitable gas business) and that the number of electric ranges in Cornwall jumped from 4 in 1920 to 800 in 1930. Surely this was due to some vigorous promotion, aside from the "perception that electricity would soon replace gas for cooking." The author tells us no more. If women were involved in the promotion of domestic electrical applications in Cornwall, as elsewhere, the author likewise gives us no insight into it.

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Léonard, Jean-François and Jacques Léveillé. *Montreal after Drapeau*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986. Pp. 134. Illustrations. \$29.95 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

This is a useful addition to the existing Canadian urban politics literature in English. The book is basically the translation of a series of articles written by Jean-François Léonard and Jacques Léveillé for *Le Devoir* during the last Montreal municipal election campaign. Given the general significance of the election — the end of the Jean Drapeau era — it is interesting to see the authors' analysis of the Montreal political climate. Léonard and Léveillé are very measured — they are realistic about the limited likelihood of Jean Doré bringing in substantial reforms, yet it is not a personalized denunciation of Doré as having sold out the earlier, more radical, promise of the Montreal Citizens' Movement. Rather, they feel that politics in Montreal is now dominated by a new middle class primarily concerned with its own interests and that this political alliance will fundamentally determine the political direction of the city. This does not preclude the possibility of actions favourable to the less advantaged but it sets limits on these actions. Certainly judging Doré's performance so far, the analysis seems well-founded.

The book is welcome in that it makes available in English the work of Léonard and Léveillé — two of the most important urban scholars in Québec — whose work is not sufficiently known in English-speaking Canada. This book helps to change this and for this reason alone, I hope it makes its way into university classrooms. The translation, done by Dimitri Roussopoulos, who also wrote a lengthy "Introduction," is very readable — it is clearly an advantage to have a translator who is a specialist in the area. While not a complete analysis of the political situation of Montreal, this is journalism of the highest order — thoughtful, well-presented and readable.

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Mormino, Gary Ross. *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986. Pp. xi, 289. Illustrations, tables, bibliography, index.

*Immigrants on the Hill* is an intensive examination of emigration and ethnicity at the local level, more specifically of Italians from Cuggiono in northern Italy to "the Hill" in St. Louis, Missouri from 1882 to the present. The book traces the emergence of a unique Italian neighbourhood, with "the Hill" taking a commanding place as one of the most stable, immobile and cohesive ethnic colonies in the United States. The author's intent is to transcend raw statistics and portray emigrants not as victims of a tragedy, but rather as agents of change and architects of their own destiny. To a considerable degree, this attempt is successful. Placing his study

squarely within the framework of contemporary historical scholarship, the writer insists that Italian immigrants in St. Louis were not uprooted, but transplanted. Revisionist interpretation is characteristic of this new addition to immigration studies.

Mormino gives us a fresh, readable, skillfully crafted monograph whose early chapters are vividly evocative of late nineteenth century Italian village life and twentieth century urban life in a distinctive Italian colony whose roots on the Lombard plains are traced far back in time. He begins with two chapters on the Mound City and Lombardy, where a handful of small villages in northern Italy after 1880 began to experience “the human volcano” — mass migrations to America. No reference is made to nor is there any attempt to compare the “New” immigration with the “Old” from northern Europe which preceded it. The author studiously avoids reference to the considerable historiography on the controversial nature and consequences of the “New” immigration from southern Europe, so characteristic of late nineteenth century United States.

Mormino devotes some attention to the sources of the “push” factor — the plight of the *contadini* (peasants), “the torturous conditions” on the rice plantations, the devastation of populations by the plague in 1635 and 1735, shrinking opportunities for upward mobility, and what was so common throughout Europe in the nineteenth century, the inability of the land to support burgeoning populations. Ultimately village breadwinners were compelled to become migrant labourers, seeking opportunities in other countries, while many of their women and children found poorly paid employment and unhealthy conditions in the experimental silk industry.

The familiar outcome was the chain migration phenomenon which ultimately channeled millions of Italians into the Americas, linking individuals and groups to specific economic niches and settlement patterns. Cuggiono offers a typical example of chain migration, as “America mania” gripped the villages in the region. (Cuggiono represented one of only a handful of villages in the province of Lombardy to record an absolute loss of population during the period between 1881 and 1931 [from 6,105 to 4,475]). Of more than 200 other towns and villages the author surveyed, most others recorded impressive gains.

Why did so many Italians leave these particular villages for America? Mormino’s research produced several possible explanations: absentee landlords held ninety per cent of the land in late nineteenth century Lombardy; blight ruined the grapes in 1850; crippling tariffs were imposed on agricultural products, and there was increasing competition from other agrarian sectors, followed by a devastating late nineteenth century drought. A quiet form of desperation resulted in introducing cultivation of the silk worm, which proved adaptable in Lombardy, but which seems not to have pros-

pered widely. And yet, after offering all this evidence, the author concludes that emigration from Cuggiono did not occur simply within the crude confines of the “push-pull model.” The chain migration phenomenon, he tells us, was not the result of economic forces alone. “Clearly,” the author states, “emigration was fueled by more than economic deprivation.” But in the very next sentence and without further explanation, he writes: “Regardless of motivation, Cuggionesi left Italy in torrents. If a deteriorating economy pushed Lombardy to the brink of rebellion, the Hill pulled them over the edge to America” (p. 44).

This is what is known in editorial terms as an abrupt transition. More seriously, it is here that the reader encounters the book’s Achilles heel. We are left hanging, with some convincing data, but no explanation or analysis that addresses the issue. If economic forces alone did not fuel this emigration, what did? The author himself raises this fundamental question, but fails to answer it. Elsewhere, especially on pages 56 and 57 the author is given to unsupported generalizations, e.g., that *most* historians concur with Stephan Thernstrom’s assessment of immigrant mobility, or that urban historians have long noted the extraordinary endurance of Italian-American neighbourhoods, but that *most* scholars hold that such territorial persistence was not necessarily a residual carryover of the original inhabitants. Serious readers will want to know who all these historians, urban observers and scholars, are, but Mormino fails to cite a single one.

Successive chapters are devoted to the St. Louis community, politics, employment, religious life, prohibition (“A Still on a Hill”) and sports. A final chapter characterizes the Hill during World War II. For source materials Mormino relies heavily on secondary works in history and sociology. The book is replete with comparisons of the Italian colony on the Hill with immigrant neighbourhoods elsewhere in urban America, as previously studied by Humbert Nelli (Chicago), Josef Barton (Cleveland), Stephan Thernstrom (Boston) and Rudy Vecoli. He relies at times on these authors’ original interpretations, instead of producing constructs for his group, based on his own data. He cites a variety of primary source materials, e.g. emigrant narratives, newspapers and oral histories.

A redeeming virtue of this study is the emphasis placed by the author on his description of the physical existence of the Hill and the immigrants who peopled it. There is revealing testimony here from the many voices of the Italian inhabitants of St. Louis, to ensure that this history is no dreary compilation of census data and newspaper accounts, as so many others have been. Oral history accounts enabled the author to record such gems as this remark by an elderly emigrant: “In Cuggiono we was so hungry we even steal from the pig.”

What emerges from these pages is a carefully detailed profile of the Hill, an immigrant colony with an unusually low rate of geographic mobility, few periods of instability (which the author attributes to the colony's long settlement and migration process), and a quality of permanence in the years 1900-1930 based on evidence found in naturalization petition statistics and city directories, although here the author's sample covers only the principal streets and the six years that spanned 1921-1928.

For all those interested in urban and immigration history, this study of the Hill offers rich rewards. Baseball fans will learn among other things that its playing fields produced Joe Garagiola and Yogi Berra. Whether all the author's positions on more substantive issues ultimately prove to be acceptable — and as stated I am dubious about some of them — he has nevertheless produced a scholarly, stimulating history that makes an important contribution to immigration literature.

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Byers, Edward. *The Nation of Nantucket: Society and Politics in an Early American Commercial Center, 1660-1820*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987. Pp xv, 367. Illustrations, tables, maps, index. \$35.00 (U.S.).

Add one more to the growing list of well executed local histories of early Massachusetts communities. Edward Byers has done for the island town of Nantucket what others have done previously for Andover, Boston, Concord, Dedham, Newburyport, Springfield, Sudbury, to name only some of the localities receiving full treatment in the past generation. Byers' book covers the years from Nantucket's first European settlement through the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Its contents reflect both the uniqueness of the Nantucket experience and the now standardized themes of much New England local history written by professionals.

Nantucket was, indeed, a special world. Its native population remained largely unaffected by the various epidemics which decimated coastal tribes in the seventeenth century, adapted readily to Christianity, outnumbered whites until about 1710, and contributed much to the island's economy until shortly before the revolution. Nantucket's first European settlers—speculative proprietors from northern Massachusetts and what is now New Hampshire—arrived expecting to raise crops and livestock, yet their descendents became some of the most imaginative, aggressive, and successful commercial entrepreneurs in early America. The island was part of New York until 1692, of Massachusetts

after that, and pretty much a world unto itself no matter what province it found itself part of (today it is both a town and a county, and periodically threatens to secede from the Bay State). Congregationalism and Quakerism shared top billing among the island's various denominations, but no one seems to have taken religion as seriously as colonial New Englanders in general. During both the American Revolution and the War of 1812, Nantucket did its best to remain neutral. Byers has entitled his book "The Nation of Nantucket" to emphasize the island's uniqueness.

The development which most influenced Nantucket's early history was whaling. There exists, of course, an immense literature on the subject. Byers has been careful not to repeat what others have emphasized. He is less interested in the technical details and romance of whaling than in its impact on community. Some of the richest passages in the volume appear in a lengthy unit called "The Rise of A Whaling Port 1690-1740." Population became increasingly concentrated near the best harbour on the north shore. Indians, once relatively independent, found themselves reduced to an impoverished underclass. Ship captains and owners dominated political and cultural life. Island wives—their husbands at sea for longer and longer intervals—managed family life even more thoroughly than did their mainland farming counterparts. Whaling in subsequent decades made Nantucket one of New England's most prosperous and populated towns. The island in 1726 had about 900 inhabitants. In 1775 it had over 4,500. Dependence on whaling, in turn, made the community especially vulnerable during the wars and explains, along with Quaker antipathy to the military, why many islanders tried to find a middle ground between the combatants.

For all its differences from other New England towns, however, the Nantucket Byers presents will seem familiar to those who keep up with literature in early New England community development. The whole genre has become a bit predictable. Writers address the community vs. individual theme: Byers at several points describes the island culture as more "liberal" and individualistic than the rest of New England. There has to have been a period of harmonious stability which as modernists we can look fondly back on. Part three of *The Nation of Nantucket* is called "Life in an American Utopia, 1740-75" and includes chapters on "The Culture of an American Utopia" and "The Politics of Cultural Uniformity and Social Stability"; part four has "The Shattering of Unity, 1775-1820" as its title. A third theme has to do with elitism. Everyone acknowledges the presence of dominant elites defined by intermarriage, wealth, and generational continuity. Byers describes with precision the emergence of this group in Nantucket, but seems torn between admiration and rejection of their world. The latter is most evident in casual aside (p.8, n.8) that despite its liberalism the Nantucket of his book "must still be judged as undemocratic." Finally, the proof of having mastered statistics. Byers concludes his work with nearly thirty pages of elaborate figures