

# EMIGRATION FROM FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES

Javier Grossuti, University of Trieste

## **1. The “new” migratory flows towards the United States and Italian emigration**

Before the 1890s, most of the Europeans who reached the United States were British, Irish, German and Scandinavian. Each group had different working skills and came to occupy a different position in the hierarchy of the job market that distinguished the first ethnic groups of emigrants. British and Germans normally were the most qualified workers, and gradually tended towards specialized positions in the industrial sector. On the other hand, Irish and Scandinavians were usually employed as general unskilled labourers. Around the beginning of the 1890s, the areas from which European emigration originated shifted towards the east and south. These new migration flows were mainly composed by Slavs, Jews and Italians. In 1900 emigrants from the United Kingdom only accounted for 2.8% of the entire European flow, while emigrants from Ireland, Germany and Scandinavian countries were 8%, 4.1% and 7% respectively. In the same years, Italians, AustroHungarian and Russian and Polish Jews reached 22.3%, 25.6% and 20.2% respectively.

The main features of Italian emigration towards the United States were already clear in the 1880s. Most emigrants reaching the United States were from Southern Italy and arrived in the US through the so-called padrone system. They represented a wide range of professions, mostly unqualified, and usually returned home after one or more seasons in the United States. The padroni (owners) imported cheap workforce and took advantage of their knowledge of English and of the local job market conditions, controlling the supply of Italian labour in the construction and railway sectors.

In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the United States welcomed about 800,000 Italians. In the first fifteen years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian emigration towards the US reached impressive numbers: more than three million Italians entered the country. The regions of southern Italy contributed most to this flow, in particular Campania, Calabria, Basilicata, Abruzzo, Molise and Sicily. Certain areas of the Tuscan Apennines and of northern Italy, mostly Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto and especially Friuli, were also affected by the phenomenon. In 1902, the Industrial Commission – a commission of enquiry created by the US Congress in order to “investigate questions pertaining to immigration, to labour, to agriculture, to manufacturing, and to business, and to report to the Congress and to suggest such legislation as it may deem best upon these subjects” – included Udine and Friuli as “collecting points” and “contributing districts” for Italian emigration towards the United States. The route followed by emigrants particularly from Friuli, Veneto, the area around Cadore and Treviso, led them from Udine to New York through the railway stations of Milan, Chiasso, Basel, Paris and the French ports of Le Havre and Cherbourg. In the same years, this route was also followed by Friulians heading for Canada<sup>1</sup>.

Between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, more than two thirds of Italian immigrants were registered by American authorities as labourers or peons. A minority, less than 20%, which actually amounted to over 300,000 people, worked as craftsmen.

Overcoming their employers’ prejudices and sometimes the opposition of the trade unions, this minority of qualified immigrants was able to work their original trades: tailors, barbers, cobblers, stonecutters, stonemasons, plasterers, cement mixers, mosaic and terrazzo workers. However, in 1900 about half of Italian emigrants were still employed as peons, a percentage that remained unchanged until the First World War<sup>2</sup>. As many experts pointed out, Italians were excluded from the best paid jobs not only because of their lack of qualifications or their limited knowledge of English,

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<sup>1</sup> F. MICELLI, Stagioni, luoghi e parole: le lettere di un emigrante temporaneo (1905-1915), in A. D’AGOSTIN - J. GROSSUTTI (edited by), *Ti ho spedito Lire cento. Le stagioni di Luigi Piccoli, emigrante friulano. Lettere famigliari (1905-1915)*, Pordenone, Municipality of CodroipoERMI, 1997, pages 269-326.

<sup>2</sup> R. J. VECOLI, *The Italian Immigrants in the United States Labor Movement from 1880 to 1929*, in B. Bezza (edited by), *Gli italiani fuori d’Italia. Gli emigrati italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi d’adozione (1880-1940)*, Milan. Franco Angeli Editore, 1983, pages 257-306.

but also because of “the racial prejudice which is intense among the native population”. In fact, the (negative) stereotype of Italian people was so embedded in American society that even the most educated and qualified emigrants were forced to take “the pick and shovel”<sup>3</sup>. This was not the situation of mosaic and terrazzo workers from Friuli: as highly specialized labourers, well paid and with no competition, they represented the upper class of the labour force. The most careful experts of Italian emigration in the United States were well aware of the presence of such a group within the biggest construction industry, as Robert F. Foster pointed out: From Venetia and Tuscany [respectively], for example, workers in mosaics and stucco have brought a special training, a traditional aptitude of which Americans have been glad to avail themselves [...] It is common to find them at work on the most exacting tasks, insuring the neatness of appearance, or the beauty, of the most ambitious public and private structures<sup>4</sup>.

Between the 1880s and the 1890s the number of Italian emigrants working in the construction sector reached very high percentages. In 1883, according to estimates of the American trade unions, 75% of construction workers were Irish, 15% Italian and the remaining 10% was formed by locals or people from other countries. Ten years later, in 1893, these figures had been completely reversed: Italians formed three quarters of the total and, progressively, took on more qualified positions<sup>5</sup>.

## **2. Miners, mosaic and terrazzo workers, stonemasons and stonecutters from Friuli in the United States, between the 19 th and 20 th centuries**

For people from the valleys and mountains in Friuli, especially from the Western areas, the United States only became a common destination in the last ten years of the 19 th century, and increasingly so in the first decade of the 20 th century<sup>6</sup> Miners

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<sup>3</sup> R. VECOLI, Negli Stati Uniti, in P. BEVILACQUA, A. DE CLEMENTI, E. FRANZINA (edited by), Storia dell’Emigrazione Italiana. Arrivi, Rome, Donzelli Editore, 2002, page 62.

<sup>4</sup> R. F. FOERSTER, The Italian Emigration of Our Times, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1924, page 352; see also R. J. VECOLI, Chicago’s Italians prior to World War I. A Study of their Social and Economic Adjustment, Ph.D dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1962.

<sup>5</sup> E. FENTON, Immigrants and Unions. A case study. Italians and Americans Labor, 1870-1920, New York, Arno Press, 1957, page 378.

<sup>6</sup> J. ZUCCHI, Immigrant Friulians in North America, in Italian Immigrants in Rural and Small Town America, Essays from the Fourteenth Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association held at the Landmark Center St.

from the Cellina and Corvera valleys worked in Silverton (Colorado), in Pennsylvania, in Illinois, in Ohio, in Michigan; stonemasons, builders, stonecutters from the Meduna, Tramontina, Cosa, Corvera, Pesarina and Cleulis valleys worked in New York, in Philadelphia, in Detroit; they were even employed in the reconstruction of San Francisco after the earthquake of 1906<sup>7</sup>. For miners, emigration had a goal and a deadline: the money they were able to save with a few years of hard work, however, could never compensate for all the lives lost due to silicosis. Between the end of the 19 th century and the beginning of the 20 th century, Frisanco, Poffabro and Casasola in the Colvera valley, which all together had a population of 2,469 persons in 1901, saw 112 of their residents die in the silver mines of Colorado<sup>8</sup>. However, the hardships withstood by Italian miners did not go unnoticed: during the miners' strike in 1903– 1904, the Friulian Olinto Marcolina denounced the injustices and the arbitrary behaviour of the federal and national police forces against fellow Italian miners.

Marcolina, secretary of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) of Williamsburg (Colorado), also fought his battle through the pages of the magazine "Il Lavoratore Italiano"<sup>9</sup>. Olinto Marcolina reached the United States in 1896, at the age of 22, travelling with fellow Italians Luigi Marcolina, headed for New York, and Pietro Giacomelli "Stel" and Luigi and Basilio Roman "del Prete", headed for Silverton. Before he reached Silverton, Olinto Marcolina, registered as a stonemason by the American Immigration Authorities of Ellis Island, spent some time in New York. Other fellow countrymen from Poffabro took instead the opposite route,

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Paul Minnesota October 30-31 1981, edited by R. J. VECOLI, New York, The American Italian Historical Association, 1987, page 63; E. FRANZINA, *Il Friuli e l'America. Donne, società, emigrazione fra '800 e '900*, in Tina Modotti. *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi*, edited by the Comitato Tina Modotti, Udine, Arti Grafiche Friulane, 1995, pages 79-95.

<sup>7</sup> M. ROMAN ROS – A. PELLEGRINI MAZZOLI – A. COLUSSI, *La Valle del Colvera nella storia e nella leggenda*, Maniago, Tipografia Mazzoli, 1973, pages 94-95; N. CANTARUTTI, *Oh, ce gran biela vintura!... Narrativa di tradizione orale tra Meduna e Mujé*, Udine, Centre of Regional Studies, 1986, page 30, 32; ID., *Segni sul vivo*, Udine, Arti Grafiche Friulane, 1992, page 378; J. GROSSUTTI, *La comunità di Frisanco all'estero. Traccia per un'anagrafe*, in "Communi di Frisanco". *Frisanco – Poffabro – Casasola*, edited by N. CANTARUTTI, Maniago, Municipality of Frisanco, 1995, pages 281, 289, 290.

<sup>8</sup> A. TRAMONTINA, *La febbre dell'oro*, in "L'Eco della Val Colvera", March 2002, page 6.

<sup>9</sup> P. F. NOTARIANI, *Italian Involvement in the 1903-04 Coal Miners' Strike in Southern Colorado and Utah*, in *Pane e Lavoro: The Italian American Working Class*, Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association held in Cleveland, Ohio, October 27 and 28, 1978 at John Carroll University, edited by G. E. POZZETTA, Toronto, The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1980, pages 55-56.

reaching the northern areas of Philadelphia, specifically Chestnut Hill, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after having worked in Silverton. Most of them worked as stonemasons and bricklayers on the construction of houses and buildings, with stone extracted from the open pit mines in the area. Some established successful companies, such as the Lorenzon Brothers Company founded in 1914, and the Marcolina Brothers. These two companies gave work to the many Italians who reached Chestnut Hill at the beginning of the 1910s, but also in the period between the two World Wars. In the neighbouring Germatown, a group of builders from Cleulius worked for the company established by Ferdinando Primus.

In the United States, during the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many Friulians worked in the mining sector. In 1909, Guido Picotti, an inspector for the Ufficio Provinciale del Lavoro (Provincial Employment Office) in Udine, observed that:

There is an abundance of miners around the town of Pordenone. And many can be found in Cassano Nuovo, in Cimolais, Claut, Erto Casso, Frisanco, Montereale, Caneva, Sacile, Polcenigo, Meduno, Cordovado, Pravidomini and Casarsa. Many leave for America and others head especially to Germany. Of these miners some are employed in the digging of tunnels, in quarries, others, those who go to America, in the extraction of peat and coal, in the metal, silver and copper mines. Miners especially favour Canada, the Republic of Argentina and California as destinations<sup>10</sup>.

Other miners from Friuli lived in the area around Steubenville, in Ohio, were a group of emigrants from Cavasso Nuovo and Frisanco worked. The mines of Iron Mountain, in the state of Michigan, and those in the Coal City area in the state of Illinois, housed just as many emigrants from Cavasso, Frisanco, Meduno and Profabbro.

In the 1880s and 1890s, but also in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Friulians reaching the United States also worked in the mosaic and terrazzo floor sectors, at first in the coastal cities, particularly New York, and then in cities in the interior of

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<sup>10</sup> G. PICOTTI, Le caratteristiche dell'emigrazione d'oltre Tagliamento, "La Patria del Friuli", 10<sup>th</sup> September 1909.

the country. The spread of mosaics and terrazzo floors in the US often took place following the same strategy already perfected in Germany. Initially, the mosaic and terrazzo floor works in the cities in the country's interior were entrusted companies in New York, who sent their craftsmen there: if there was a potential for developing mosaic and terrazzo floor work in the city, the craftsmen would often decide to stay there and start a small business, together with fellow countrymen, which sometimes then developed into a company<sup>11</sup>. The example of Luigi Pasquali, born in Sequals in 1861, can give us a good idea of the path followed by many mosaic and terrazzo floor workers from Friuli. As a boy, Luigi went to Venice, where he learned the craft of building mosaics and terrazzo floors. From here he moved to Paris and, after a spell working in the French capital, he was sent to New York to manage a mosaic workshop. Back in Paris, in 1887 he moved to New York and together with other fellow countrymen created the "The New York Mosaic Cooperatives", also becoming its secretary. Five years later, in 1892, he went to Philadelphia, where he set up the "Italian Marble Mosaic Company", one of the most important terrazzo floor, mosaic and tile companies in the city and amongst the first to use, in 1919, brass stripping, that is strips that mark the height and divide the terrazzo floor in different "zones", designed in that same year by the businessman Luigi Del Turbo, from Sequals in Friuli.

The migration story of Luigi Pasquali was no anomaly. There is a strong tradition of mosaic and terrazzo floor workers in the prealpine area of the region of Carnia. At the beginning of the 17 th century, a lot of mosaic and terrazzo floor workers from Sequals and the area around Spilimbergo already worked in Venice.

Luigi Pognici observed: "Sequals and its county have been famous for battuto work (commonly terrazzo) since olden times. The ancient battuto that decorate the magnificent buildings of Venice and the region of Veneto were made by the terrazzo floor workers of Sequals. Those battuti are also known as Venetian floors because in

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<sup>11</sup> J. ZUCCHI, Immigrant Friulians in North America , in R. J. VECOLI (edited by), Italian Immigrants in Rural and Small Town America , Essays from the Fourteenth Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association, New York. The American Italian Historical Association, 1987, page 63.

Venice the workers from Sequals first tested this new technique<sup>12</sup>”. Their presence in Venice was consolidated definitely in the first half of the 18 th century; however, around the middle of the 16 th century, two brothers, Domenico and Vincenzo Bianchini, from Polimbergo di Sequals, supervised the works on the vault in San Marco<sup>13</sup>. Romualdo Mander, from the same town as the brothers, terrazzo layer and mosaicist of the Procurator of San Marco’s floor and of the Church of San Marco, was one of the pioneers of this art in of Venice<sup>14</sup>. In 1727, Tommaso Crovato, also from Sequals, steward in the terrazzo art in Venice, complained about the difficulties in paying due taxes and said: “Almost all brothers of this art, all from the country of Friuli, come to this city without a house, sleeping in hired beds, and for most of the year they stay in their villages and it is impossible to find them, and if they are found you can never get the money out of them”<sup>15</sup>. Even if they were members of the Venetian art, terrazzo workers from Friuli, who periodically returned to work the fields in their home villages or who moved to other cities in order to practice their profession, evaded payment of their taxes.

In the first half of the 19 th century, some terrazzo workers, but most of all mosaicists, reached France from Venice. In 1847, for example, Giandomenico Facchina, having heard of the discovery of some ancient mosaic floors in the south of the country, moved to Montpellier where he carried out some restoration work. Many other mosaic and terrazzo workers from his village, Sequals, followed him<sup>16</sup>.

The first mosaic and terrazzo workers from the foothills of eastern Friuli, from Sequals, Toppo, Istrago di Spilimbergo and from the nearby villages reached New

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<sup>12</sup> L. POGNICI, Guida di Spilimbergo e dintorni, Pordenone, TipoLitografia A. Gatti, 1885, pages 70, 72-73.

<sup>13</sup> G. PRESSACCO, Sermone, Cantu, Choreis et... Marculis. Cenni di storia della danza in Friuli, Udine, Società Filologica Friulana, 1991, pages 126-127; N. CANTARUTTI, Musaici, in Reinvenzioni: 28 artisti alla Scuola di Spilimbergo. Mosaico è, Pasian di Prato, Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli, 2000, page 13.

<sup>14</sup> L. POGNICI, Guida di Spilimbergo e dintorni, cit., pages 72-73.

<sup>15</sup> G. CANIATO – M. DAL BORGO, Arte dei Terazzeri, in ID., Le arti edili a Venezia, Roma, pages 141-158. On the presence of mosaic and terrazzo workers from Friuli in Venice, see also the essays of Novella Cantarutti (Musaici), Gianni Colledani (Sassi/claps) and of Antonio Crovato (Il pavimento alla veneziana) in G. COLLEDANI – T. PERFETTI (edited by), Dal sasso al mosaico. Storia di terrazzo workers e mosaicisti di Sequals, Sequals, Comune di Sequals, 1994 nonché A. CROVATO, I pavimenti alla veneziana, Resana, Edizioni Grafì, 1999, pages 11-49. On the materials and techniques for the construction of the Venetian terrazzo floor see also P. GRANDIS, Ricerche sullo sviluppo storico e tecnico dell’arte dei terrazzai nella provincia di Pordenone, Thesis, rel. prof. G. Perusini, Università degli Studi di Trieste, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, academic year 1973-1974.

<sup>16</sup> H. LAVAGNE, La Mosaïque, Paris. Presses Universitaires de France, 1987, pages 113-117.

York around 1875. They often left from France or other European countries, such as England, Switzerland, the AustroHungarian Empire or Germany, where they worked as mosaicists or terrazzo workers. Luigi Zampollini from Baseglia and Filippo Crovato from Sequals, for example, arrived in New York in 1880. Both worked for Gian Domennico Facchina's company in Paris. Luigi Ridolfi, a priest from Friuli and chaplain of the *Vulcania*, a boat that steamed between Italy and the United States, who visited the communities of Friulians in the US and Canada in the 1920s and 1930s, described the arrival of the two pioneers as follows:

In the year 1800 the millionaire Vanderbilt commissioned the construction of his residence to the general company Herter Brothers of New York. Vanderbilt, who had travelled extensively throughout Europe and Italy, wanted some Venetian mosaics on the walls and ceilings of the rooms. The Harter Company was embarrassed. Who could they call for such a job? No mosaics had yet been done in America by that time. The Harters asked thus the Italian Consulate, where the Antonini (Count Antonino, a Friulian from Udine, attached to the Italian delegation in New York as a doctor and interpreter) often met in order to assist the first Italian emigrants. After a long exchange of letters, cav. Facchina of Sequals, who was staying in Paris, sent two of his best mosaicists to New York: Zampolini Luigi from Baseglia and Crovato Filippo from Sequals. Once the works on Vanderbilt's house were finished, that were greatly appreciated and that can still be seen nowadays, Zampolini Luigi was appointed director at the new Ideal & Mosaic Company<sup>17</sup>.

Between the 1890s and the beginning of the 20 th century the flow of mosaicists, and most of all terrazzo workers, grew, involving other villages in the alpine valleys such as Fanna, Meduno and Arba. During this period, mosaic and terrazzo workers mainly chose European countries as destinations for their migration. Up until the Great War, the migratory experience of mosaic and terrazzo workers from the alpine valleys was remarkable, for a number of reasons. One of the most meaningful reasons is the duration of their stay abroad: while for most of the Friulians the beginning of spring

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<sup>17</sup> L. RIDOLFI, *I Friulians nell' America del Nord*, Udine, Arti Grafiche Friulane, 1931, pages 17-18.



and the arrival of winter marked, alternatively, the departure towards Central European countries and their return home, the terrazzo workers from the alpine valleys of western Friuli spent considerably longer periods abroad. In the first case emigration was seasonal; in the second it was long term. Construction sites, quarries or brick factories, in fact, depended on weather conditions, and the arrival of winter meant the end of outdoor work. Terrazzo workers, on the other hand, worked indoors; therefore their return home did not necessarily depend on the change of seasons. Reading through the registers of the villages of the valleys of western Friuli confirms the longterm character of the terrazzo workers' migratory experience. The high number of births, which happened alternatively in Germany and in Friuli, for example, proves that even though the emigration was not always permanent, it nevertheless involved the entire family.

Furthermore, until the beginning of the Great War, European countries – Germany in particular – acted as a kind of professional training ground for a number of terrazzo workers who would then reach other migratory destinations, such as the United States. At the same time, German cities offered a healthy market for the terrazzo workers from the villages in the valleys of western Friuli, who set up a number of businesses. The high number of small and medium-sized terrazzo companies owned by Friulians from the western foothills who emigrated to Germany, proves the success of the German experience<sup>18</sup>. The geographical position of the businesses owned by Friulians in Germany mirrors the most popular destinations for emigrants. In Germany's case, the areas that welcomed the highest number of terrazzo workers from Friuli are the Northern Rhine Valley and Westphalia, the two regions that “in the decade before 1914 were the most important immigration zones for Italian workers”<sup>19</sup>. The most recurring destinations were the cities of Cologne, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Aquisgrana, Essen, Bochum, Dortmund, Düren, Münster, Duisburg, Elberfeld, Bielefeld, and Ramersdorf. The terrazzo workers from Friuli occupied a

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<sup>18</sup> H. May H., *Terrazzieri in Franken. Italienische Terrazzoleger und der Import eines vielseitigen Baustoffes*, in *Fremde auf dem Land*, Bad Windsheim, Fränkisches Freilandmuseum, 2000, pages 101-134; see also R. Del Fabbro, *Transalpini. Italianische Arbeitswanderung nach Süddeutschland im Kaiserreich 1870-1918*, Osnabrück. Universitätsverlag Rasch, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> C. CORNELIßEN, *L'emigrazione italiana nell'Impero tedesco: analisi comparativa della storiografia tedesca e italiana*, «Studi Emigrazione», 38, n. 142 (2001), pages 297-314.

niche in the job market, as highly specialized workers, in stark contrast to the sectors that, in the Rhine and in Westphalia, employed most Italian immigrants: heavy industry and mining.

The outbreak of the First World War brought to an end a lucky route for emigrants from Friuli, leading many to return home, even if they had settled permanently in Germany, as they had married German women, or emigrated with their whole family, or because they had set up small and medium-sized successful businesses, as many terrazzo workers did. For people from Friuli, therefore, the end of the war also brought an end to a consolidated migratory experience. The United Kingdom, but most of all the United States, became the two preferred destinations for mosaic and terrazzo workers.

### **3. An exclusively Venetian organization: the syndicate of mosaic and terrazzo workers from Friuli.**

In 1888, a few years after the pioneers' arrival in the United States, mosaic and terrazzo workers from Friuli created the Mosaic and Terrazzo Workers' Association of New York & Vicinity, gathering together the most expert terrazzo workers (the so-called Mechanics): this is the oldest Italian section union within the builders' federation<sup>20</sup>. In 1919, the Mosaic and Terrazzo Workers' Association of New York & Vicinity joined forces with the Bricklayers, Masons and Plasterers' International Union of America (the international union of brick layers, stonecutters, plasterers, stucco decorators, cement layers, marble workers, tilers and terrazzo workers of the United States): an agreement negotiated by the union leader Federico Patrizio from Sequals<sup>21</sup>. According to the 1930 registers, the union, which became the "Mosaic and Terrazzo Workers' Association of New York & Vicinity Local 3", grew to reach more than 300 members. Even in 1969, three quarters of the terrazzo workers registered with the union were from Friuli. However, New York was not the only place to

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<sup>20</sup> Federal Writers' Project, *The Italians of New York*, New York, Random House, 1939, page 161.

<sup>21</sup> On the Bricklayers, Masons and Plasterers' International Union of America and the role of the construction unions see. United States Department of Labor, *Handbook of American Trade Unions*, Miscellaneous Series n° 506, Washington, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1929, pages 1618, 1922.

witness a union movement generated by emigrant mosaic and terrazzo workers from Friuli. For example, between 1871 and 1881, following the initiative of Gian Domenico Facchina, a workers' association of mutual support between mosaic workers was established in Paris, aiming at evolving into an opposition society<sup>22</sup>. In 1901 in London, mosaicists and labourers formed a union that quickly achieved improvements in working conditions (a reduction of working hours), even when compared to other categories of English workers. In 1904 London also saw the creation of the Mosaic Workers' Cooperative Society, which grouped together about one hundred members<sup>23</sup>. The union experiences in Paris and London were nevertheless shortlived and ended after a few years. "For workers emigrating to Germany – observed GioBatta Toffolo from Fanna – things were not easy at all, given the incredibly high number of small businessmen who, thinking themselves rich and above the working classes (while they actually work more than many others), will not even consider the idea of organization". According to Toffolo, despite the problems faced by many, the time had come for mosaic and terrazzo workers to form a union, whether it be "a group that includes all the mosaic and terrazzo workers from Friuli with sections in the various countries throughout Europe and America" – observed Toffolo, or whether a group was formed for each single state<sup>24</sup>. The latter was the form that had met a moderate success in the United States. The objective of the Mosaic and Terrazzo Workers' Association of New York & Vicinity was "to maintain and improve the economic conditions of its members, based on reciprocal cooperation, and to achieve a fair compensation for the services rendered by its members in order to eliminate unjust privileges and check that each member fulfils his duties". Edwin Fenton observed that, in New York, the high professionalism allowed Italian mosaic and terrazzo workers to have a monopoly on

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<sup>22</sup> M. ANDRYS, Gian Domenico Facchina, in G. COLLEDANI – T. PERFETTI (edited by), *Dal sasso al mosaico...* cit., page 62

<sup>23</sup> L. GIANNESSE, Per l'organizzazione dei mosaicisti terrazzieri in "L'Emigrante", V (1910), n. 1.

<sup>24</sup> G. B. TOFFOLO, Mosaicistiterrazzieri unitevi!, in "L'Emigrante", V (1910), n. 2.

the sector, entirely controlling certain branches without the support of the national union<sup>25</sup>.

Terrazzo workers from Friuli, therefore, were a true “occupational niche”<sup>26</sup>. The prevalence of mosaic and terrazzo workers from Friuli was proven. On 4 th December 1892, the New York Times published an article on the disagreements between the Helpers’ and the Mechanics’ union, which met in room nr. 35 and room nr. 3 respectively. The helpers were accusing the mechanics’ union of discriminating against nonItalian workers. According to the helpers, the leaders of the Mosaic and Terrazzo Workers’ Association of New York had turned the union into an exclusively Venetian organization. The Helpers, who were less qualified workers and probably had non Venetian members within their ranks, claimed that even if a helper held the necessary professional qualifications to join the mechanics’ union, admission would have been denied unless he was from Venice<sup>27</sup>. The Helpers’ Union was formed two years after the Mechanics’ one, and gathered together workers both from Friuli and the rest of Italy. The birth of other mosaic and terrazzo workers’ unions in the United States resulted from the growth and the consolidation of this sector between the 1910s and 1920s: the Mosaic Ceramic Terrazzo Union of Philadelphia, for example, was founded in 1918, while the Mosaic & Terrazzo Workers Union of Pittsburgh in 1924.

#### **4. The Friulians in the United States between the two wars “were mainly mosaic and terrazzo workers”**

In 1931 don Luigi Ridolfi estimated there were no less than 9,000 people from Friuli in the United States and, as regards the eastern states of the US and Canada, he observed:

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<sup>25</sup> FENTON, *Immigrants and Unions. A case study. Italians and Americans Labor, 1870-1920*, New York, Arno Press, 1975, pages 381-384. On the Italian presence within the workers’ movement, see R. VECOLI, *The Italian Immigrants in the United States Labor Movement from 1880 to 1929*, in *Gli italiani fuori d’Italia*, cit., pages 257-306.

<sup>26</sup>

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The majority are terrazzo and mosaic workers; then come the bricklayers, including labourers; the third group are the industrial workers and miners and finally furnace workers and farmers. There are over 200 businessmen; about fifty professionals and merchants. A third of emigrants come with their families and this number is growing as they are naturalized American. [...] When one wishes to find Friulians in a city, one must first find out whether there are any terrazzo and mosaic companies there, and ask them. Often the businessmen are American, but the workers are from Friuli.<sup>28</sup>

The majority come from villages in the foothills of western Friuli. “Born in Sequals, trained in Spilimbergo, we work around the world”, wrote the journalist Orio Vergani in the *Corriere della Sera*, on 10 th June 1930. Adding:

It is a strange thing to hear, in such small villages, people talking about far away cities with such ease. Certain marvels of the coastal cities of Liguria and the Neapolitan area can be seen once again, here in the foothills of Friuli. Here, it seems easier to leave bound for Poland or Canada, than for Udine. Under the small porticos people talk about Paris, Warsaw, Budapest, Washington and Vienna as destinations close to home [...]. If anyone wished to compile a golden book of mosaic workers from Sequals, they would be found decorating the Library in Boston, the tunnel under the Hudson in New York, the crypts of the Kremlin in Moscow, the fountains of Abdul Hamid in Constantinople, the American residences of the Vanderbilts, the Rockefellers, the Pullmans, the Armours, the Library of the American Senate<sup>29</sup>.

In the 1930s, terrazzo workers from Friuli reached the United States, the neighbouring Canada, and – passing through Florida –the Caribbean Islands, Cuba in particular, where Luigi Mion, from Fanna, made the terrazzo floor of the Teatro Nacional (now Teatro Garcia Lorca ) and the ramblas of Havana.

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<sup>28</sup> L. RIDOLFI, *I friulani nell' America del Nord*, cit., pages 147 e 43.

<sup>29</sup> O. VERGANI, *Pellegrinaggio tra gli artigiani d'Italia. Il miracolo millenario del mosaico*, in “*Corriere della Sera*”, 10th June 1930.

From Helpers, many terrazzo workers became Mechanics and then the owners of small and mediumsized businesses. In February 1924, the 27 owners of mosaic and terrazzo companies from all over the United States met in Chicago, summoned by Gus (Costante) Cassini (from Cavasso Nuovo), and they founded the National Terrazzo and Mosaic Contractors' Association<sup>30</sup>. In 1926, out of 59 companies members of the association, 40 were owned by Italians, mainly from Friuli<sup>31</sup>. Four years later, in 1930, of the 128 companies forming the Association at least 74 belonged to Italians<sup>32</sup>. In one of the first issues of the magazine "The Art of Mosaics and Terrazzo" published in Chicago from 1930, the architect A. Reed Wilson wrote: "Although a member of the Terrazzo Association, I must admit that I am not a terrazzo man. At that, I don't see how I can be blamed if my ancestors do not hail from Cavasso Nuovo, Fanna or Sequals in Northern Italy"<sup>33</sup>. Amongst the "terrazzo men" who set up important business activities between the 19th century and the 20th century were Louis (Luigi) Del Turco (owner of L. Del Turco & Bros. Inc. of Harrison, N.J.), Louis (Luigi) Pasquali (Italian Marble Mosaic Company of Philadelphia), Louis (Luigi) De Paoli (De Paoli Co., Inc. of New York), Anthony (Antonio) Tramontin (Tramontin Tile & Terrazzo Co., Inc. of Detroit), John (Giuseppe) Patrizio (Patrizio Art Mosaic Co. of Pittsburgh), Vincent (Vincenzo) Pellarin (Pellarin & Co. Roman and Venetian Marble Mosaic and Terrazzo of New York), representing the paradigm of selfmade entrepreneurs. The decisive factor was that the clients of these terrazzo and mosaic companies were not within the Italian community, but the American public in general. The rise of most Italian businesses, in fact, was strictly tied to the continuous growing of "Little Italys", relying almost exclusively on Italian clients: in most cases it was a market within the community. The first and most common ItalianAmerican businessmen were linked to the production, processing and selling of traditional Italian foods, or to importing them

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<sup>30</sup> The National Terrazzo and Mosaic Contractors Association, Minutes of the Organization, Chicago, 1924, page 3.

<sup>31</sup> The National Terrazzo and Mosaic Contractors Association, Catalog and Design Book, Chicago, 1926, page 2.

<sup>32</sup> In 1953, Chino Ermacora said that the terrazzo and mosaic companies, property of Friulians, adhering to the "Mosaic and Terrazzo Workers' Association" were 225, cfr. C. ERMACORA, *Il Friuli. Aspetti caratteristici del lavoro*, cit., page 110.

<sup>33</sup> A. REED WILSON, *An Outsider Looks at the Industry*, in "The Art of Mosaics and Terrazzo", 1931, v. II, nr. 1, page 26.

from Italy. As Howard E. Aldrich and Roger Waldinger observed, the presence of ethnic communities offered to some of their members usually particular advantages over outsiders when starting a business aimed at satisfying the demands of the minority to which they belong<sup>34</sup>. Terrazzo and mosaic workers from Friuli, on the other hand, had to deal with the tastes and preferences of the American market: their success therefore represents an almost unique case in the history of Italian emigration to the US.

From 1924, the National Terrazzo and Mosaic Contractors Association organized its convention in a different American or Canadian city. It was no coincidence that the Convention for the fiftieth anniversary of the association, in 1973, was held in Rome, from where participants reached Udine and Spilimbergo. The link between the National Terrazzo and Mosaic Association and Friuli practically dates back to its founding: between the two wars, the association financed the Mosaic Workers' School of Spilimbergo. The monthly publication "The Art of Mosaics and Terrazzo", in the August 1932 issue, published a letter from the school's director, Antonio Baldini, to the president of the "National Terrazzo and Mosaic Association".

The director wrote: "I hope to be able to send you a mosaic shortly, to confirm our appreciation and as a modest act of homage for the great help your national association has given and gives every year to our School, so that it may develop mosaic works". At the beginning of the 1920s, in the villages in the foothills of Friuli, and in the minds of bright men such as Lodovico Zanini and Ezio Cantaruti, the mayor of Spilimbergo at the time, or cav. Pietro Pellarin, the idea of creating a local mosaic school began to develop. Given such a massive exodus of labour – often unskilled, the school was to guarantee a form of training, giving young workers a type of training that would meet certain demands, within a specific labour market. The "Scuola di Musaico", originally planned for Sequals, was established in

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<sup>34</sup> H. E. ALDRICH – R. WALDINGER, *Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship*, Annual Review of Sociology, 1990, XVI. 111-135.

Spilimbergo in 1922, also had the support of the Società Umanitaria di Milano with a contribution of ten thousand lire<sup>35</sup>.

In the first 1930s, the American architect Eugene Clute observed: “Most of the terrazzo workers in this country seem to have come originally from the Friuli, Province of Udine, a few hours from Venice, and terrazzo, of course, is a feature of Venetian architecture”<sup>36</sup>. In the 1920s and 1930s, American architects discovered the potential of terrazzo, which soon became more and more used in the most important public buildings of the country<sup>37</sup>. Terrazzo floors soon replaced mosaic ones, and thus the American labour market requested more and more terrazzo workers, and fewer mosaic workers. Owners of businesses in this sector and terrazzo workers were, mainly, from the areas of the foothills of western Friuli too.

There are many works by mosaic workers, and most of all by terrazzo workers, in New York and the United States, all of great artistic value. Louis Pasquali and Peter Pellarin from Sequals did the mosaics on the walls and vaults of the Library of Congress in Washington: once back in Italy, Pellarin became the first president of the “Cooperativa Anonima Laboratorio e Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli” of Sequals, which then became the present “Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli” of Spilimbergo. In 1935, Victor Foscatto from Sequals realized the famous mosaic “Aztec Sun Stone” in the Judy and Josh Weston Pavilion in the American Museum of Natural History of New York. Foscatto founded his own company in 1899, the V. Foscatto Company, which became one of the most important in New York in the 20s and 30s. The terrazzo floor in the Empire State Building is the work of the De Paoli, Del Turco & Foscatto Corporation of New York, a consortium of companies owned by people from Friuli<sup>38</sup>. Amongst the 3,400 workers employed in the construction of the Empire State Building, Ferruccio Mariutto from Fanna and Pietro Vescovi from Berceto di Parma, both terrazzo workers, received a craftsmanship award: their name can be seen on the

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<sup>35</sup> On the founding and development of the “Scuola di Mosaico” compare: D. VENUTO, La scuola dalle origini al 1941, in A. GIACOMELLO – A. GIUSA (edited by), La scuola mosaicisti del Friuli: bozzetti, documenti, fotografie, stampe e modelli, Pasian di Prato, Regione autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli, 2000, pages 51-76.

<sup>36</sup> E. Clute, Modern Craftsmanship in Terrazzo, in “Architecture”, 1932, March, pages 140-141.

<sup>37</sup> W. C. Johnson, Terrazzo, in T. C. Jester (edited by), Twentieth Century Building Materials. History and Conservation, Washington, D.C. National Park Service – Mc Graw Hill, 1995, pages 234-239.

<sup>38</sup> C. Willis, Building the Empire State, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, page 64.



placard at the entrance of the building<sup>39</sup>. The company L. Del Turco & Bros., established in 1910 by Louis Del Turco from Sequals, realized a number of jobs in terrazzo and tiles in many New York buildings, such as the Metropolitan Building, Steinway Building, New York Trust Co., N.Y University Building, Radio City/Rockefeller Centre, Newark Airport, Lincoln Center, United Nations Building, Holland and Lincoln Tunnels and, more recently, also in the Trump Towers, World Wide Plaza, Rutgers Housing, Princeton University Pool. The company Pellarin & Co. Roman and Venetian Marble and Terrazzo, established by Vincent Pellarin in the 1880s, did elaborate mosaic works in Temple BethEl, Church of The Ascension, Savoy Hotel, Bank for Savings, Central Bank Building, Museum & Library of NY University, St. Vincent's Hospital, Manhattan Club, First National Bank, Bloomingdale Bros., Savoy Hotel. The Roman Mosaic and Tile Company, established in 1902 by Angelo Trevisan from Sequals, did terrazzo and tile works in the Pentagon, at Arlington (near Washington), in the Smithsonian Institute (Washington), in the State Office Building of Philadelphia and in the Ciby Geiby laboratories of Sufferan.

Between the 20s and 30s, the American mosaic and terrazzo market, from the Atlantic coast to California and from the Canadian border to Florida, was almost entirely in the hands of Friulians. In the same years, the United States, after France and Argentina, was the third migratory destination for Friulians.

## **5. “There is no doubt that Friulians alone form one great village, like Gemona and Maniago”: emigrants’ origins and destinations**

Although the highest concentration of Friulians, between the two World Wars, was in New York, they were also present in other cities. In Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), for example, a good number of emigrants worked in the steel mills; in Detroit,

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<sup>39</sup> G. B. Wagner, *The Creation of the Empire State Building. Thirteen Months to Go*, San Diego. Thunder Bay Press, 2003, page 80.

(Michigan) many were employed in the car factories; in Cleveland (Ohio), emigrants from Cordenons, San Pietro al Natisone and Fanna found work in the steel industry.

In Chicago, the largest group came from Vendoglio di Treppo Grande and from Azzida di San Pietro al Natisone: most worked in factories, or in the mosaic and terrazzo sector as builders. In California, Los Angeles was home to emigrants from Meduno, San Lorenzo di Casarsa, Sacile, Gradisca di Sedegliano, Pinzano al Tagliamento, Pielungo, Tarcetta, Barcis and San Quirino; in San Francisco, the largest group was formed by a number of families from Carpacco, San Daniele del Friuli, San Giovanni di Casarsa, Maniago, Casasola, Frisanco, Braulins, Azzano Decimo, Zoppola, Sedegliano, Zompicchia, Arzene, Orcenico Superiore and Valvasone; the few Friulians of Sacramento were from Osoppo and Braulins. In the rest of the country, the majority of emigrants from Friuli worked in the terrazzo, tile and mosaic sectors. The largest community was in New York, as Don Luigi Ridolfi wrote:

There is no doubt that Friulians alone form one great village, like Gemona and Maniago. Most come from the municipalities of Fanna, Sequals, Cavasso Nuovo, Meduno, Pordenone and Talmassons. Meduno alone had 235; Fanna 200; Cavass Nuovo 200; Sequals 150; Pordenone 150; Cordenons 90; Flambro 90; Arzene 80; San Daniele 110; Spilimbergo 150; Maniago 70. Smaller groups were from Udine, San Vito al Tagliamento, Casarsa, Sedegliano, Azzano Decimo, Roveredo in Piano, Tramonti, Castelnuovo, Travesio, Coseano, Frisanco, Casarsa. There are some from about thirty other municipalities of Friuli. Most of them are terrazzo and mosaic workers. In New York, and in the whole of America, in a country that is a true mosaic of people... they are known as mosaicists<sup>40</sup>

Up to the 1950s, terrazzo and mosaic workers from Friuli residing in New York lived in East Harlem, in the West Village, but most of all in the area between First and

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<sup>40</sup> L. RIDOLFI, *I Friulians nell' America del Nord*, cit., pages 21-22

Third Avenue, ending with 24 th street to the south and with 35 th street to the north. At the beginning of the 30s, for example, according to the priest Luigi Ridolfi, over one thousand Friulians lived in the area. In 1929, the Friulians of New York founded a FAMEE Furlane, the first of its kind in the United States, preceded only by the Venetian Social Club of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, established in 1924 by a group of emigrants from Poffabro, Frisanco, Cleulis, Buia and Coloredo di Monte Albano.

In the other states of the union, Friulians usually worked for the various mosaic and terrazzo companies established by their fellow countrymen: in Toledo, Art Mosaic & Tile, owned by Michele Fioritto from Cavasso Nuovo, employed quite a high number of emigrants. Michele (Michael) Fioritto arrived in the United States at the beginning of the 20 th century and created the “Art Mosaic & Tile Company” in 1907, with premises in Toledo (Ohio), and branches in Fort Wayne and South Bend, (Indiana). The company made terrazzo floors in buildings in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Missouri, as well as in Greenwood (South Carolina), Austin (Texas where he did important works on the government building), and even in California. In Toledo, Michael Fioritto’s company did terrazzo work on the Holy Rosary Cathedral, while in South Bend he built most of Notre Dame University. In the 20s and 30s, the “Art Mosaic & Tile Company” gave work to a number of Friulians reaching the United States including, for example: Oswaldo Fioritto, Secondo Maraldo, John Bier, Angelo Maraldo, Salvatore Bernardon, John Tita Lovisa, Eugenio, Romano e Amedio Lovisa.

In Cincinnati, mosaic and terrazzo workers from Friuli worked for the “Cincinnati Mosaic & Tile Co.”, owned by A. Cassini from Sequals, and the “Martina Brothers Co.”, owned by John Martina from Tauriano; in St. Louis (Missouri), Arthur Girolami from Fanna and John Pellarin from Sequals were the owners of two of the most important companies in the city; in Houston (Texas), F. Pontello from, Cavasso Nuovo, managed the “Union Art and Tile Co.”, employing various mosaic and terrazzo workers from Fanna and Cavasso; in New Orleans (Louisiana), the Tramontin family from Cavasso Nuovo, and Benvenuto Dinon from Orgnese, worked as contractors in the terrazzo sector. Friulians reaching the United States after the

Second World War were mostly employed as tile or terrazzo workers by many of these companies. Dario Boschian, from Cavasso Nuovo, for example, remembered arriving in New Orleans in 1958 and he was employed as a specialized terrazzo worker by the company owned by Benvenuto Dinon in the same city. Dinon, Dario Boschian recalled, “had requested three workers from Cavasso, but only two of us left, myself and a fellow countryman who, after a few years, returned to Friuli. My employer, Benvenuto, had arrived in New York as a child, at the beginning of the 20s, with his father, who was a terrazzo worker in the city. After the Second World War Benvenuto did a terrazzo job for his father’s company in New Orleans (Louisiana), at the Charity Hospital. Once he had finished the job, he decided to stay in the city and set up his own business in the terrazzo and tile sector. Benvenuto Dinon’s company employed many Italians, mostly from Sicily, Abruzzo and Lazio, but there were few people from Friuli”.

In fact, after the Second World War, emigrants reaching the United States preferred larger cities such as New York, or communities with a longer tradition, such as Chestnut Hill, to the north of Philadelphia. Once more, the migratory routes established by Friulians between the 19 th century and the 20 th century seem to prove their effectiveness and their potential.