



Indianapolis Italians (IN) (Images of America)

James J. Divita

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In 1910, Indianapolis had the smallest foreign stock population of any city north of the Ohio River, and city historians merely ignored the presence of the ethnic communities. In the 1920s, the Hoosier capital supposedly lacked a cosmopolitan character, and the Ku Klux Klan gloried in the slogan "100% American." However, the size of a community does not indicate its significance in municipal life. Rather, immigrants and their descendants make a difference because of their talents and available local opportunities. Residents of Italian origin have contributed mightily to Indianapolis's economy, culture, and professional and religious life. The first to arrive were the Sicilians who developed the city's fruit and vegetable trade and the Friulani who engaged in terrazzo-mosaic tile work. Early immigrants became grocers, shoemakers, tailors, and barbers. Later, primarily after World War II, many American-born of Italian descent moved into Indianapolis, excelling in business and professional fields, including law, medicine, and education. The community has continued to grow, adding to its numbers the Italian-born but married to American military or engaged in skilled labor in carpentry, tailoring, salesmanship, and food preparation.

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