

Buccino, a small town in the Campania region of Italy, located about 50 miles southeast of Naples, contributed in its own way to the building of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The PRR, at the beginning of the 20th century, needed masons to build the massive stone archways and tunnels the railroad required. Buccino's mountainous location led many of its residents to work in the masonry trade, and many of these masons made their way to Altoona.


Life was not easy for the new immigrants. Not invited to join older organizations because of growing anti-immigrant sentiment, many immigrant communities established mutual assistance societies to meet the social, psychological, and economic needs of their members. In May 1910 a number of Altoona's Italian immigrants from Buccino founded the Buccinese Mutual Italian Benefit Society to provide for the membership in times of hardship and a place for general fellowship. The society limited membership to males who were either of Buccinese descent or married to a woman of Buccinese descent. Membership benefits included sick and unemployment benefits and also a death benefit to be paid by the society to survivors. In the days before sweeping social programs, such mutual assistance societies allowed people of a common background to care for one another.

The impact of the PRR's fortunes on members of the Buccinese Society was tremendous. Most of the founding and early members of the club were employed in some capacity by the railroad. Since railroading was a dangerous business and was punctuated by work stoppages, strikes, and other labor and economic problems, the club was invaluable to railroad workers not only as a safety net but also as a place to congregate. Through the past five decades the



*Founders of Altoona's Buccinese Society outside the original club building in 1910. First row: Frank DeLeo, Nicola DeLeo, Joseph Ferricola, Joseph Branda, Pasquale Marasco, Antonio Fatigante, Frank Ferricola, Joseph Cerlio, Joseph deLeo, Nicola DeStadio, David Ferricola. Second row: Antonio Fasano, Frank Durio, Frank Lardieri, Angelo Fasano, unknown, Joseph Fasano, unknown, Arcangelo Robertazzi, Paolo Lepore, Joseph Policastro, Joseph Salimbene. Third row: Felice Adamo, Angelo Pucciarello, Antonio Trimarco, Pasquale Morelli, Joseph Marasco, Alfonse Sciarillo, Pasquale Caputo, Dan Lardieri, Joseph Fatigante. Courtesy of the officers of the Buccinese Society, Altoona, PA.*

club has dealt with the decline of the railroad industry by providing for members in times of need. Many of the current members are retired or currently employed railroad workers.

The Buccinese Society acquired its lodge home at 612-614 8th Avenue shortly after its founding, and the building remains one of the last vestiges of a vibrant ethnic neighborhood. Regular members, those of Buccinese descent, continue to run the organization. Social members number around 500. The club takes part in many civic and social activities and also runs several bocce leagues, with both indoor and outdoor courts. The Buccinese Society remains one of the last of Altoona's many Italian ethnic clubs and continues to be a place where individuals of Italian descent congregate. 

To learn more about ethnic mutual assistance associations, see HSP's educational materials on mutual assistance associations online at <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=86>.

Erik Mentzer is a member of the Buccinese Club in Altoona, PA.