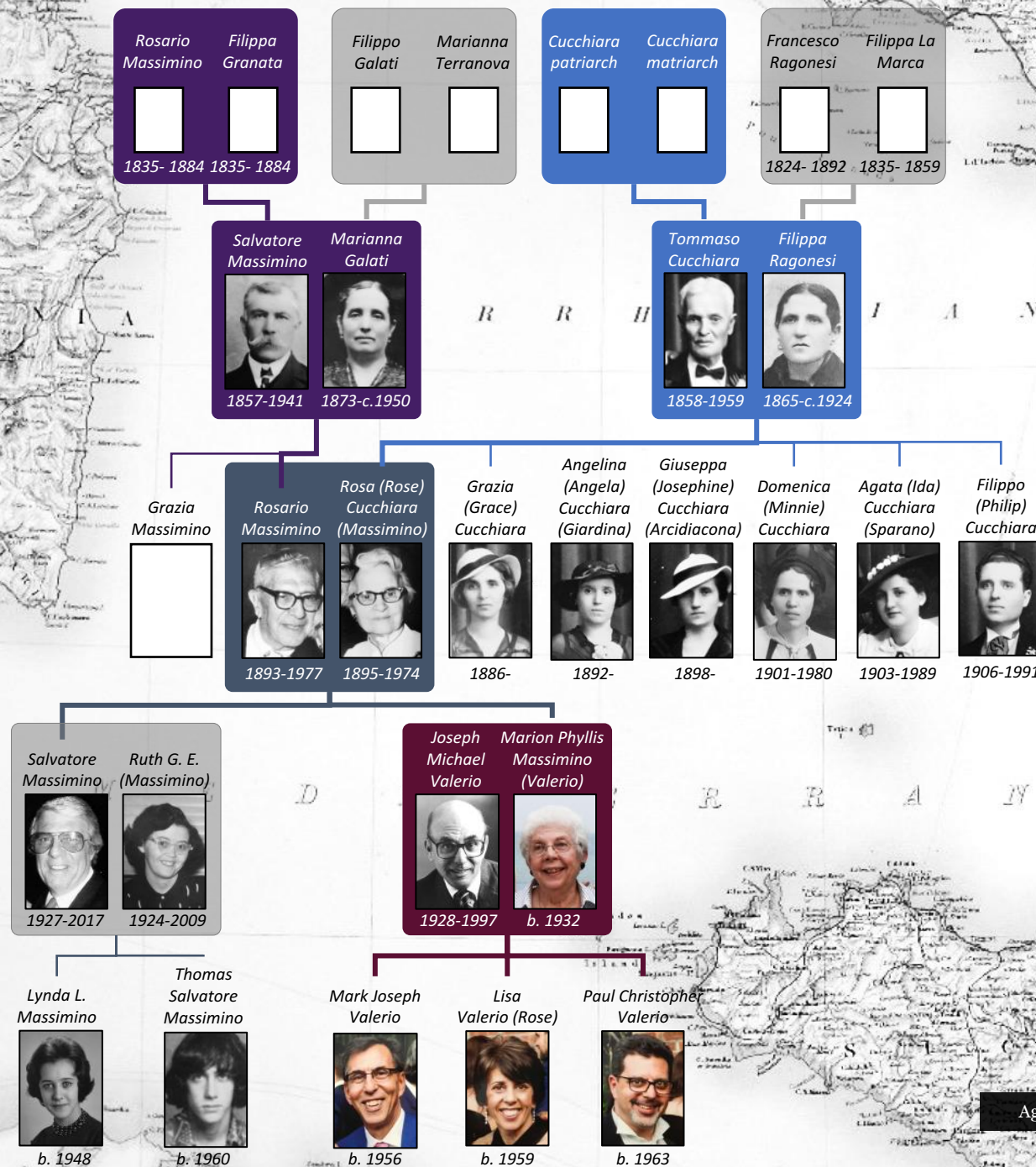


From Sicily to Newark:



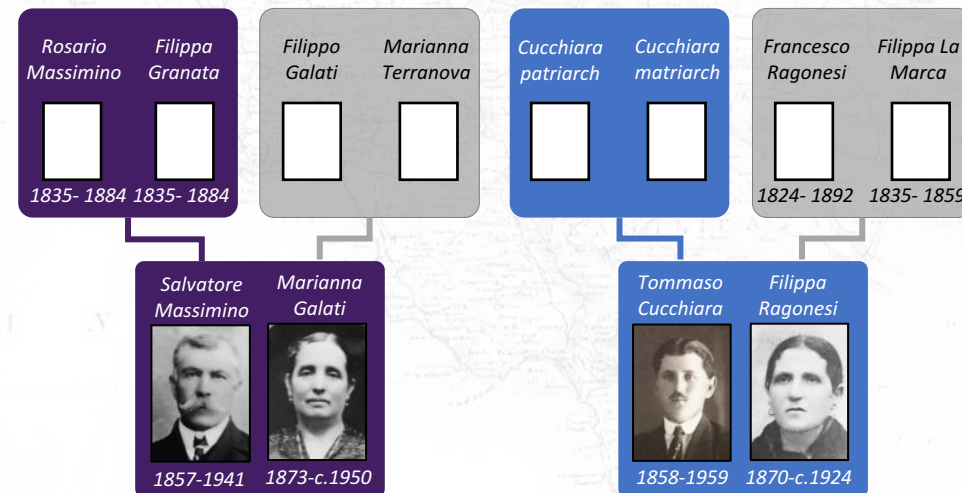
The Massimino • Cucchiara Family Tree



Agira/San Felippo, Sicily

Roots of the Massimino and Cucchiara Families: 19th Century Agira, Sicily

The Massimino and Cucchiara families share deep roots in Agira, a hillside town in the province of Enna, Sicily. Until 1861 the town was called San Felippo d'Argirì, in honor of its patron saint Philip of Agira. This may help explain the many instances of given names like Filippo, Filippa – and later Phillip and Phyllis – in both of these families.



Salvatore Massimino and Marianna Galati raised two children to adulthood in Agira: Rosario and Grazia. While Salvatore and his daughter Grazia remained in Agira their entire lives, Rosario emigrated in 1920 at age 27; his mother Marianna joined him in America many years later, as a 74 year old widow.

Tommaso Cucchiara and Filippa Ragonesi raised nine children in Agira -- on a winding street called Via Emilia -- before immigrating to America in the early 1920s. Eventually, almost the entire Cucchiara clan re-settled within a few blocks of each other in Newark, New Jersey.

Agira is a village of impossibly steep, narrow, byzantine streets, none more so than Via Emilia.



Massimino
Granata
Galati
Terranova
Cucchiara
Ragonesi
Scilla
La Marca
Agira/San Felippo, Sicily

From Italy to America

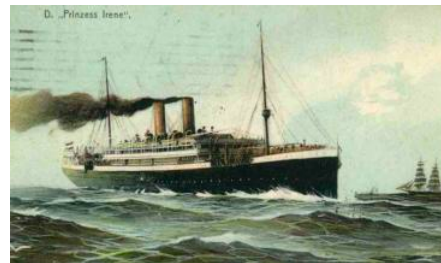
Between 1880 and 1924, more than four million Italians immigrated to the United States, most fleeing oppressive poverty in Southern Italy and Sicily.

It's difficult to imagine the physical hardships and emotional anguish that the Massimino and Cucchiara families endured in traveling from their ancestral homes to America. From saving up the money for steerage; securing and waiting for a spot on a departing ship from Naples or Palermo; enduring an overcrowded voyage that could last two weeks, with poor sanitation, bad food, and the threat of crime and disease; to the indignities of health and security inspections at Ellis Island... all these sources of stress *preceded* their setting foot on the streets of New York and Newark – an intimidating, completely foreign environment, where immigrants had to start from scratch, often unwelcomed, and facing blatant, sometimes even violent ethnic discrimination.

Despite all the challenges, these four families persevered, and lived to see their children and grandchildren live better lives.



Embarking at Port of Napoli



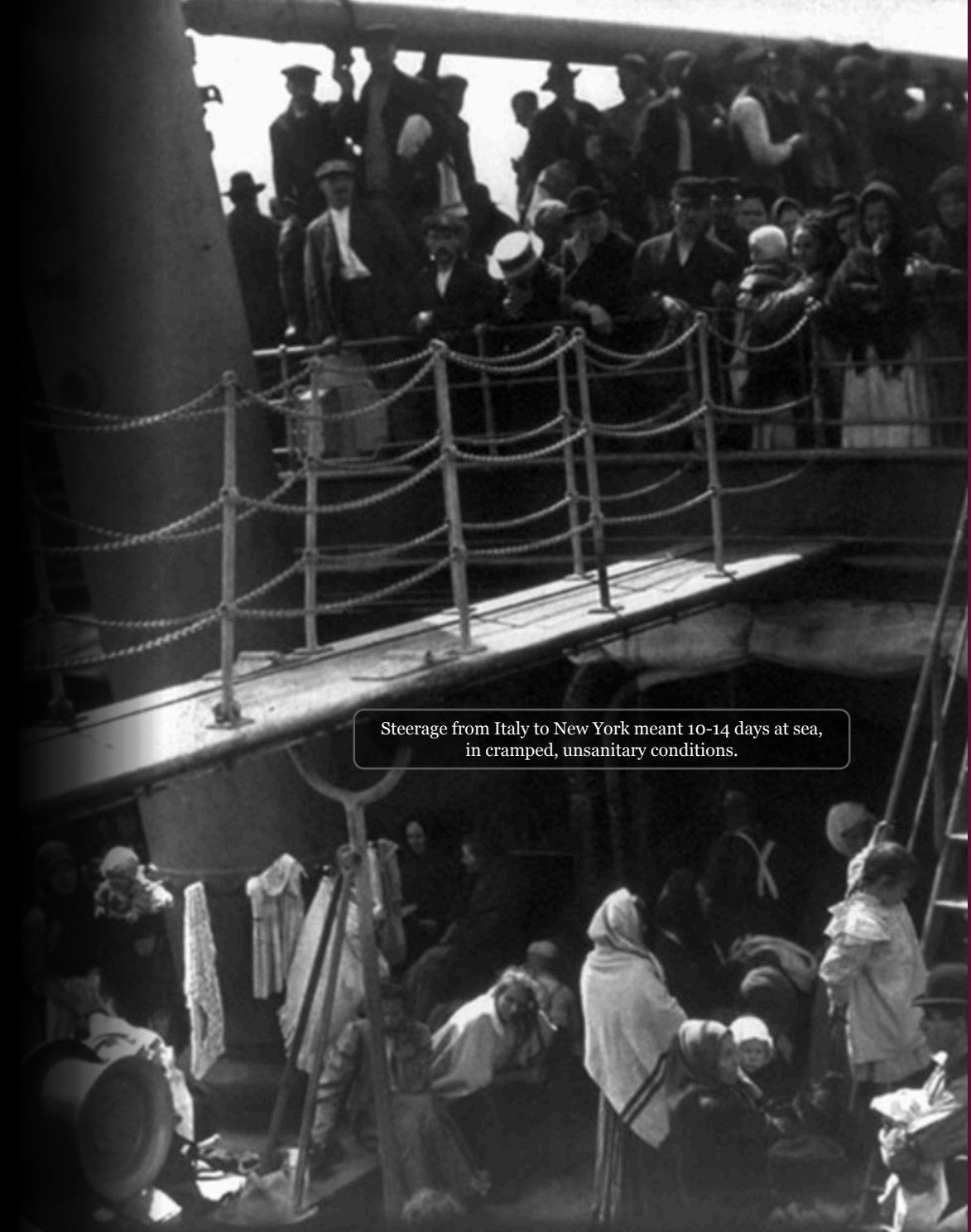
Prinzess Irene, 1908



Disembarking at Ellis Island



Awaiting inspection at Ellis Island



Steerage from Italy to New York meant 10-14 days at sea, in cramped, unsanitary conditions.

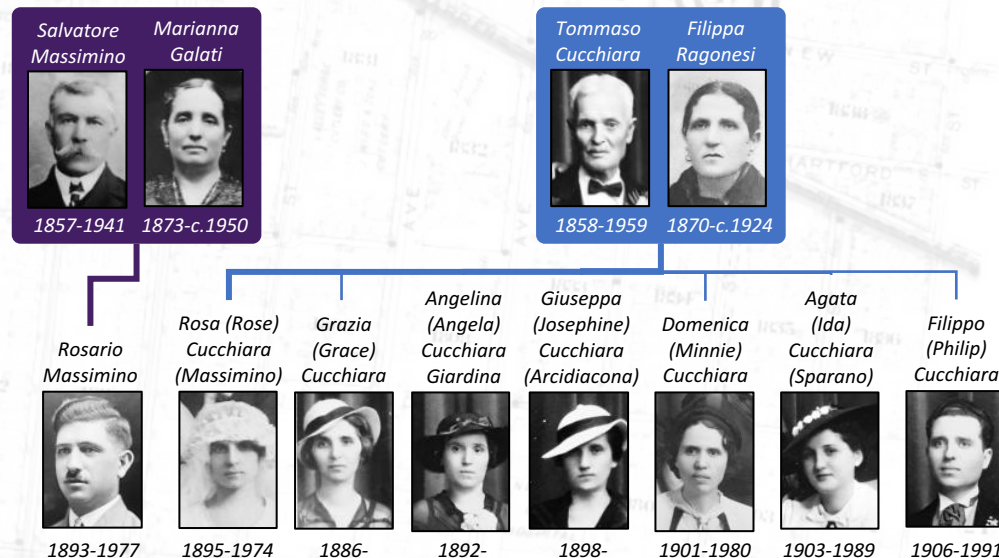
Rosario Massimino & the Cucchiaras: From Agira to Newark's Sixth Ward, 1920-30s

When Rosario Massimino and the Cucchiara family emigrated from Sicily, they resettled within just a few blocks of each other in Newark's Sixth Ward, joining a large southern Italian and Sicilian émigré community in northern New Jersey. As the map below illustrates, the immediate neighborhood was crowded with extended family, as well as a community of old neighbors transplanted from Agira.

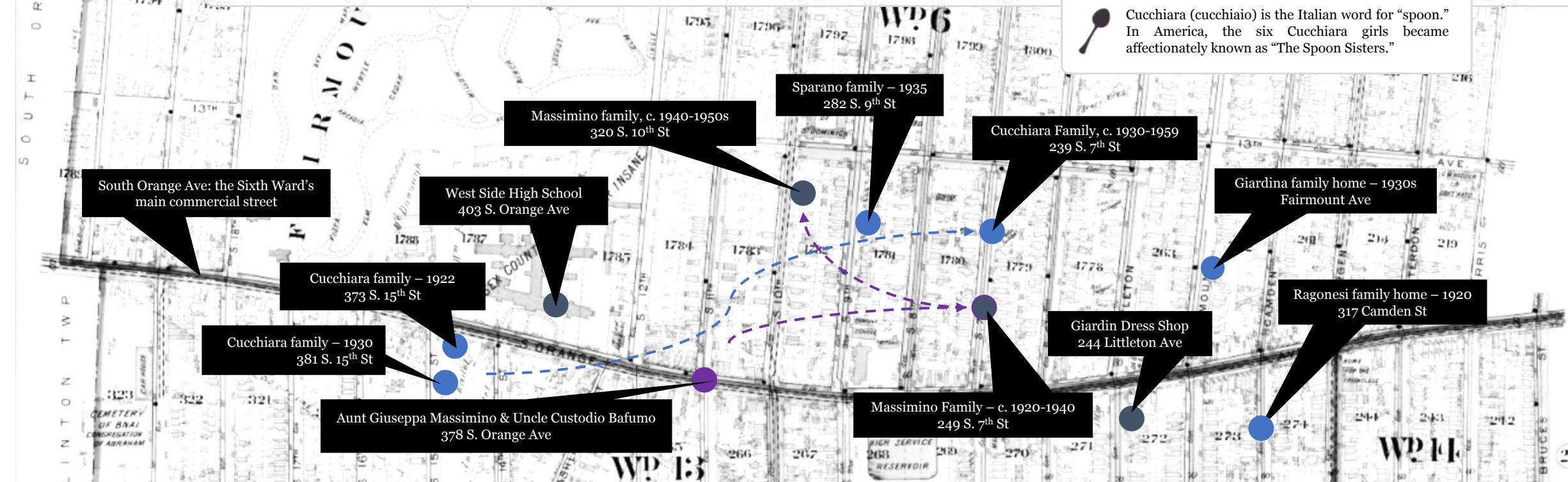
Rosario arrived at Ellis Island on Christmas Day, 1920 at the age of 27. Initially he joined his father's sister, aunt Giuseppa Massimino, and his uncle Custodio Bafumo, who lived on South Orange Avenue between South 11th and 12th Street.

The Cucchiaras arrived in three waves. On 11/12/20, Filippa Ragonesi (age 50) and daughters Angela (28) and Domenica Cucchiara (19) arrived at Ellis Island, initially staying with Filippa's brother Antonino at 317 Camden Street. Two years later, on July 26, 1922, Grazia (36), Agata (21) and Giuseppa (24), along with her husband Alfie and their infant son Domenico (1), arrived. Later that fall, on 11/1/1922, the family was finally reunited when Tommaso Cucchiara (64), along with daughter Rosa (24) and son Filippo (16) re-joined the family, who were by then living at 373 South 15th Street. Eventually the family settled at 239 South 7th Street.

With so many familiar faces of relatives and old friends on every block, Newark's Sixth Ward of the 1920s must have felt like "Little Agira."



Cucchiara (cucchiaio) is the Italian word for "spoon." In America, the six Cucchiara girls became affectionately known as "The Spoon Sisters."



The Cucchiara Clan: Newark, circa 1926

The occasion of this Cucchiara family portrait is unknown, but judging from the mostly black wardrobe and Filippa's absence, it's possible that this photograph was taken at her funeral. Multiple documents confirm Filippa was alive in 1922 (age 52), but her name was notably absent from the 1927 Newark City Directory, while those of her husband and children were listed. Her granddaughter Marion Massimino never met her maternal grandmother, and recalls that she passed away at a "fairly young" age.

Giuseppa (Josephine) was the first "Spoon Sister" to marry, c. 1920, while still in Sicily. She and her husband, Alfredo (Alfie) Arcidiacono, were married and had their first child, Domenico (Dominic) in Agira. After settling in Newark in July 1921, the couple went on to have two more children: Thomas (Tommy) and Frances. Alfie ran a neighborhood barber shop. Sadly, Josephine died at a relatively young age of "heart problems," sometime after 1930.

In July 1922, Angelina Cucchiara married Salvatore Giardina, an immigrant from Assoro, a village not far from Agira. The Giardinas had four kids: Ipollito (Paul), Tommaso (Tom), Placido (Pat), and Carolina (Carol).

Rose Cucchiara married Rosario Massimino in 1926; more to come on that.

Ida, the youngest of the Spoon Sisters, married Thomas Sparano, likely sometime in the early 1930s. The records are unclear regarding Sparano children.



Philip married Elizabetta Surdi in the mid thirties, and had at least one child, Phyllis Elizabeth Cucchiara.

Grace and Minnie both remained single and lived with their father until his death in 1959.



Grazia (Grace)
Cucchiara (age ~40)

Angelina (Angela)
Cucchiara Giardina (~34)

Filippo (Philip)
Cucchiara (~20)

Rosa (Rose) Cucchiara
Massimino (~31)

Giuseppa (Josephine)
Cucchiara Arcidiacono (~28)

Domenica (Minnie)
Cucchiara (~25)

Tommaso (Thomas)
Cucchiara (~68)

Agata (Ida)
Cucchiara Sparano (~22)

After Thomas lost his wife of ~40 years, Filippa Ragonesi, he carried on as a widower for 35 more years. In 1959, in his 101st year, his funeral was held at the Tamburro Memorial Home, just one block north of his long time home on South 7th Street.



Rose & Rosario's Wedding

December 26, 1926



St Anthony's

The Massimino-Cucchiara wedding ceremony was most likely held at St. Antoninus Church (St. Anthony's) on South Orange Avenue.

While not all the names are known, this wedding party portrait provides some clues as to Rose and Rosario's daily lives.

Among the groomsmen was Rose's brother Philip. It's curious that none of her five sisters were bridesmaids; perhaps this was simply Rose's way of not showing favor to any sister over the others.

Rose and Rosario married at a relatively mature age – in their thirties – and had two children. Both were named in honor of their grandparents: Salvatore Thomas (Sal) Massimino was born in 1927, and Marianna Phyllis (Marion) Massimino in 1932.



Giuseppe Torrissi was a friend of Rosario's, a barber who emigrated from Paterno, Sicily. He became a US citizen in 1934, and served as a witness when Rosario applied for naturalization in 1941.

Joe Torrissi (30)

Philip Cucchiara (20)

Rosa Cucchiara (31)

Rosario Massimino (33)

Nephew Dominic Arcidiacona (5),
Son of Josephine Cucchiara
and Salvatore Arcidiacona

Nephew Paul Giardina (3),
son of Angelina Cucchiara
and Salvatore Giardina

Millie Scriffignano (16)

Tessi Treppinti

Like the Cucchiaras, the Scriffignano family emigrated from Agira, and settled at 295 S. Ninth Street in Newark. Millie's father, Filippo Scriffignano, was aboard the same ship that brought Filippa, Angela and Domenica Cucchiara to Ellis Island in 1920. In the 1930 Census, Millie was an "operator" in the garment industry; it's possible that she worked with the Cucchiaras at Giardin Dress Shop.

Marianna Massimino
Age 1, c. 1933



Frances Arcidiacona (3) and
Marianna (1) in Alfie's
barbershop, c. 1933



Paul Giardina, Marianna (3),
Uncle Tom Sparano c. 1935



Age 4, c. 1936



Age 5, c. 1937

Marion's Early Childhood Memories

As shared with her daughter Lisa:

"I was born on August 20, 1932 in Newark, NJ at Columbus Hospital. I think my first home was on Fairmount Avenue, a house we shared with the Giardina family. Angelina (Cucchiara) Giardina was my mother Rose's sister; she had a daughter Carole* and three sons: Tom, Paul and Pat. There were ten of us living in the house, including my brother Sal, of course.

"The cousins had lots of fun playing together. One time the boys were in the attic and fell through the ceiling. The 'deadend kids' picture in the basement (at right) is of my cousins, Angelina's children. (Also pictured: Sal Massimino as well as Tommy and Dominic Arcidiacona, sons of Marion's aunt Josephine Cucchiara).



"Before I was old enough to go to school, I went for daycare at Mrs. DiLeo's house. This was during both pre-school and elementary school.

Dolores DiLeo

"I went to Catholic school, Saint Ann's, from first grade through eighth grade. The school was located on 7th Street, and run by Dominican sisters. My early school days were somewhat fun, and I was very well behaved. I walked to school by myself each day.

"There were limited housing options for Italian families. By the time I was at Saint Ann's, we were living in an apartment, first on 6th Street at South Orange Avenue over a bank. It was a one bedroom apartment for the four of us, and was located about three blocks from the dress factory on Littleton Avenue. We then moved to the 10th Street apartment, again just our own family. The church we attended, St. Anthony's, was 4-5 blocks from our apartment."

* Marion and her cousin Carole Giardina Lutz remained lifelong friends.



The cousins, aka "Dead End Kids", c. 1932
L to R: Tom Giardina (8), Paul Giardina (9), Tommy Arcidiacona (9),
Dominic Arcidiacona (11), Sal Massimino (5), and Pat Giardina (6)

Daily Routines of 1940s Life in Newark's Sixth Ward

Marion's recollections, continued:

"Throughout my school years, starting at age seven or eight, I took care of my older brother Sal and the household. I would iron Sal's shirts and do lots of cooking and cleaning chores. Sal did not do much of anything. He was doted on by my mother."



"I walked to school, which was seven blocks from our house. When I was six years old I got hit by a car because I was running after Sal. I did not go to the hospital. I was taken upstairs at home and don't remember anything after that. It was often scary to walk to school since cars would often stop and be threatening to me, but no harm done."

"Each day after school I would go to the factory and have a snack and talk with my grandfather, who was the janitor, and my Uncle Philip who owned it, my parents and other relatives."

"I would arrive each day at 3:15pm and leave around 4:30pm to go to the butcher's and do dinner shopping on the way home."

"Once home, I would maybe start something for dinner and then do my homework. My parents would get home around 6:30pm-7:00pm and we would eat dinner together, then do more homework. We would start all over again in the morning. This was my routine through grade eight."



"I saw my extended family every Sunday after church for meat sauce or an antipasto lunch. My dad would cook the meat sauce in the basement. My father was the main cook in the house, and my mother was more of his helper."

*"I saw my extended family
every Sunday after church
for meat sauce
or an antipasto lunch.
My dad would cook
the meat sauce
in the basement."*



Rosario Massimino became a US citizen on December 20, 1941 – two weeks after Pearl Harbor. It's understandable that the outbreak of hostilities with the axis powers would make Italian immigrants especially eager to show allegiance to the US, and demonstrate pride in their new American identity.

In 1947, Marianna Galati, the 74 year old matriarch of the Massimino family, finally came to America. She had been widowed in 1941, and came to join her son Rosario, daughter-in-law Rose, and grandchildren Salvatore and Marion in their apartment at 320 South 10th Street. It's unclear as to when she passed.



The Giardin Dress Shop: 244 Littleton Ave.

Just as the Massiminos and Cucchiaras lived in close proximity, they also *worked* together. The Giardin Dress Shop was located at 244 Littleton Avenue, about a block from South Orange Avenue.

Marion's recollections, continued:

"My mother's brother, Uncle Philip, owned the dressmaking factory where our families worked together... the Giardin Dress Shop. My mother was one of six sisters... all worked at the dress shop except Josephine (Arcidiacona). She died at a young age of heart problems.

"Both my parents worked at the dress shop... and they worked very hard. My mother worked there for 34 years... not only as the factory manager, but she trained others as well. My dad would press the clothes.

"I learned the sewing trade by cutting fabric and sewing. Finishers did hand work, and there was different machinery for hemming and buttonhole making. The Singer sewing machine in our basement is from the factory. I made money by making buttonholes, even though I was too young to be working. I made a lot of money, not by the hour but by the number of buttonholes, which was considered piece work. I saved all my money.



"I was also active in doing payroll and office work, and I spoke with lots of people in New York. New York companies would send one sample dress to the shop, and fabric, and it would be spread out on the table. The dresses had to then be cut out and duplicated. At least ten women would be working on making the dresses, with each woman making ten dresses or so. These women were called dress operators.

"One of the advantages of working there was that I had the best dresses for myself. I could order any dress that was being made, for free. ...I had a great wardrobe thanks to my mother. If I saw a dress I liked in the movies, my mother would make it for me."

The Giardin Dress Shop was an important part of the Cucchiaras' and Massiminos' lives. It brought three generations of the family together every day, and sustained them financially through The Great Depression and the war years. And for young Marion, it provided valuable work experience that built her confidence as she matured. Philip remained proprietor of the business into the 1970s.



Mark Valerio demonstrating the antique electric Singer sewing machine from Giardin Dress Shop, stored in Marion's basement. It still runs like a champ (2019).

Marion Massimino: West Side High School Class of '50

Marion's recollections, continued:

"We bought a home on South 10th Street before I went to high school. I went to West Side High School, and this is where I met my best friend Vickie Paolini. She lived in a different neighborhood. She was blond and I was the brunette. We had a lot of fun in high school. The first two years were easy thanks to Saint Ann's. I attended lots of football and basketball games. I learned baton twirling but did not join the group. Vickie had a boyfriend Michael who was not in school, and was a salesman in a store; he was older but not by much. One of my friends was Lou Ludovico, a football player and the best, nicest guy. Lou married my friend Josephine.

"I did well academically in school and got an award for Italian. My Italian teacher Mrs. Rubino wanted me to go to Italy as part of the reward/prize, but my family would not let me go. Our family had left Italy."



Vickie Paolini
West Side HS '50



Lou Ludovico
West Side HS '50



MARION DOLORES
MASSIMINO

"Mar"

320 South 10th Street

Short hair . . . winning smile . . . friendly
and considerate . . . never found without
Vickie . . . loves football, dancing and
swimming . . .

Italian Club; Art and Photography
Committee; Reception Committee;
Biography Committee; Placement Of-
fice Staff.

Marion Massimino
West Side HS '50

*"My Italian teacher wanted me
to go to Italy as part of the prize,
but my family would not let me go.
Our family had left Italy."*



West Side High School, South Orange Ave. c. 1950

Marion Massimino: Coming of Age

Marion's recollections, continued:

"I graduated high school in 1950. I then went to night school for secretarial training, which included shorthand and typing. I attended with my friend Vickie. During the day I worked as a secretary at a small office in Newark. I then got a secretarial job working for Kinsey Distilling Company (whiskey). I became friendly with one of the women who worked there, who suggested that I apply for a job at the Air Force so I could escape from the current office environment, which included older and leering men."

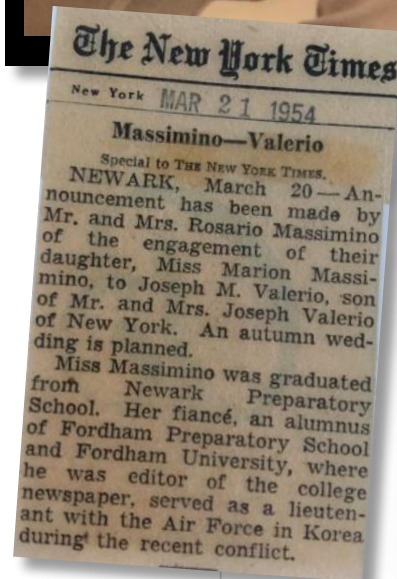


"I then went to work at the Newark (USAF) Transportation Depot. General Darr Alkire was in charge. I first worked for Major Haller, who was my boss and a wonderful man. Then I worked for Captain Gusdorf. I worked in Management and Procedures with Lieutenant Wiseglass."

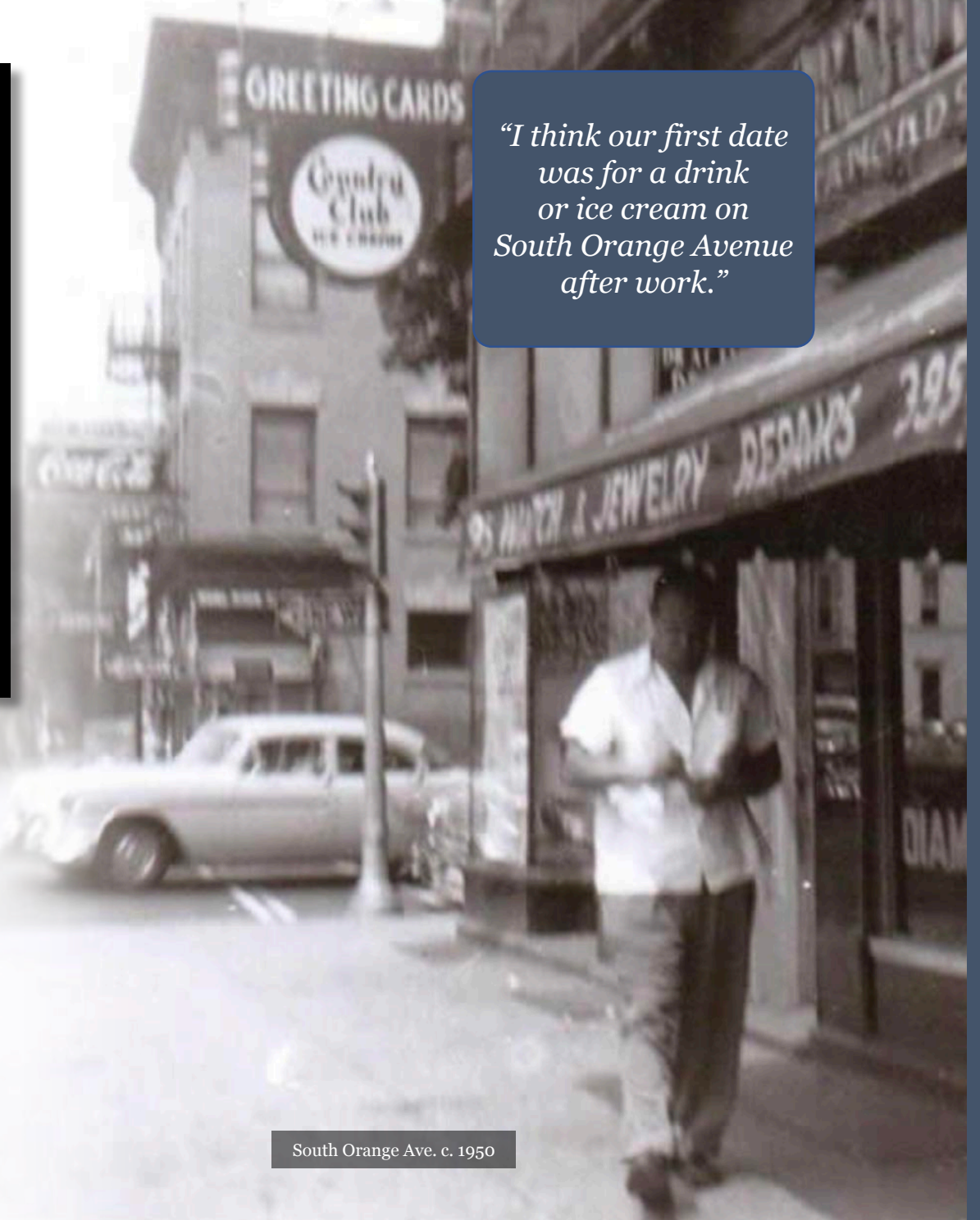
"At the time, Dad was living in the Bronx at home with his parents, commuting to the office at the NTCD. I think Dad worked there nine months to a year. I met him walking to the office one morning. He had to come upstairs to the Management Office where I worked to sign up for the Officer's Party. This is how we officially met. He bought tickets and went to the party without me, since I was just in charge of sign-up. But the next time we were walking to work, we knew who each other was."

"I think our first date was for a drink or ice cream, not sure, on South Orange Avenue after work. Then we started dating. I was also living at home with my family. Dad proposed at a soda fountain after he returned home from Korea. The Korean War ended in July 1953. I'm not sure how long our engagement was. (Judging by the newspaper announcement, it was about seven months). We were married on October 16, 1954."

Lieutenant Joseph Valerio
US Air Force, c. 1952



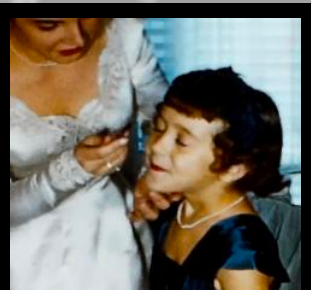
"I think our first date was for a drink or ice cream on South Orange Avenue after work."



South Orange Ave. c. 1950

The Valerio-Massimino Wedding: Newark, October 16, 1954

Marion and Joe were blessed with glorious fall weather for their wedding day, and much of the extended Valerio-Massimino family turned out for a picture perfect celebration. Marion's gown, expertly handmade by her mother Rose with the finest Parisian *peau di soie* satin, would be worn again by her daughter Lisa 29 years later. Note: these images are from Joe and Marion's 8mm film archive.



Flower Girl Lynda Massimino



Bridesmaid Vickie Paolini



Bridesmaids in blue



Joseph & Evelyn



Marion & Rose



Marion and Rose



10/16/54



Lisa in Marion's dress, 9/24/83



10/16/54



Thanksgiving with the In-Laws: Newark, 1954

When the Massiminos hosted the Valerios later that autumn to celebrate Thanksgiving – that most American of holidays – they did so in their own uniquely Italian style, starting with plenty of antipasto, Chianti, warmth and joviality.



Rosario toasts the newlyweds



Joseph and Evelyn Valerio, aglow



Rose serves the bird; Evelyn approves



Joseph and Evelyn



Ruth, Sal and Lynda Massimino



Rose presents the antipasto to an enthusiastic audience



Evelyn: Too much wine, too much song



Marion and Joe

Welcoming the Second Generation: Syracuse, 1956

Joe's job with Carrier Corporation took the young couple to Syracuse, NY, where they bought a classic suburban starter home, and decided to start their own family. On March 15, 1956, the Valerios and Massiminos joyfully welcomed Mark Joseph Valerio to the world.

For new grandparents Evelyn, Joseph, Rose and Rosario, this new chapter must have been very meaningful. They began their lives in a country undergoing severe economic, political and social distress; they overcame tremendous challenges to create a new beginning in America; and they lived to see their children and grandchildren go on to lead lives full of opportunities they never had.



Grandma Rose with newborn Mark, 3/15/56



Visiting Syracuse to celebrate the holidays...

...and Rose's 62nd birthday, 12/30/57



Mom and baby Mark with Grandma Evelyn and Grandpa Joseph, March 1956



Grandpa Rosario explaining the world to Mark, in Italian. Christmas 1957.



Joe's '54 Chevy
Bel Air Convertible