The Lives of Albanian-Americans in Worcester in the First Half of the 20th Century

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Abstract

Working with the Albanian Festival Committee and the Worcester Historical Museum, the project documented the lives of Albanian immigrant families in Worcester during the first half of the 20th century. The team conducted 40 interviews with individuals who grew up in the Albanian Beacon Street neighborhood of the city, and collected photographs and archival materials to develop a digital exhibition focusing on family life, work, childhood experiences, leisure, cultural change, and institutions. Our project serves as the starting point for a more comprehensive exhibition the museum is planning and was intended to catalyze interest in the Albanian community.

Acknowledgments

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Preserving History: The Life of Early Albanian-Americans in Worcester

"People are hungry for stories. It's part of our very being. Storytelling is a form of history, of immortality too. It goes from one generation to another" -Studs Terkel

Community oral history plays a major role in expanding upon the historical record of different communities. It primarily involves collecting stories and information by conducting interviews of a group of people "who live in some geographically bounded place," and/or have a "shared social identity" (Shopes, 2002, p.588). Conducting a community-based oral history project is a large undertaking that requires years of work and dedication, as relationships with the community take time. Shopes stated approaching life interviews with a "spirit of critical inquiry" will result in a more "nuanced and humane understanding of the way individuals live in history" (Shopes, 2002, p.597).

As opposed to just preserving and sharing the stories of what one would typically consider "historically significant" events or figures, museums have shifted focus to highlight the everyday lives of ordinary people. The Worcester Historical Museum has produced community-based exhibits such as the Water Street, LGBTQ+, and the Latinx exhibitions. All of these exhibits involved collecting information from the community to add to the Worcester Historical Museum's presentation of the narrative. These community exhibitions and histories "can open up an understanding of the local culture, those underlying beliefs and habits of mind, ... and perhaps extend outward to a larger significance" (Shopes, 2002, p.593). This allows members outside of, as well as within, the community to get a better understanding of life during a given time period.

The Worcester Historical Museum (as seen in Figure 1) is

Figure 1: The Worcester Historical Museum (Wikipedia 2019)

working with a committee from the Albanian community in Worcester to develop an exhibition on Albanian life in Worcester. To help encourage community participation in the exhibition, the Albanian committee wanted our team to document and create an online exhibition of Worcester's earliest Albanian neighborhood that, from 1900 to 1950, was home to many Albanian immigrant families. This neighborhood, centered on Beacon Street, stood as Little Albania for the Albanian community. In recent decades however, Albanian families moved from Beacon Street to other parts of the city and neighboring towns, and there is little indication any longer that Beacon Street had been the center of Albanian life in Worcester.

We conducted a series of in-depth life history interviews with members of the Worcester Albanian community to gain a more nuanced understanding of what it was like for Albanian-Americans during the time. We investigated maps, census data, and other primary sources from the time period to obtain a better understanding of the context in which people lived. All the information collected from interviews regarding the experiences

Figure 2: Family outside church on Easter Sunday, photograph submitted by participant (photograph provided by Jeanette Anas)

of the early Albanian community were synthesized into a digital exhibition. We used stories, photographs (as seen in Figure 2), transcripts, audio recordings, and more to weave an engaging narrative of life in the Beacon Street neighborhood. The digital exhibition sparked enthusiasm for the Albanian exhibit to be held at the Worcester Historical Museum.

Background

Section I will explore community museum collaborations and approaches to sharing stories of different communities. This section will introduce digital features that museums leverage in order to effectively tell the story of a community and engage visitors. The section will also examine existing story maps that have been created and look at different storytelling techniques. Section II will describe the city Albanian immigrants encountered and discuss demographics of the growing city, labor force participation, social institutions, and the process of assimilation in Worcester. Section III will describe the push factors that led Albanian immigrants to Worcester and immigrants' motivations for migration. Finally, section IV will introduce the Beacon Street neighborhood and describe how it has changed.

Museums and Effective Digital Design

In the past museums were more focused on collecting and storing information and not on communicating it to the public. Often small collections served to present the narrow view of the owner/proprietor (Taxén, 2004). Museums have come a long way from the original cabinets of curiosities in the homes of the privileged; they now cater to the interests of visitors instead of the predilections of curators and design exhibitions that capture local interests. Exhibits and events made to engage with the public embrace the idea of museums being a conduit for educating the public and give often overlooked communities more representation.

It has become increasingly common practice for museums to collect artifacts and stories from local community members. For example, the Tenement Museum in New York has an online digital storytelling exhibit called "Your Story, Our Story" that

encourages people to submit personal stories about objects and/or traditions that relate to their cultural identity. Similarly, the National Immigration Museum is continually interviewing people whose lives have been touched by Ellis Island to include in their oral history project. Most of the records are available to the public online, so the information is easily accessible.

There are a variety of ways to approach presenting firsthand accounts so that others may benefit from them, such as including collecting them in books or films, or simply making a collection of documents publicly available. Museums have extended their project portfolio to include websites archival information, published collections of interview transcripts, incorporated first-hand accounts into documentaries, and even partnered with other organizations to produce plays depicting the experience of people during a certain time and place (Latino History Project, n.d.; Shopes, 2015). In addition to just compiling information, museums have created engaging exhibits and social media platforms to communicate with the public in a memorable and accessible way. For example, the Museum of Jewish Heritage has a podcast called "Those Who Were There:, Voices from the Holocaust" that shares testimonies from Holocaust survivors, liberators, and witnesses (Those Who Were There Podcast Series | Mjhnyc.Org, n.d.).

There have been many collaborations between museums and communities to revive no longer existent neighborhoods. One example is an exhibition by the Levine Museum showcasing the Brooklyn Neighborhood in Charlotte, North Carolina, which was destroyed during renovations to make room for what is now Charlotte's Second Ward. The exhibit is titled Brooklyn: Once a City Within a City and it "explores the rise and demise of Charlotte's Brooklyn neighborhood, once the most thriving and vibrant black community in the Carolinas" (Levine Museum of the New South, 2019). To achieve this, the exhibit features video recordings of people who lived in the neighborhood, as well as an

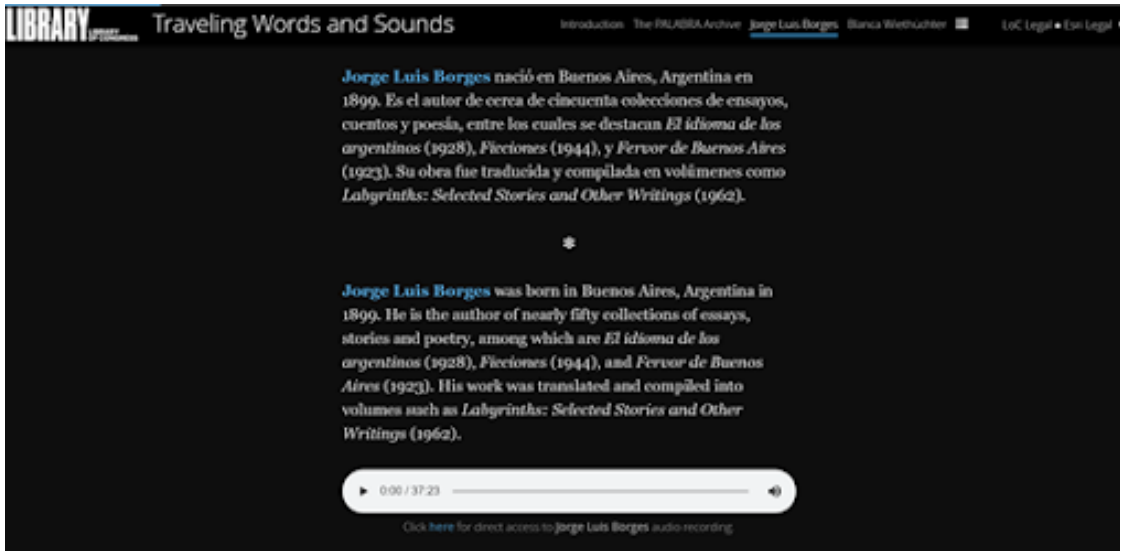

Figure 3: This figure shows a section from a story map including an audio recording and a short bio of the individual who is speaking. (Traveling Words and Sounds, n.d.)

interactive component. The interactive component allows visitors to utilize a tablet to learn more information about items on display, and stations near displays where visitors are given a prompt to write down their feelings and reactions (Levine Museum of the New South, 2019). This could indicate that the primary themes of this exhibit would be education of the public and self-improvement. This is evident through the focus of storytelling in the exhibit components, and the emphasis on questioning one's feelings about topics relevant to the Brooklyn Neighborhood.

Additionally, another neighborhood in which the community worked closely with a museum to create an exhibit was the South Conejos Street neighborhood located in Colorado Springs. The neighborhood was very small, and home to many Hispanic families; however, it was demolished during the beginning of the 21st century to make room for a park. The exhibit showcasing his neighborhood included a replica of a grocery store that was in the neighborhood, a hand-drawn map of the neighborhood, and many residents' belongings (Hancock, 2020). It is evident that a main theme of the exhibit was remembrance, as many exhibit components were highlighting what the neighborhood was like before it was demolished. The exhibit provides an immersive experience that gives visitors insight into what daily life was like.

Many different factors can go into creating an immersive experience, often involving transformation of the surrounding environment. When attempting to make an immersive exhibition, one aims to reduce all distance between the visitor and the material they are absorbing. Having a digital exhibit inherently comes with logistical and technological constraints that limit how immersive it is capable of being. One study regarding the authenticity of immersive design for education concluded that while the use of immersive media itself (such as virtual reality) can be a powerful education tool, it is not necessary when another form of media can effectively do the same job (Jacobson, 2017). The same study also remarks that there still iexists many barriers and expenses that keep use of virtual reality from being accessible. The engagement of multiple of the user's senses has also been shown to aid in immersion (Pursey & Lomas, 2018). In creating a virtual exhibit that is easily accessible to as broad of an audience as possible, the senses that can be engaged are sight and sound. In this case designers must make the most of visual and audio elements, like providing the viewers with many images and sounds to really drive home and exemplify what is meant to be conveyed at a certain section.

Inventive design of museum exhibits allows visitors to engage and connect more with the material. Effective exhibit design relies on several criteria, such as identifying and appealing to the target audience, incorporating storytelling techniques, creating an immersive experience, and precipitating interaction between the viewer and the content. These principles do not only exist independently, but often overlap and complement each other. By identifying the target audience, exhibit designers can make sure the level of complexity of the information being presented is appropriate. In the case of historical exhibits specifically, the goal is to tell a story, so incorporating storytelling techniques is helpful for getting the intended points across. Incorporating multiple forms of media can reinforce the information being presented and be used as a storytelling technique, as well as to aid in immersion. There was a case in which journalism students worked on an exhibit at the Michigan State University Museum on items from a 1920s general store (Ware, 2016). They created audio profiles on specific objects that visitors could access with their smart devices. Additionally, they compiled clips of sounds that would be often heard in general stores and played them in an area where visitors encountered objects from such stores to add to the immersive atmosphere. Including some sort of nteractive aspect to an exhibit naturally increases participation and allows patrons to engage with the material. For example, the Mob Museum has a "Global Networks Touch Wall" which makes use of multiple forms of media and lets visitors "explore the intricate world of organized crime today through a mix of video,

images, maps and text" (Global Networks Touch Wall, n.d.). Interactive components like these really allow patrons to follow lines of inquiry on specific topics that interest them by giving them the choice to see what they want. Incorporating interactive components and multiple forms of media would be especially useful for a digital exhibition because it would help engage visitors so they don't feel like they're just reading a textbook.

Many of the above-mentioned design features are directly translatable to a digital context. For example, the virtual analog of having sounds play as one physically moves through the rooms of a brick-and-mortar exhibit is to have audio auto-play on a page as users scroll to a certain area of a story map. Additionally, the concept of having patrons consciously choose to listen to audio by accessing audio profiles on their mobile devices in the general store exhibit very easily lends itself to a virtual setting because users would simply have to press a button to play audio without having to divert their attention from the site.

Naturally multimedia pieces like interactive touch screens and films can be incorporated into a virtual setting whereas components that rely on physical presence, such as viewing artifacts or navigating the layout of the space can only be approximated. The virtual proxy for visitors navigating a physical space is navigating a website. When designing digitally one needs to consider how pre-set the path that the user takes is. For instance, digital exhibits involving maps can guide the user through a predetermined path by marking location pins in numerical order or, more subtly, by zooming in on specific locations to show additional data as the user scrolls forward. Similar to a physical exhibit, the user can also skip to sections of particular interest in a story map. Including heading tabs at the top of the screen, for instance, enables users to select to jump right to a certain part of the page. For example, the story map pictured in Figure 4 includes both heading tabs and marked pins.

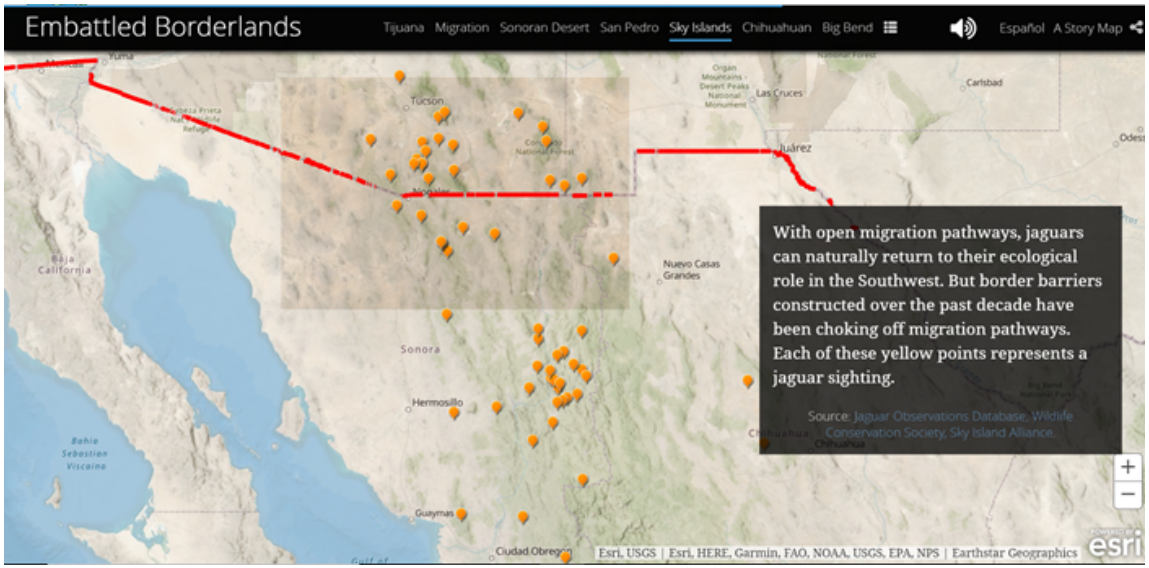

Figure 4: This figure shows part of a story map in which data points are marked by pins in locations on a map. (Embattled Borderlands, n.d.)

The Immigrant Neighborhoods of Worcester in the Early 20th Century

Immigrant Demographics

Albanians emigrating to Worcester in the early 20th century found a rapidly growing city filled with many different individuals of different backgrounds. The population increased nearly 65% from 1900-1920 and the number of wage earners nearly doubled as it rose from 20,000 to 39,000 workers. The dramatic increase in population was partly due to the large influx of immigrants from Europe, Canada, and the Near East, which contributed to Worcester's drastic changes (Rosenzweig, 1983).

By 1915, Worcester had reached population numbers greater than 160,000, which in turn made Worcester "three times larger than the next largest town" in Massachusetts (*Historic and Archaeological Resources of Central Massachusetts,* 1985, p.161).

The large foreign-born population in Worcester was composed of people from a multitude of different backgrounds as seen in Figure 5. In 1905, Worcester's foreign-born population was 41,484 (32% of Worcester's total population) (Historic and Archaeological Resources of Central Massachusetts, 1985).

By 1920, Worcester's foreign-born population skyrocketed. According to Rosenzweig (1983, p.29), "almost 72 percent of Worcester's residents were of foreign birth or parentage."

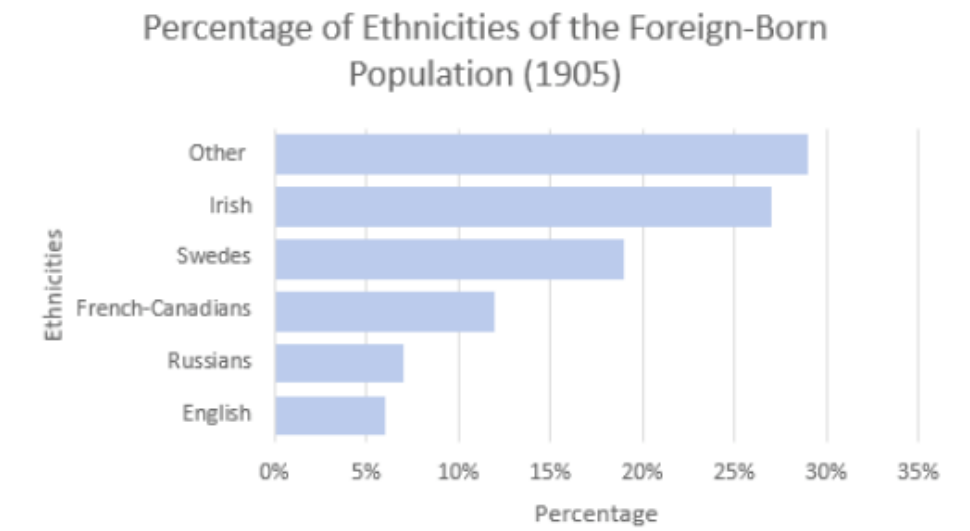

Figure 5: This figure shows the percentages of the foreign-born population based on ethnicity in Worcester in 1905 (Historic and Archaeological Resources of Central Massachusetts, 1985)

Labor Force Participation

Many immigrants came to the United States to pursue employment opportunities. Immigrants made up a large portion of the labor force in the city's expanding factories. The prosperity of the city was largely due to the available opportunities involving job availability, earning higher wages, and education (Historic and Archaeological Resources of Central Massachusetts, 1985). Just as Worcester's population was diverse, so were the industries. During the late 19th to the early 20th century, no single industry in Worcester made up more than a quarter of the city's labor force. Worcester's three largest industries, The Norton Company, American Steel & Wire Company, and Crompton & Knowles Loom Work, combined employed only 41 percent of the total labor force in 1880. Comparatively, 83 percent of Fall River workers

were employed in cotton mills and 82 percent of workers in Lynn had jobs in boot and shoe shops. Although Worcester had a variety of industries, metal trades and machinery accounted for roughly 40 percent of the city's production during this time period (Rosenzweig, 1983). The immigrant and ethnic population made up the majority of the labor force in the blue-collar sector however, most of those jobs were going to men. Compared to other Massachusetts cities that had large textile factories, women's opportunity in the labor force was limited in Worcester (Rosenzweig, 1983).

The first six companies listed in Table 1 were the major industries in Worcester in the mid 1900s and each of them had over 1,000 employees. Although this table does not list all of the factories, there were a total of approximately 40 larger companies ranging from 250 to 4,500 workers (Senosk, 1955, pp. 50-51). This also only focuses on major factories, the data does not account for small family-owned stores that emerged all over Worcester.

Figure 6 details the locations of eight factories in the city, five of which are located near the center. There is a direct relation between the location of the factories and the population distribution. During the daytime, the population of Worcester was heavily concentrated in the center of the city, where most of the factories were located.

This can be recognized in Figure 7, where each dot represents fifty persons and the darkest area during the daytime is in the center. The red star represents the approximate location of the Beacon Street community that we will be researching further.

While the increase in industries was a major part of Worcester at the time, the chance to start or run businesses was an opportunity many took advantage of in general. Of the Jewish community that was employed in 1942, "36.2 percent owned their own businesses" (Mopsik, 1945, p.58). Small family-owned businesses were very common throughout different communities like the Jewish community.

Major Industries and Number of Employees (1951)	
Company	**Number Employed**
1. The Norton Company	4,480
2. American Steel & Wire Company	2,990
3. Crompton & Knowles Loom Work	2,730
4. The Telechron Company	1,700
5. Heald Machine Company	1,180
6. Wyman-Gordon Company	1,160
7. Reed & Prince Mfg. Company	1,100
11. Brown, H.H. Shoe Company	700
15. Graton & Knight Company	550
16. Johnson Steel & Wire Company Inc.	540

Table 1: This table shows some of the major industries and the number of employees in 1951 (Senosk, 1955, pp. 50-51)

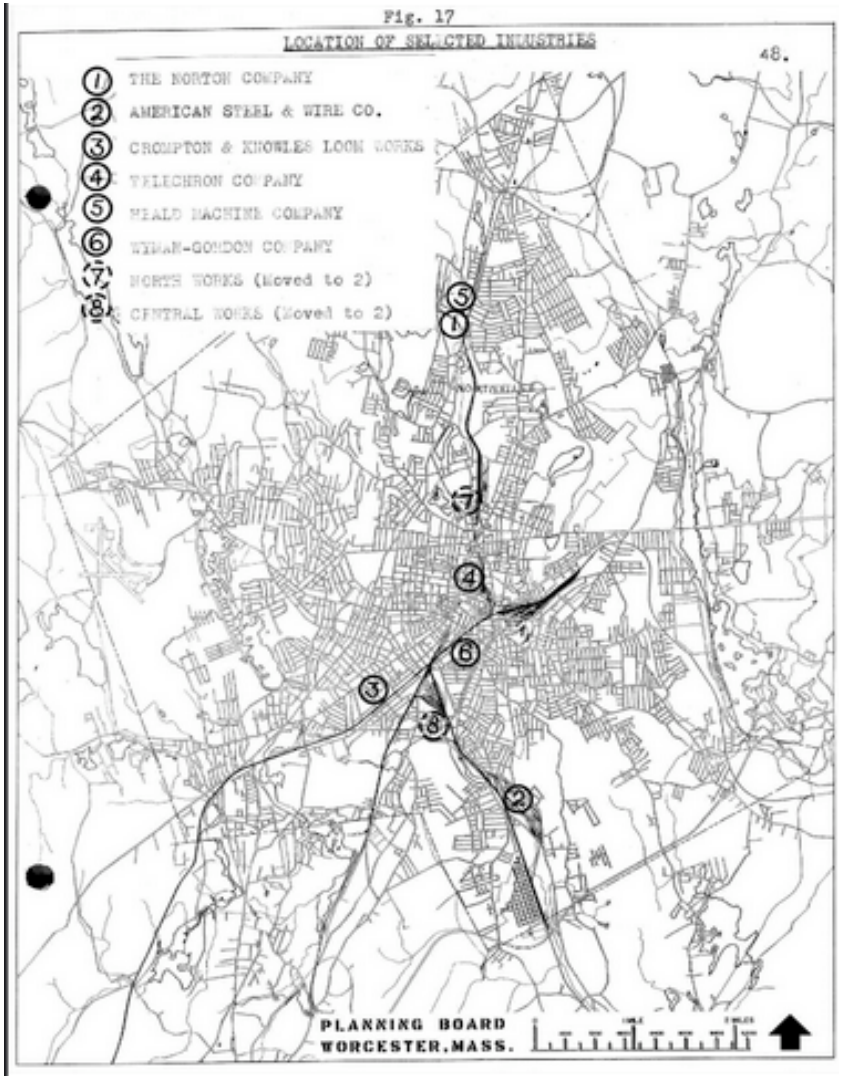

Figure 6: This map shows the locations of 8 major factories located in Worcester in the mid-20th century. The faint diamond outline portrays the boundaries of Worcester (Senosk, 1955, p.48)

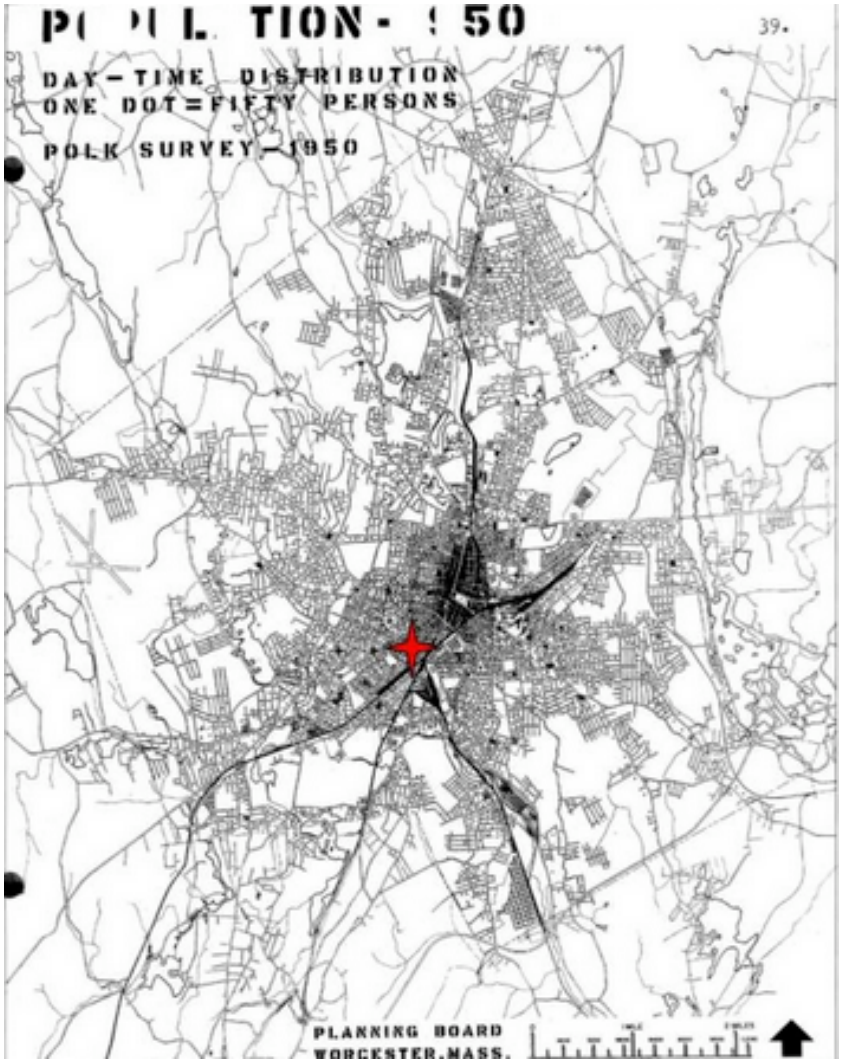

Figure 7: This map shows the concentration of immigrants in Worcester during the daytime in 1950 (Senosk, 1955, p.39)

Social Institutions

Different social institutions played a tremendous role in the lives of immigrants helping them adapt to a new life in a new city by establishing a sense of community. There were certain institutions that gave these immigrants that opportunity, specifically, "churches, families, lodges, saloons, cafes, [that] structured the experience of most Worcester immigrants." (Rosenzweig, 1983, p.31). Religious institutions were a common place where communities could gather. It was very common for different ethnic communities to settle near an already established church or establish a church in their community. Since church was a major part of most communities, this was a common place for gatherings to happen. Individuals would congregate here and bond over their ideals and traditions.

Social institutions helped communities establish and protect their core beliefs. These institutions aided in "the development and preservation of a distinctive way of life and set of values" (Rosenzweig, 1983, p.27). They helped encourage a sense of community for the different ethnic groups. Individuals in ethnic communities also "patronized their own businesses within ethnic communities, most notably the French Canadians, Swedes, Italians, Lithuanians, Poles, and Jews" (Historic and Archaeological Resources of Central Massachusetts, 1985, p.171).

Schools can be viewed as another social institution for younger generations. School was a place for children to come together and form communities of their own. From 1880 to 1915, the large influx of immigrants caused the city of Worcester to build 45 new schools (Southwick, 2011). All these schools were built so the immigrant children and foreign-born population would have the opportunity to go to school. For many immigrants, school has "held a central place in the mythologies celebrating the assimilation of immigrants into American life" (Olneck & Lazerson, 1974, p.453). Children used school, in comparison to how adults used work, to foster connections with other individuals of the same and different backgrounds.

Spacial Distribution of Ethnic Neighborhoodss

Ethnic communities in Worcester were often divided up in different regions. Rosenzweig (1983) argues that Worcester was spatially divided along class lines, with wealthier, native-born residents living in single family homes in the Westside while working class immigrant families lived on the Eastside in triple-deckers. There were different ethnic communities that could be seen in Worcester in the early 20th century. Some of the groups included the Irish, French Canadians, Italians, Syrians, Swedes-Finns (including Swedes and Finns), Albanians, and Greeks. These communities settled in different locations around the city, however, they mostly settled in the Eastside, as seen in Figure 8.

Figure 8: This map shows where the different immigrant communities settled in Worcester (Rosenzweig, 1983, p.27-30)

These locations were “within walking distance of the downtown shops and factories” because poorer families did not have cars, so they walked everywhere (Rosenzweig, 1983, p.27). Ethnic communities had many benefits for immigrants, as they allowed “workers a sphere in which they could carry out a mode of life and express values, beliefs, and traditions significantly different from those prescribed by the dominant industrial elite” (Rosenzweig, 1983, p.27). These different communities increased the diversity in Worcester and allowed immigrants to feel a sense of home and community after moving to a new country.

Assimilation

Assimilation and the preservation of culture are key components to any ethnic group immigrating to another country. Overcoming the language barrier is one challenge that many immigrants had to overcome. Most families spoke their native language at home and English elsewhere. For individuals that were learning a new language, children often adapted quicker. From a personal account taken from a journal, it took a child “about six months [to speak] English fluently. [While for his parents], it took [...] much longer.” (Nemeth & Editor, 1998). Children were able to learn English while attending school, while adults often had to rely on their workplace or other social activities to learn the language. In the 1910s, the Industrial Department of the Cambridge Association supervised English courses offered to foreign-born individuals in which one year over 1200 adults in Massachusetts participated and 175 of which were in Worcester (Tupper, 1914). Assimilation took place in many settings, common social locations made the process of assimilation easier, “the movie theaters ... [provided] an arena for ethnic groups to mingle...the friendships made, expectations raised, and "American" self-perceptions encouraged at the movies may have eased the way to union activism in the 1930s and 1940s” (Kazal, 1995, p.466). These locations provided the opportunities for different ethnic communities to interact with the American public, making them more familiar with each other and allowing them to feel more comfortable adapting to American culture.

The first wave of immigrants and their children all have a strong connection to their ethnicity and work hard to learn and preserve their cultural traditions. Different immigrant groups in Worcester that were related to the Irish group acknowledged that “Irish born seemed far more intensely loyal to their ethnic group than the second generation” (Meagher, 1985, p.275). The older generation tries to keep some of their traditions and values from home, which is often different from the typical American traditions and culture. Certain groups would only refer to immigrants as their ethnicity, for example the “Worcester Irish [described] Irish immigrants as simply "Irishmen," never "Americans," ... nor even "Irish Americans," a description applied almost exclusively to members of the new Irish generation” (Meagher, 1985, p.276). Members of a certain ethnic group would make the distinction between the old generation born in the native country and the new generation born in the states.

The Arrival of Albanian Immigrants

Political turmoil and economic hardship led many Albanians to emigrate to the United States. The decline of the Ottoman empire led to decades of unrelenting conflict in Albania. The Ottomans “promised to relieve the Albanians of their heavy burden of taxation and to award them full constitutional rights together with their privileges” (Vickers, 1995, p.54). They also promised that they would remain in possession of their arms and be allowed to have schools which taught in their own language. However, these promises were not kept. The growing sense of nationalism amongst Albanians also helped drive a wedge between the Albanians and the Ottomans. Overall, this led to many uprisings of Albanians against the Ottomans. Other countries surrounding the Ottoman Empire, such as Serbia,

Greece, and Bulgaria, noticed the decline and wanted to utilize the opportunity to expand their respective empires. Surrounding governments supplied Albanian leaders with weapons and money to revolt against the Ottoman Empire (Hall, 2000). The end of the Ottoman empire brought instability to the region and conflict between emerging nation states such as Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania. This eventually led to the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913. Albanians hoped to remain neutral and uninvolved during the wars. However, due to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, they fought with Balkan armies, and many young Albanian men were drafted to fight which led to many fleeing the country (Vullnetari, 2007). The Balkan states continued to fight over claims to land of the Ottoman Empire, which included Albania. Eventually, many were fighting for a piece of Albania both in terms of physical land and political influence. During World War I, supporters of various rebel groups fought among themselves for political influence such as the Serbs and Italians. Albania was broken into pieces, and Albanians pleaded for the reunification of their country.

Economic Conditions

A major factor that influenced Albanians to migrate elsewhere was the lackluster economic conditions in Albania. These difficulties resulted in many families looking for a permanent settlement in other areas where the economy was flourishing and full of opportunity, such as the United States. After World War I, "Albania was devastated and bankrupt, having been continuously at war since 1910" (Vickers, 1995, p. 98). As a result, many Albanians were forced to sell their possessions in an attempt to pay their debts. Widespread poverty led to an increase in Albanians looking for jobs. After independence in 1912, Albania had "neither a central bank and a banking system, nor a national currency" (Pisha et al., 2014, p.355). This meant that exchange rates for different currencies differed throughout Albania and money was managed locally, which overall created instability of the economy. Even after becoming an independent nation, Albania essentially "reverted back to how it had been before the war, with reampant brigandage and lawlessness" (Vickers, 1995, p.98). During this time, many Albanians were taxed heavily, and struggled to earn money to support their families. It was also during this time that the United States was undergoing rapid industrialization. As a consequence, many Albanians immigrated to the United States in an attempt to obtain these jobs. The acceptance of immigrants into the United States demonstrated the need for manpower in the labor force (Eckler & Zlotnick, 1949). The vast availability of jobs was a very attractive quality of the United States to Albanians, since job opportunities were limited in Albania. Reports quickly spread throughout southern Albania that "In America there is much money for those who would travel many miles over the water to seek fortune" (Members of the Federal Writers' Project, 1939, p.6). Overall, the lack of economic prosperity in Albania and the potential for a better life financially was a driving factor in their decision to migrate to the United States.

Albanian Immigrant Demographics and Statistics

While Albanians began immigrating to the United States prior to the 20th century, the first major wave of immigration occurred in the years 1900 to 1925. The largest Albanian settlements consisted of people from southern Albania, primarily the Korçë region. Widespread poverty existed throughout southern Albania and led to increased mortality rates and diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria (Members of the Federal Writers' Project, 1939).

Migrants were primarily "young males who hoped to return home after they made money on the new continent" (Ragaru & Dymi, 2004, p.3). During and prior to the 20th century, Albania had a patriarchal system of society, which meant that typically only men worked to provide for their families, not women. Because of this, men were more likely to migrate to the United

States, as they were the sole breadwinners of their families. The ratio of men to women during the early period of Albanian migration up until 1925 was 10 to 1.

Sailing to America cost over fifty dollars in the early 19th century (with inflation, this is approximately a thousand dollars today). It was common for one member of a household to migrate to the United States and make enough money to travel back to Albania. Oftentimes, "immigrants were dependent for traveling expenses upon the money of friends and relatives already in America" (Members of the Federal Writers' Project, 1939, p.7). Albanians would have to obtain the loans for travel from moneylenders, which had high interest rates. Any land owned by the borrower would serve as security, and moneylenders would even have people in the United States to make sure that loans were paid off (Members of the Federal Writers' Project, 1939). This made it difficult for many Albanian families to migrate to the United States, especially during a time of financial hardship.

The statistics regarding early Albanian migration contain discrepancies because there was no Albanian state. Albanians were subjects of the Ottoman Empire and were counted as Turkish and to a lesser extent Greek. Based on census data, Jurgens (2014) estimates that "by the late 1930s, there were between 35,000 and 60,000 Albanians in the United States, most of them Orthodox Christians in New England." However, the Immigration Act of 1924 was passed, which limited the number of immigrants that were granted entry into the United States. This law specifically enforced that the annual number of new immigrants could not surpass more than "two percent of the number of immigrants from that country who were already living in the United States in 1890" (Milestones: 1921–1936 - Office of the Historian, n.d.). This strictly limited the number of Albanians that could immigrate to the United States, as prior to 1900, Albania was not recognized as an independent nation.

Another reason for statistical discrepancies is that oftentimes the number of the foreign-born individuals would be based on the country they came from before the United States and not their place of birth. Table 2 depicts population data from the 20th century by country of origin.

	Total, Southern and Eastern Europe	Eastern Europe						
		Total	Albania	Bulgaria	Czechoslovakia	Estonia	Hungary	Latvia
	Ad384	Ad385	Ad386	Ad387	Ad388	Ad389	Ad390	Ad391
Year	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
1850 [9]	9,672	1,520	—	—	—	—	—	—
1860 [9]	32,312	10,586	—	—	—	—	—	—
1870	93,824	63,408	—	—	40,289	—	3,737	—
1880	248,620	182,371	—	—	85,361	—	11,526	—
1890	728,851	512,464	—	—	118,106	—	62,435	—
1900	1,674,648	1,134,680	—	—	156,891	—	145,714	—
1910	4,500,932	2,956,783	— [13]	11,498	219,214	—	495,609	—
1920	5,670,927	3,731,327	5,608	10,477	362,438	—	397,283	—
1930	5,918,982	3,785,890	8,814	9,399	491,638	3,550	274,450	20,673
1940 [10]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1950 [11]	—	—	—	—	278,438	—	268,183	—
1960 [11]	3,907,020	2,365,579	9,618	8,223	227,618	13,991	245,252	50,681
1970 [11]	3,090,991	1,727,796	9,180	8,609	160,899	12,163	183,236	41,707
1980 [11]	2,748,547	1,411,742	7,381	8,463	112,707	12,169	144,368	34,349
1990 [11]	2,285,513	1,231,372	5,627	8,579	87,020	9,210	110,337	26,179

Table 2: *Table from the Historical Statistics of the United States displaying the percentages of foreign-born population by country of birth between 1850 to 1990 (Foreign-Born Population, by Country of Birth: 1850-1990, n.d.)*

In the 1920s there were approximately 5,608 Albanian-born individuals in the United States and in the 1930s there were 8,814. This is much less than the numbers discussed previously because these numbers only take the number of foreign-born individuals into account; meaning that individuals of Albanian parentage born in the United States are not counted. Even on government records, "Albanian" frequently wasn't even recognized as a nationality (Members of the Federal Writers' Project, 1939). Thus, it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of Albanians that immigrated to the United States during the early 20th century.

Reimagining the Beacon Street Neighborhood

The Beacon Street Neighborhood

The Beacon Street neighborhood was the epicenter of Albanian culture in Worcester during the first half of the 20th century. The neighborhood was home to many Albanian immigrant families, as well as factories, small corner stores, and organizations such as the Boy's Club. For the purposes of this project, the Beacon Street neighborhood is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Compilation of Sanborn Fire Insurance maps depicting the Beacon Street neighborhood. The street highlighted in green is Beacon Street and the map also includes streets such as Tainter Street, Kilby Street, Lagrange Street, Jackson Street, and Hermon Street. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts., 1910)

The factories and companies that were located in the Beacon Street neighborhood (see Figure 10) include the Worcester Machine Screw Company, Cranska Thread Company, Beacon Lumber & Fuel, Harwood & Quincy Machine Company, and Standard Foundry Company (*Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts.*, 1910). Given the nature of the factories, distinct smells and sounds emulated from them, as well as noxious chemicals being released in the air. People working in the cotton textile factories at the time developed a "hacking cough" and informed others that working in those factories would lead to lung diseases (Members of the Federal Writers' Project, 1939, p.23).

There were also institutions and organizations present in the neighborhood. As discussed above, there was a recurring pattern of migration in Worcester at the time, where ethnic communities would settle near or establish a place of worship in their community. In the case of the Albanian community that settled in the Beacon Street neighborhood, they had the St. Mary's Orthodox church that was located at the corner of Jaques Ave and Wellington St. The St. Mary's Orthodox church was the center of worship for the Albanians in Worcester and was one of six Albanian Orthodox churches in Massachusetts by 1939. The Albanian church played a large role in the development of some Albanian societies and clubs such as Daughters of Korcha, Drenovare Society, and The Women's Guild of St. Mary's church.

The Albanian American National Organization (A.A.N.O.) and the Pan-American Federation of America (Vatra or "the hearth" in Albanian) were two of the larger societies/organizations that played a large role in the local and national Albanian community. Vatra was an organization established in April 1912 and has worked to support the learning of the English and Albanian languages among Albanian-Americans, to protect the Albanian immigrants and workers, to encourage relationships between Albanian immigrants and American citizens and institutions, and to promote love for their culture (*WELCOME- MIRESEVINI*). A.A.N.O. was established in 1946 and has worked to "celebrate Albanian traditions and customs," "encourage friendship and unity among all Albanian-Americans," "educate the general populace of the majesty of being of Albanian descent," and support the education of Albanian-American youth (*Albanian American National Organization*). At the emergence of these two organizations, chapters were established in different areas of New England, as well as the United States, in which Worcester had its own branch.

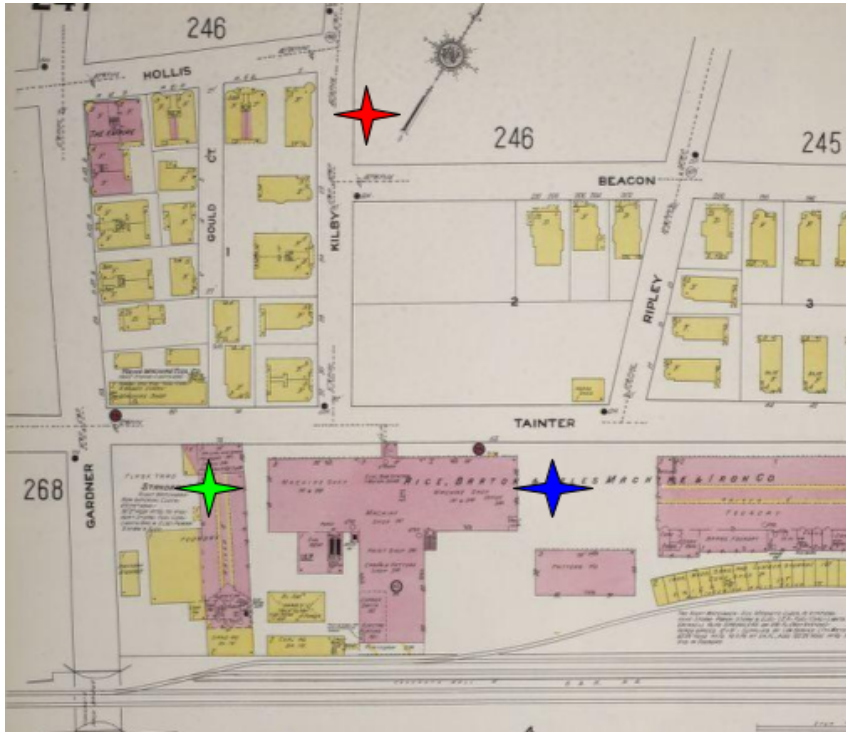

Figure 10: Another portion of the Beacon Street neighborhood that includes Beacon St, Ripley St, Kilby St, and Tainter St. The blue marker represents the Rice, Barton and Fales Machine & Iron Co., the green marker represents Standard Foundry Co., and the red marker represents Christo's market. This section is located on the left side of Figure 9. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts., 1910)

In addition to the larger institutions, the Beacon street neighborhood contained numerous small corner stores as seen in Figures 10 and 11. There were many Albanian-owned businesses in the neighborhood that made shopping convenient for locals so that they did not have to walk all the way to Worcester Market (which was located on the Ionic Ave end of the neighborhood).

Figure 11: Another portion of the Beacon St neighborhood that includes Benefit St, Hammond St, and Ripley St. The red markers indicate Albanian-owned stores. The locations of the Albanian-owned stores on the map are not exact, they are an estimation based on descriptions from personal accounts. This section is towards the center of the map in Figure 9. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts., 1910)

Present Day

Today, the Beacon Street neighborhood looks very different from what it did during the 1920s. Many of the original three-deckers have been destroyed or renovated, and parts of streets, such as Tainter Street, have been removed to accommodate for other buildings/neighborhood projects. Figure 12 portrays a residential view of Beacon Street in 1929. The houses in this view are very close together and in the background there are a few three-decker style homes. It was a picturesque neighborhood that many Albanians called home. In the Beacon Street neighborhood today, vehicles are more prevalent, although there are fewer triple deckers. Many of the factories and small

Figure 12: Photograph of Residential View of Beacon Street, circa 1929 (Beacon Street - June 3, 1929, n.d.)

Albanian owned corner stores no longer exist, as much of the space along the neighborhood is now taken up by restaurants and chain stores. The neighborhood is no longer home to many Albanian families, as other ethnic groups and communities have found shelter in that neighborhood.

The stories of the early Albanian community living in the Beacon Street neighborhood have yet to be documented. The early wave of Albanian migrants, the majority of whom from the Korçë region, have played a large role in setting the foundation for what the Albanian community is today.

Methodology

The goal of our project was to document the lives of Albanian immigrant families in Worcester during the first half of the 20th century, so that we could tell a compelling story of a long-gone Albanian neighborhood in Worcester, as well as cultivate interest and encourage participation from the Albanian community for the exhibition at the Worcester Historical Museum.

The team identified four objectives to structure our research:

1.) documenting the working lives of Albanian-Americans

2.) illustrating and recreating familial relationships and social lives of Albanian-Americans in the Beacon Street neighborhood

3.) examining the role and impact of institutions on the lives of Albanians in the Beacon Street neighborhood

4.) determining how to best present the information we gather as a cohesive and engaging narrative.

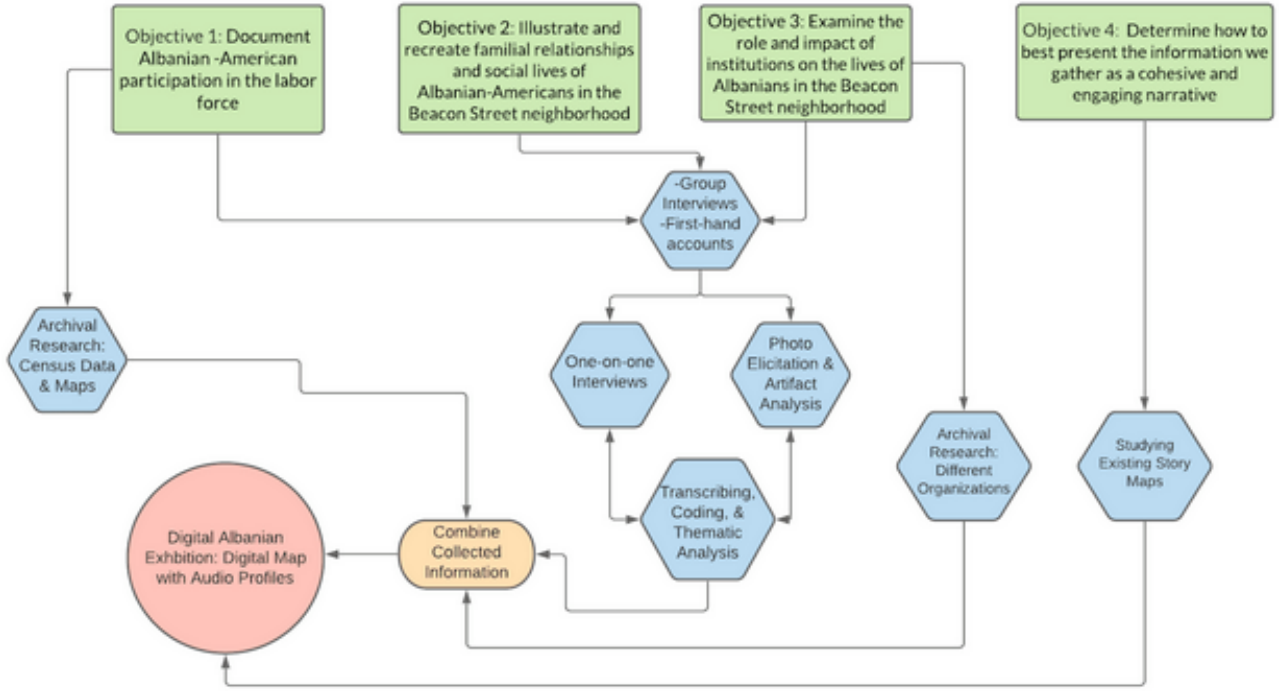

Figure 13: Flowchart that describes the process to go from the objectives to the goal, including tasks we will have to complete along the way

The project flowchart provides an overview of how we conducted our research. To achieve our objectives we: 1.) conducted group and in-depth oral history interviews with members of the Albanian community and others who had some connection with the Beacon Street neighborhood; 2.) thematically analyzed transcripts from interviews conducted; 3.) identified and analyzed primary sources, such as newspapers, maps, letters and diaries in local archives and in private collections; 4.) studied existing story maps. With the direction of all four objectives, the project team produced an interactive digital exhibition of the Beacon street neighborhood during the early to mid-20th century. We discuss our approach in more detail below.

Interviews

We conducted interviews employing oral history methodology to obtain a more accurate picture of what it was like for early Albanian immigrant families. Oral history is a method of conducting historical research through recorded interviews between a narrator with personal experience of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer (Reti, n.d.). Oral histories will overall help exhibition visitors "[engage] in history and [be] affected by the experience" (Whincop, 1986).

Interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom. Interviewees that were not comfortable with the Zoom software had the option to dial-in. In some cases we called the participants and dialed into Zoom by merging calls. To encourage a more affable and trusting relationship with our participants, we first organized two group meetings with the participants and our sponsors, who the participants knew well and served as facilitators. We invited roughly seven participants to each meeting and introduced ourselves and the project. In the group meetings, we then gathered contact information from each participant and scheduled the first one-on-one interviews with everyone. Our introduction to the group meetings can be seen in Appendix A. We then discussed the consent script (see Appendix B) and allowed the participants to ask any questions.

After the group discussions our sponsors, Greg Steffon and Frank Zdruli, identified more participants and we conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of 18 people from the Albanian community. If time permitted, we all tried to attend the interviews with two of us leading. If scheduling conflicts occurred, we broke up into groups of two to conduct interviews. We used semi-structured interviews because it gave us the flexibility to ask both open-ended questions and more "theoretically driven questions" (Galletta & Cross, 2013). Semi-structured interviews occur in stages where the beginning phases consist of open-ended questions. This allowed us to elicit information based on the participant's experiences. Later phases enabled us to pursue specific topics that were mentioned previously, allowing the participant to lead the discussion in early stages while we listened and observed (Galletta & Cross, 2013).

Additionally, we interviewed an individual from outside of the Albanian community that was a part of the Beacon Street neighborhood to see how their experiences compared to those of the Albanian community. We utilized snowball sampling by asking participants if they knew any non-Albanian individuals who experienced life in the Beacon Street community during that time period. Broadening the scope of those included in interviews "simultaneously deepen[ed] the inquiry and extend[ed] it outward, helping us understand both the internal complexity of the community under study and its relationship to a broader historical process" (Shopes, 2002, p.597).

To ensure we had a wide range of perspectives within the Albanian community, we leveraged purposive sampling. We interviewed men and women of different ages, educational backgrounds, and economic status. In these interviews we focused on the following topics: memories of childhood, education, family life, leisure activities, the amenities in the neighborhood, important institutions in their lives, etc. As Seidman (2013) suggested, in order to help understand how

these themes were integrated in their lives, we asked our interviewees to reconstruct what a typical day was like. A full list of our interview questions can be seen in Appendix C. We received verbal consent from each participant before proceeding with interviews which specified how the material from the interview was used. Additionally, we asked for permission to record all interviews. If granted permission, we transcribed and coded the interviews. If the interviewees were not comfortable with us using their name, we gave them the option to keep their information confidential. Interviewees also had a chance to review the transcripts, add any clarifying details, and omit sections and phrases that they were not comfortable with sharing. We were attentive and cautious with topics that were sensitive to the participants, however, it was important to have those difficult discussions because as Shopes suggested, the results "foster a more nuanced and humane understanding of the way individuals live in history" (Shopes, 2002, p.597).

While interviews provided an abundance of first-hand detailed accounts of events, it was vital that these interviews were documented and analyzed. After we transcribed the interviews, we then coded the transcripts, an example of this is seen in Figure 14. In *Introduction to Codes and Coding*, Saldana (2009) defined a code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative [...] and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p.3). By analyzing transcripts from audio recordings of the interviews, our team pinpointed common experiences and emotions towards those experiences (Humphries, 2003). In essence, comparing themes across different interviews aided us in the understanding of our project. This assisted in how we portrayed certain information in our exhibition deliverable to highlight what it was like for Albanian-Americans during the early 20th century. To ensure that all group members were involved in the interviews, the two group members that did not lead the interview were in charge of transcribing and coding the interviews. In addition, to ensure commonalities across the coding of the interviews, we kept a "code book" where we wrote down common codes that can be used. We then met and discussed themes and patterns as a group.

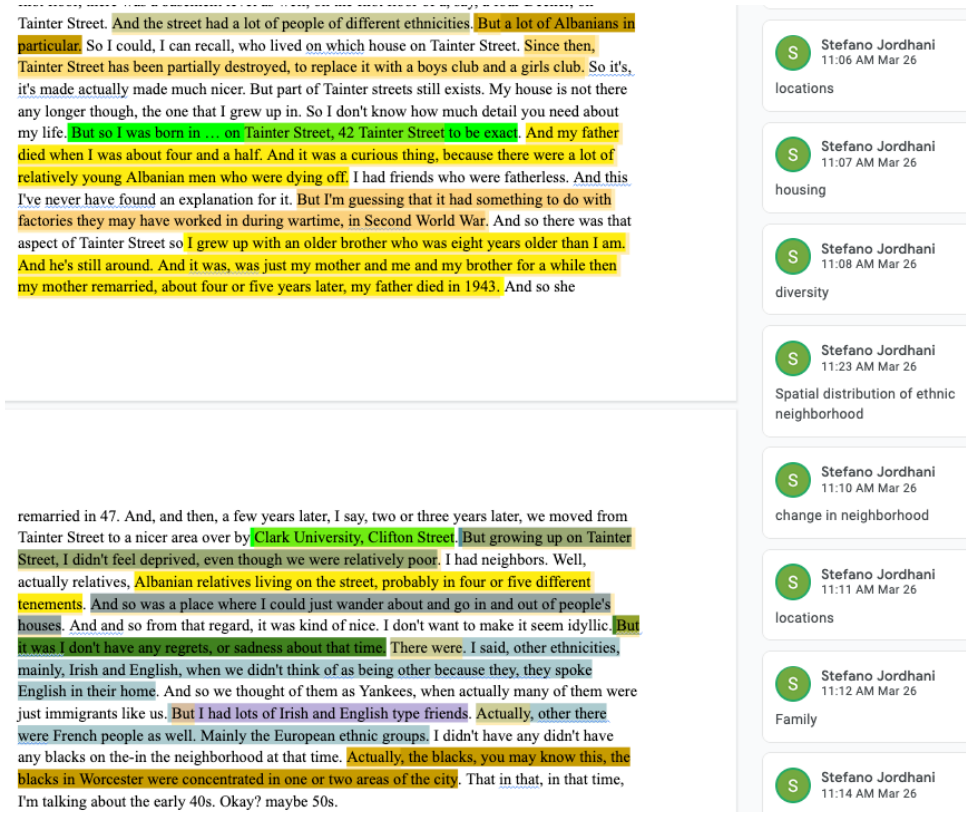

Figure 14: An example of what a marked-up coded page looked like

One technique we employed during interviews was photo-elicitation, which allowed participants to recall events or stories when images were shown. As Rose (2007) suggested, photo-elicitation allows for insight into social phenomena that other research methods that rely on oral or written data cannot provide. Photographs also helped ease the uncomfortable or

awkward aspect of interviews. Photo-elicitation studies that have been conducted usually fit into one of two categories, "auto-driven" or "researcher-driven". In auto-driven photo-elicitation, the interviewee is in charge of providing the photographs and in researcher-driven photo-elicitation, the researcher controls the visual media (Padgett et al., 2013, p.1436). Clark-Ibáñez (2004) stated that inductive research approaches, where theory is developed in the course of the research, typically follow the auto-driven format of photo-elicitation studies. Initially, we asked interviewees to bring photos with them to the interviews. We also asked interviewees to bring any journals, diaries, letters, etc. from the time period that they would be willing to share with us. We asked participants to either scan or take pictures of the photos and email them to us before interviews so our group can view them. In addition to reviewing participant-submitted images, we also followed the researcher-based approach where we leveraged photographs from the Worcester Historical Museum online database, as well as the Worcester Albanian Community Facebook page. Our approach was a combination of inductive and deductive research. We were able to use auto-driven photo-elicitation to remove any bias from interviews and allowed theories to develop from the participants' stories. Additionally, the deductive aspect of our approach came from investigating themes that were discovered during the background research. So we also structured our inquiry in ways that were informed by other literature.

When the researcher controls the visual media, they can use photographs as a tool to expand on ideas while when participants control the photographs, they can use them to "provide a unique way to communicate dimensions of their lives" (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). In most studies, these photographs are explored through broad prompt questions such as "what does this show?" or "why have you chosen this photograph?," which leads the interview in the direction that the participant decides (Rose, 2007, pp.321-322).

Photo-elicitation interviews offer a deeper insight into the experiences and themes surrounding the participants as opposed to traditional one-on-one interviews. This type of qualitative research is effective because as Collier, and Bukowski and Buetow suggest, "photographs stimulate new thoughts and memories…[and] they can make the 'invisible visible'" (Padgett et al., 2013, p.1435). Photo-elicitation interviews require collaboration between researcher and participant and with the auto-driven method, the participant plays a larger role in the research process (Rose, 2007, p.316).

Archival Research

We conducted archival research to supplement information gathered from interviews and compared the working of memory with primary sources from the time. Initially, we found maps of Worcester and census data from the time period. We used maps from the Library of Congress, and Sanborn Fire Insurance maps to gain an intimate understanding of spatial relationships in the Beacon Street community and to gather information to aid in our interviews. Furthermore, since the neighborhood has changed dramatically since the early 20th century, these maps gave us a better understanding of how the neighborhood was composed, and conceptualized how accessible jobs were to Albanian-Americans in terms of physical locations of jobs and workplace proximity.

Census data allowed us to determine characteristics of a household, employment data, educational background, and living quarters. According to census data from 1920, Beacon Street fell into Ward 8 Precinct 1 (City of Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts 1920 Team Census Transcription). The census records collected included data such as place of birth, address, occupation, marriage status, citizenship status, English proficiency, and more.

Other archival research was conducted by examining organizations that helped the Albanian community, such as the

AANO and Vatra. We looked into the purpose of these organizations and how they aided in the assimilation of Albanian immigrant families in Worcester. Archival research helped us understand the broader context of life, which will help us distinguish between memory and facts, since a lot of our information relied on interviews. These resources helped give us a better understanding of what Worcester was like during that time.

Creating a Story Map

There are many different ways to tell the story of a community. In our project, we examined different facets of what life was like for the Albanian immigrant families in the Beacon Street neighborhood. We combined collected information in order to create the story. We followed an approach that combined both the interviewees' and interviewers' interpretations, with more emphasis on the interviewees'. ArcGIS offers a story mapping software that we used to create our digital exhibition. Different features such as graphs, images, sound recordings, animations, and quotes can be used in conjunction to create a visual story that resonates with the viewer. One component of our story map site we have included is a digital map of the area. We marked the locations on the map of individuals' houses, and significant institutions in/around the neighborhood. ArcGIS also allowed us to include additional stories through slideshows, sidecars, image galleries, and more. There was an extensive amount of information and knowledge we gathered that was condensed into a cohesive and compelling narrative. We reviewed existing arcGIS story maps to analyze different storytelling techniques being used, so that we could determine what would best work for the story we were trying to portray. While reviewing existing projects, we took note of parts we found especially compelling and reflected on what aspects of the design, linked with the story being presented, elicited such a response.

We cultivated all of the information from the interviews and archival research detailed above and transformed it into a digital exhibition. We also used photos provided by the Worcester Historical Museum, our interviewees, and other sources such as the Albanian Community Facebook page. Using these methods together gave us a better sense of the community, and what Worcester looked like at the time. It aided in getting a better sense of what life was like for the Albanian immigrant families during the time period. Through the use of photographs and audio profiles, it allowed for a more immersive exhibit which helped viewers connect more to the interviewees. We presented the stories told by interviewees how they wanted them to be told in order to honor them. This was very beneficial, as it also guided visitors in interpreting the information contained within the digital exhibit that our team produced. It allowed visitors to experience and relate to intimate details of stories that are beautiful, poignant, and most of all, human.

Meet the Interviewees

Jeanette Anas: Lived at 190 Beacon St. until the age of 9. For most of her childhood she lived with her parents and two uncles.

Peter Christopher: Lived at 42 Tainter St. and then moved to Clifton St, he grew up with his older brother who worked to provide for the family since their father passed away at a young age.

Tom Wasso: Lived at 26 LaGrange St. He grew up with his parents and grandparents, his father passed away when Tom was young. He was an only child.

Janet Leacu Rouvina and Helen Athanas: Sisters that grew up on Austin St., father owned the Ritz Cafe and other properties, but passed away when they were young. After their father passed, their mother was widowed with three children.

Mary Colorio: Grew up on 216 Beacon St. with her younger brother and her parents.

Dickie Gaitane: Lived at 21 LaGrange St., his father owned a store on 23 LaGrange St. He grew up with a younger sister.

Arthur Dono: Lived at 22 Kilby St., grew up with an older sister (20 years older) and brother, and another brother of the same age.

Violet Laska: Grew up outside of the neighborhood at 27 Endicott St. with two younger brothers and a younger sister.

Connie Athanas: Grew up on 194 Beacon St. with an older brother and an older sister. Her mother lived in Boston at first and her first husband passed away. She eventually remarried to Connie's father and moved to Worcester.

Dorothy Mitchell: Grew up on 179 Beacon St. with a younger brother and a younger sister. She lived with her siblings, her parents, and her grandmother

Bob Steffon: Grew up right outside of the Beacon St. neighborhood on Florence St. Even though he was not part of the Beacon Street Community, he was very good friends with everyone there.

Tina Thamel: Grew up slightly outside the Beacon St neighborhood on Millbury St. She lived with her parents and she was an only child.

Tom Foisy: Lived at 19 LaGrange St., grew up with a French father and Albanian mother. His mother had five children, he was the second oldest.

Findings

In this chapter, we present our insights from multiple interviews and the archival material we analyzed. Our discussion considers four overarching themes: 1) how the first wave of migrants became established in Worcester; 2) the experience of widowed Albanian women in the neighborhood; 3) childhood and growing up in the neighborhood; 4) cultural continuity and change within the Albanian community.

The Development of the Beacon Street Neighborhood

In the early 1900s, the first wave of migrants from Albania to Worcester were mostly men, and the rest of their families would stay in Albania. Men arrived first, found a place to live, got jobs, made money, and then went back to Albania to get married. After they got married, they would typically bring their wives and other family members to America with them. Jeanette Anas mentioned that her father,

> Actually made two trips. He came here in the --- I would say maybe late 20s. And if I'm trying to think, he was born in 1903, maybe he was [in his] early 20's or so. And then for my mother, he went back to Albania. He stayed here for a few years and worked and got settled and so forth. And then he went back to Albania and married my mother. And then they came in 1936. And I would say my mother was probably in her 20's at that time. I think she was born in 1912, so in 1936 she was probably 24. (Jeanette Anas, personal communication, April 12, 2021)

In some instances, men were here for many years before they went back to get their wives. For Peter Christopher's parents, "My mother had come to this country in 1936. But my father had been here for, well, 10 or 15 years before." (Peter Christopher, personal communication, February 23, 2021).

During that time period, most Albanian marriages were arranged. Their families back home would set them up,

> It was a fix up, that's how it worked out. It certainly wasn't anything romantic like you'd see in this country. They probably knew 10 years before that this woman was going to marry that one, etc. And oftentimes it worked out very well. And in our case, it did, but it was a very short lived thing because my mother got married when she was 19. And he, [my father], was about 26 or 27. I don't remember exactly... It was a very short lived romance if it was a romance at all. But that's the way it was, generally it was a fix up. It [was] different in my mother's generation, it got a little bit better, because it was here in this country. But those that were married in Albania, in most cases, it was a fix up. (Tom Wasso, personal communication, April 6, 2021)

When coming back to the United States, it was crucial that men had jobs to support their families. Based on accounts from

Figure 15: Picture of Helen and Janet's Father inside his store, Ritz Cafe (Provided by Helen Athanas)

nterviews, many men started their own businesses. They had corner stores, luncheonette and bars, and other small businesses. Helen Athanas, and her sister Janet Leacu Rouvina, remembered that growing up, their father owned a store,

> He owned this place, which was called the Ritz Cafe. You have to walk by Portland and Myrtle right there on the corner ... It's a bar and a luncheonette as far as I can see. And I know he sold cigars because the one thing about him, every time I saw my father, no matter when, he had the half inch butt of a cigar hanging out of the corner of his mouth, you know, I don't even know if it was lit. You know how you walk around and see somebody with a cigar. Always. Always. I know they sold the cigars. And he worked, the place was open late because he never got home till one or so in the morning. So it must have been, like I said, they must have served lunch and they had drinks and a soda fountain. It's not like now where it's either a bar or a luncheonette. This was like everything. (Helen Athanas, personal communication, April 9, 2021)

It wasn't only Helen's father that was an entrepreneur, many other participants' family members had their own business. Jeanette Anas could recall a store called "Anas Bros. Groceries" that her uncles owned,

> Well, this was my father's uncle. And he-- this is Vasili and his brother, Pandi [owners]. This is what they have-- what they started when they came here. And I'm not sure where the store is. I have a feeling it may have been on Gardner Street, but I'm not absolutely sure. But that's Vasili standing outside the store. So he would be my great uncle. And I would think this is probably sometime in maybe the 1950s. In through that era, I believe. Now. That's what that is. (Jeanette Anas, personal communication, April 19, 2021)

Figure 16: Picture of Jeanette's uncle standing outside of his store, Anas Bros Groceries (Provided by Jeanette Anas)

Figure 17: The location of Dickie Gaitane's father's corner store (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts., 1910)

Some of these stores were located in the Beacon Street neighborhood and others were located in different parts of Worcester. When Dickie Gaitane was a child, he recalled his father buying a store,

> Then we ended up buying a small store. In the four decker, he had a small corner store and we lived here above the store for seven or eight years, we did pretty good. My father did alright in a store like that. That's how it was. We were open five and a half days, six and a half days a week, half a day on Sunday in the morning ... Yes, he had a small corner store. We did okay. (Dickie Gaitane, personal communication, April 2, 2021)

Immigrant-run grocery stores helped define the neighborhood. From interviews, we learned that it was very common to visit the Albanian-run grocery stores that were close by. Some individuals owned other companies too. Arthur Dono's father owned many different companies and bounced around from job to job while he was trying to settle in America. When one job wouldn't work out, Arthur's father would get another,

> [He] owned his own soda company too. Him and Mitch Shtika ... owned Glacier beverages on Lafayette street if I'm not mistaken. I still have their bottles. I have a couple of cases with soda still in the bottle. Yeah. Some Glacier beverages and my father owned it before he went to TableTalk. He went to a different couple of things. When he first came over, he worked at Peter Lumber's. And that was some kind of Albanian thing there, you know. And he worked there for a while, went back to Albania, got my mother and worked at Peters Lumber's again. Then he ventured off. He ended up driving--- I forget what he did after that, but then him and Mitch got together. And they put a soda company together and they actually had a business selling soda. My father would do the--- do all the deliveries and Mitch he kind of stayed in the shop type of thing. (Arthur Dono, personal communication, April 9, 2021)

All of these men used these businesses to "stake their claim" in Worcester. They were becoming established members of the Worcester community and slowly starting to integrate into life in America. Helen and Janet's father became a more notable businessman in the Worcester community. Not long after he settled in the United States with his family, he received,

> The key to the city. And a letter from the mayor who presented the key to my father. And that was back on April 3rd, 1936. And I don't believe that there were too many other Albanians in that timeframe that had gotten the key to

Figure 18: Picture of the key to the city along with the note that Janet's father received (Provided by Janet Leacu Rouvina)

> the city. So we assume that he--- he was a member of the Elks club, and a member of the American Legion ... But I couldn't believe that he was with that high class type of people. So apparently, he was considered a very highly respected businessman. And for whatever reason, because of his work in the community, and just helping people out I guess, he was presented the key. And it was by Walter Cookson, was the mayor at the time ... The only thing is on that letter, he does not have my father's last name. He has the first and the middle, but he does not have the name Leacu. But we know it's his because we have [it], and I have all the information. I don't know why they didn't put the last name in. (Janet Leacu Rouvina, personal communication, April 16, 2021)

It was the relations that Helen and Janet's father made as a businessman, and his membership in the Elks Club and American Legion, that allowed him to receive such an honor like the key to the city. Apart from owning businesses, Albanian men also worked as wage earners. Jeanette Anas, when talking about her father, said:

> I think in the beginning, he probably did factory work. I think when he first came here, he may have worked for his uncles because he had two uncles that were here. And I think they sponsored him. So he may have lived with them in the very beginning. And then, you know, he struck out on his own thing, that I think the men used to live in something that they called konaks, which would be like a group of friends, living together as his roommates sharing an apartment and, you know, sharing expenses and sharing the cooking and so forth. And I think he worked for his uncle. And like the grocery variety store in the beginning, and then he went on to try his hands and get working factory jobs or to make more money. (Jeanette Anas, personal communication, April 12, 2021)

I

n her account, Jeanette describes what life was like for her father when he first came to the United States. The early male migrants lived together in "konaks" in order to save money and then, later on, lived in larger three-deckers when they settled with their families. Konaks were used,

> to save money on rent, men crowded together in tenements in the slums. Ten or fifteen men often lived together in a single flat, the konak. Existence in the konak was drab. In the homeland Albanians had been accustomed to an outdoor life; here they were cramped within the four walls of the most dilapidated houses in the worst slum areas of America's mill towns. (Members of the Federal Writers' Project, 1939, p.10)

Similar to Jeanette's father, many other participants' fathers worked different types of jobs to help support their families as the "breadwinners". Violet Laska mentioned,

> My father worked in a factory. [...] They made roller skates. Matthews-- Matthews Manufacturing Company [...] Before then, most of the time-- at one time he drove a truck for some company. Little jobs, whatever, it was during the depression time. So whatever jobs he could find. (Violet Laska, personal communication, April 21, 2021).

Albanian individuals worked hard and oftentimes worked together. When reflecting on his father, Arthur Dono recalled, "[...] my father, he worked very, very hard. He worked at TableTalk pies." (Arthur Dono, personal communication, April 9, 2021). Based on our interviews, many Albanians congregated together and worked at TableTalk pie, including women. Connie Athanas mentioned, "[...] she worked one year at TableTalk pie, a lot of Albanian women worked there, they used to peel the apples." (Connie Athanas, personal communication, April 9, 2021).

Despite this, Connie Athanas, and many other interviewees, emphasized the patriarchal society that was present in Albanian culture. When talking about her mother's role around the house, Connie stated, "My mother was [...] very caring and always smiled, cooked, cleaned, and took care of the children's needs, that is the Albanian way. Take care of family first" (Connie Athanas, personal communication, April 9, 2021). This does not mean that women never worked outside of the home; however, in more traditional roles, it was common for men to work and women to be at home. In some cases, once the children grew up it was more common for some mothers to go out and seek jobs. Dorothy Mitchell confirmed this in her account when she stated,

> My father got a job at Harrington Richardson Arms Company, which was a rifle company on Park Ave and my mom was stay-at-home for a while and then when we got a little older, she got a job at Pfeiffer Shoe as a stitcher on Beacon Street... (Dorothy Mitchell, personal communication, April 5, 2021).

Women were seldom resentful of these roles, this is the way it was during that time. The women did what they needed to do to support their families. These were the roles Albanian men and women played when they established their lives in Worcester.

Widowed Mothers

Women often became widows at a very young age. One of the reasons why children grew up in a fatherless family was due to the significant age gap between Albanian married couples. Connie Athanas noted, "My father was, I think he was 26 years older than my mother" (Connie Athanas, personal communication, April 9, 2021). Although the age gap wasn't this large between all of our interviewees' parents, the age difference was quite significant according to the accounts. This recurrence can also be seen in census records from the time as shown in Figure 19. Figure 19 was taken from the United States census in 1940 and shows the demographics for an Albanian family living on 50 Beacon Street at the time. In the red box, you can see that the head of the household (the father) was 52 years old at the time of this census, and the mother was 37 years old, highlighted by the blue box.

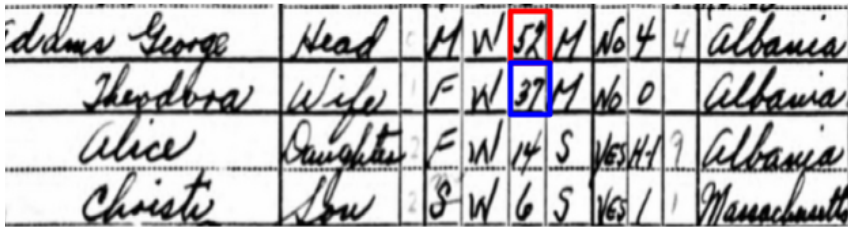

Figure 19: Demographics of an Albanian family living on 50 Beacon Street taken from the 1940 United States census (Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census)

Poor working conditions in factories also contributed to the phenomenon of the early death of many Albanian men at the time. In his account, Peter Christopher reflected on the situation saying,

> [...] It happened that my father died in 1943, just before World War, well it was World War II, but he was ill. At the same time somebody--- another friend of mine, Albanian friend of mine's father died on Tainter Street at about the same time. And another good friend of mine who I am still friendly with, my brother in law, in fact, his father died when he was five years old. At that time, I could list seven or eight kids that I knew, whose fathers died in their 30s and 40s. Just 30. And I never, you know, we never understood why, we never questioned why, but I looked at my father's resume that I may have mentioned to you. And he lists working for a couple of years at Reed & Prince, and a lot of Albanians worked at the factory Reed & Prince. I'm suspecting they were chemicals they were dealing with pre-war time. (Peter Christopher, personal communication, March 25, 2021)

The factory that Peter Christopher mentioned in his account can be seen in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Reed & Prince Manufacturing Co. that was once located at 50 Cambridge Street in Worcester. This photograph was submitted to the Worcester Telegram by the Worcester Historical Museum and was taken in the 1970s. (Reed & Prince Manufacturing Company).

Tom Wasso's grandfather was also exposed to the poor working conditions that were present during the time. In Tom Wasso's account he stated that his grandfather,

> [He] worked at a foundry, Crompton & Knowles in Worcester, which was walking distance from our house... And he was in a very hot foundry, no matter what the weather was, and I think the foundry is what eventually killed him. He died of lung cancer. But it was under dusty, burning, hot conditions that he worked in regularly. And he ended up, before he retired, he got sick. And it was kind of job related, his illness. And then he lived quite a few years after he retired. But then cancer set in and that's what finally got in his lung. He ended up dying of lung cancer. (Tom Wasso, personal communication, April 6, 2021)

As seen in Figure 21, the Crompton & Knowles foundry was located at the corner of Grand Street and Tainter Street which was within the Beacon Street neighborhood.

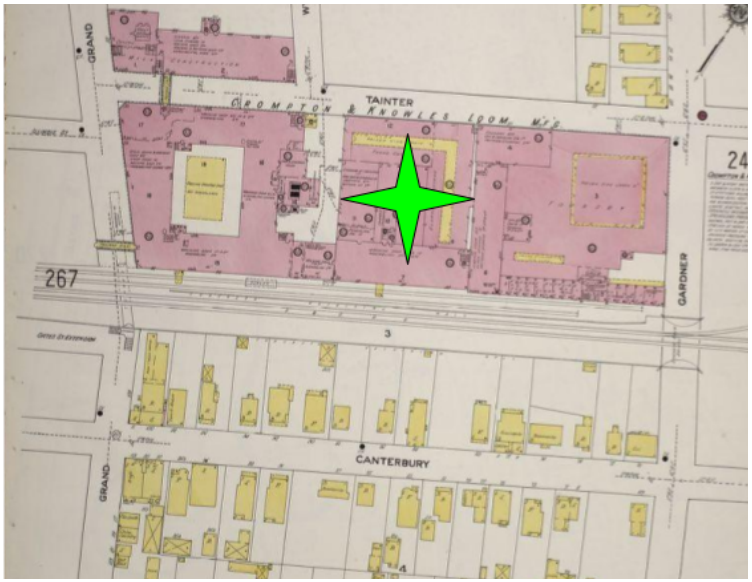

Figure 21: The green marker shows the location of the Crompton & Knowles factory (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts., 1910)

The role of first-generation Albanian immigrant women drastically changed once they became widowed. Losing their husbands brought a lot of challenges. Connie Athanas recalled, "My father had no accent at all. He left Albania when he was quite young, he spoke fluent English. My mother spoke very little

English, never really learned how to speak the full English language, so we had to speak Albanian at home" (Connie Athanas, personal communication, April 9, 2021). Many interviewees mentioned that their mothers were less comfortable with the English language than their husbands. Dorothy Mitchell mentioned, "I told you that was my first language [Albanian] because my mother didn't know English at all. And my grandmother, like I said, never. She never spoke English. Just a few words because she was a homebody." (Dorothy Mitchell, personal communication, April 5, 2021). Since it was typical for the men to migrate to the United States before the women and because it was mainly the fathers that were the ones that were out working, it was common for the mothers to be less assimilated and accustomed to the American culture.

Since women who had been widowed no longer had the "breadwinner" to provide for them, they typically had to go out and work in factories, which was uncommon at the time. Some widows worked as seamstresses, and others worked at small stores, such as grocery stores. Helen and Janet's mother had to find different ways to provide for her family financially while still taking care of the kids and her duties at home. She "used to work and get the summers off and she was a seamstress. [She] took the summer off because we were young, and found another job every fall" (Helen Athanas, personal communication, April 2, 2021). Their mother had to prepare to take an entire summer off work so she could watch her children. However, their mother struggled to do it all on her own and collected rent money from the three-deckers that her husband owned. Helen elaborates on that,

> So basically, he [Helen's father] must have ...earned money to open the business and buy the property. So when he passed away, I think that's how my mother lived because it was shameful to collect welfare. It just wasn't something people did...So my mom made do between the houses ... My mother was very, very resilient. (Helen Athanas, personal communication, April 2, 2021)

Figure 22: Picture of Helen Athanas and her parents (Provided by Helen Athanas)

Helen mentions the stigma around collecting government aid at the time and this prevented individuals like Helen's mother from using such resources and receiving other forms of support. In addition to having the leftover money from her father, Janet stated,

> [...] We had a godfather...who lived right near us. And I remember my mother telling me during the war, you know, people didn't have a lot of food. And she would send us over, one of us, just to go get a few items. And she would always want to pay for it. And so we'd go and we'd come back with this big bag. And she'd say, 'well, what is all that?'. And he [Helen and Janet's godfather] would always put in, nobody could get butter or any, but he had and he would always put it in the bag. And he and his wife [Helen and Janet's godparents] were one of the kindest people, they helped my mother after her husband died. (Janet Leacu Rouvina, personal communication, April 16, 2021)

It was during the war, when food was rationed, that Helen and Janet's godparents helped their mother out.

Godparents were very common in many Albanian families at the time and had traditional responsibilities. Bob Steffon mentioned,

> [...] The godfather is the one that names you. And you go along whatever they name you. Because...in [the] hospital...you were born 'baby [Steffon]'. And no one would give them the name and the godfather, when you get christened will give you the name of the child and...we [didn't] have any idea of knowing what our name was going to be until the godfather and the godmother would give us our name at the day of the christening, when you were baptized. (Bob Steffon, personal communication, April 16, 2021)

Godparents were of great importance in Albanian families at the time. Violet Laska stated, "...they [her siblings' godparents] were given a place of honor...in our family because they were the godparents" (Violet Laska, personal communication, April 26, 2021). The relationship with godparents was very close-knit and they were an extension of Albanian families. In her account, Jeanette Anas recalled,

> we [her family and her godparents] were pretty close in the earlier days. You know, she [her godmother] would always remember us on birthdays and Christmas and then my parents would always remember her...with gifts on holidays and so forth and, you know, they would be invited to all the family functions that we had. (Jeanette Anas, personal communication, April 26, 2021)

Since godparents were an integral part of Albanian families, the widowed mothers did have people to receive support from.

Despite having this support system, some widowed mothers had to work multiple jobs to support their families. Tom Wasso recalled,

> Right after my father got put into a hospital, my mother went to work in a factory herself. And she worked in a factory not far from where we lived. And this factory used to make corsets, Ivy Corset was the name of the factory...That was during the day, she'd work 40 hours a week there. And then she had a part time job over the weekend, working in a grocery store, in a fruit and vegetable store on Main Street. So my mother was working almost constantly. (Tom Wasso, personal communication, April 6, 2021)

Figure 23: The Ivy Corset Factory where Tom Wasso's mother worked after her husband fell ill (Telegram 2021)

During Tom Wasso's childhood, he barely got to see his mother because she had to work all the time to support the family. This was all due to the fact that she was a widow. Yet again, widows sometimes had to rely on other people to get help. Tom Wasso's grandmother played a large role in raising him because his mother was constantly working,

> My mother depended on my grandmother, more or less, to raise me and her family as well ... so my grandmother basically raised me as a child. And my mother had to pay for our expenses. My father had no source of income ... So with all of that, she [Tom's mother] wasn't able to stay home and take care of me ... My grandmother was the one that was a disciplinary, and she's the one that made sure that I got the things that I needed. (Tom Wasso, personal communication, April 6, 2021)
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During Tom Wasso's childhood, he barely got to see his mother because she had to work all the time to support the family. This was all due to the fact that she was a widow. Yet again, widows sometimes had to rely on other people to get help. Tom Wasso's grandmother played a large role in raising him because his mothaker" and the "breadwinner" after they became widows.

Growing Up in the Neighborhood

Many of our interviewees told fascinating stories that highlighted the different aspects of growing up Albanian in America, more specifically Worcester. Our time period of interest surrounds the Great Depression and most of our participants grew up in the aftermath of the Depression. Peter Christopher recounts,

> My brother was eight years older than I am. But my mother would save all of his clothes, and I was the one who inherited his clothes, eight years after he wore them. And so I recall that she gave me a pair of knickers to wear. Now, knickers were like short pants that rolled up in your plaid socks up to the-- on your calves of your legs. But nobody was wearing knickers except me. And I decided that it was time to do something about it. I was embarrassed to wear them. And so I got on a picket fence, and purposely tore them on the fence. And came home I said, well, that's that. Well, the next day I had to wear patched knickers, which is even worse than plain knickers. So that's what it was like. (Peter Christopher, personal communication, February 23, 2021)

Peter Christopher's father passed away when he was very young, and his mother became the sole wage-earner while also having to care for the children. Throughout our interviews, many people also discussed how their families had very little money to afford non-essential things, and used similar strategies to make ends meet.

It was often necessary for children to get jobs to help support the household financially during the Depression. Mary Colorio, who grew up on Beacon Street, described how she began working in a fruit store on Millbury Street when she was only 11 years old. Her mother would always ask her to "bring home some tomatoes or bring home some lettuce or whatever she needed". Mary also went on to say, "I always left work buying something. So by the end of the week, my paycheck ... was very minimal. But I felt like I was providing something for the family" (Mary Colorio, personal communication, April 8, 2021). In other instances, the child's paycheck would go entirely to their parents. Violet Laska began working at Pano's fruit store when she was around 12-13 years old. She explained,

> My paycheck went to my parents. Even when I was going to school three nights a week, I had to give [my father] money. And whatever little I had left, I could never take a bus ride and go to school. I had to walk. Because I paid for my tuition as well. (Violet Laska, personal communication, April 21, 2021)

Violet Laska even had to give her father all the money she earned when she was in high school and accounting school. Furthermore, one interviewee, Dorothy Mitchell, detailed how if she "wanted to buy clothes, [she] had to work" (Dorothy Mitchell, personal communication, April 12, 2021). Many of the people that we interviewed discussed how if they wanted something, they had to work for it, even if that was in addition to already working to help support the family.

In terms of types of jobs, many children and teenagers worked in local grocery stores, as mentioned previously, had paper routes, or were shoe shiners. Peter Christopher and his older brother grew up in the neighborhood and had these sorts of jobs during their childhoods. Peter recalled how his older brother joined the workforce to help support his family since his father passed away. His older brother started out as a "shoeshine boy, ... [and] would go to the bars downtown and offer to shine shoes. It sounds very humiliating today, my brother would not allow me to do it" (Peter Christopher, personal communication, February 23, 2021). Peter, on the other hand, had a paper route, which meant he worked considerably less hours because there was somewhat less pressure on him to contribute to the family income because he was younger. Both brothers later got jobs in local stores when they became teenagers, Peter worked at a fruit store and his brother worked at an ice cream shop.

Having jobs at a young age would also mean that young children would be walking around the neighborhood by themselves, which illustrates the freedom children had and the perception of safety in the Beacon Street neighborhood at the time. Again, many of the men that we interviewed had paper routes as young boys. With this, young children would usually ride their bicycles all around the neighborhood alone delivering newspapers. Tom Vangel shared,

> I say when we were like [14 or 15], you'd even hitchhike. I mean, that was not a problem, everybody. I mean, there were hitchhikers all over, you know, everywhere. You don't see that today. But back then it was pretty common. It was a beautiful swimming lake, up in Sturbridge, which was about 10, 12 miles from Southbridge. And we used to hitchhike there to go swimming, and usually got a ride home because there were older kids who had cars, a few of them, who would give us a ride back. (Tom Vangel, personal communication, April 14, 2021)

Many recalled not having any fear walking alone in the neighborhood during the day. In fact, Tom Foisy, another one of our interviewees, said "we figured [the neighborhood] was safe. I mean, we didn't even lock our doors. Well, during the early days" (Tom Foisy, personal communication, April 7, 2021).

Many of the people that we interviewed were out roaming the neighborhood because oftentimes children played outside during the time period. Tom Wasso recalls how,

> The street was really our playground. The traffic didn't exist as it does today. And the people driving weren't as crazy as they are today either. So people that were coming up LaGrange street or anywhere in that area, they would just automatically slow down, and let us get off the street. And then they go by, they wouldn't be all bent out of shape, because we were in the street like they would be today. (Tom Wasso, personal communication, April 9, 2021)

Children in the neighborhood would often play games such as four corners or kick the can. They often relied on themselves for entertainment. In addition to playing in the streets, in most cases children weren't even being supervised by adults during this time. Peter Christopher recounts how,

> There were factories across the street, some of those were abandoned factories. And I remember just sitting on at the front of my yard and looking out over these factories and just wondering what was going on. They were empty ... they were fenced off. We were forbidden from going and exploring in them, but we actually did some of that. And there was a certain section of the factories that was occupied. I don't know what they were making. I think there was silverware or something like that. And we could see, look in and see I think they were making actually zinc. And then we could see the fires burning and people working in the factories. (Peter Christopher, personal communication, February 23, 2021)

A large number of the leisure activities that children had partaken in during this time would be considered extremely dangerous by today's standards.

Children in the neighborhood had a great amount of independence compared to today. The Worcester Boys Club was built in 1914 and located on Ionic Avenue. It was one of the original 15 Boys Clubs in the United States. It was created to give young boys a place to go in order to keep them out of trouble and off the streets. Dickie Gaitane, one interviewee, mentioned how the Boys Club played a prominent role in children's lives and that it was important to go there. He explained that "if you went to the boys club, we learned a lot of things, learn how to swim, we met more friends" (Dickie Gaitane, personal communication, April 2, 2021).

Figure 24: Ionic Avenue Boys Club. (n.d.). [Photograph]. https://zh-cn.facebook.com/creativehubworcester/photos/built-in-1914-2-ionic-avenue-in-worcester-was-one-of-the-original-15-boys-clubs-/1304671876398644

Young boys from all over the Beacon Street neighborhood would play at their local Boys Club, as it was a place where people of all different backgrounds came together and socialized. They met other young boys outside of the Albanian community and

learned about their different cultures. At the Boys Club, boys would play on sports teams, such as basketball, ping pong, and swimming. They would also play board games in the game room, such as Snaps. Tom Foisy told us that,

> This was a mix. Yes. Well, we didn't have any black kids at the Ionic Ave Boys Club because mainly there weren't any in the neighborhood. And they had another club which was at Lincoln square called Lincoln Square Boys Club and that's where all the black kids went. And we played them. (Tom Foisy, personal communication, April 7, 2021)

The Boys club was a place where people from the neighborhood could come together through playing sports and games, and have something in common. It also gave opportunities for young boys to become more assimilated to the larger culture. Tom Foisy tells the story of how his mother was heavily involved in the Boys Club. He states that:

> She was like a president of the mother's club. They had a mother's club at the boys club. And they had meetings with all the people of the mothers of the kids that were going to the club. And that's how she got into it. Mainly. I forgot that from when I was that. That was a big deal. That was her job. She loved that. Being with the mother's club. So that I liked it too. Because I go there, my mother's the director here. And I see a little black kid calling my mother “Ma Foisy.” I said, “what?”. He says “Ma Foisy” right over there. I said that's my mother. And he was astounded. But they--- she loved it. And they loved her. (Tom Foisy, personal communication, April 7, 2021)

Growing up, a few of the people we interviewed felt strong differences between themselves being Albanian, and other Americans. Dorothy Mitchell fondly recalled how she would occasionally feel different from her peers at school. She explained,

> Someone would say “what are you albino? You know, the people that have the white eyes or whatever, white white skin?” And you know, our religion was different because I hung around with Catholics, mostly, a lot of Italian friends. And lakror, when I would bring lakror, what is that? Yes. But you know, we had a lot of Albanians in our school. So we were integrated a lot with Albanians plus other people. So it wasn't so bad. We mingled fine, but it was just, yes, I did feel different, especially when our Easter's were different. And I still feel that way now. (Dorothy Mitchell, personal communication, April 12, 2021)

In a similar facet, Peter Christopher felt different from his classmates because the lunches he brought were traditional Albanian foods. He informed us how,

> We weren't as assimilated, as Americanized as, like my neighbors from Ireland and England. And it was hard to explain what it was to be Albanian because no one, not many people knew about Albania. And, and still don't. So trying to say that you're something that nobody knows what, what it is, is kind of, kind of--- we had become defensive about it. I think I was. Also, if I was bringing lunch to school or something like that, it might have been some strange Albanian dish. And people would look at me while they were having their peanut butter sandwiches. And I'd be eating cottage cheese and a pie or something. And so we did feel different. We did feel different. But and in fact, that happened, that feeling lasted for a long time. (Peter Christopher, personal communication, February 23, 2021)

Albanian-Americans in the neighborhood were not as assimilated into American culture, since they had initially arrived recently. Occasionally differences in tradition and culture made people

feel different from the majority of the population in Worcester at the time. Contrastingly, a number of the people that we interviewed didn't feel different from other ethnic communities in the neighborhood at all.

Besides feeling different from their peers, many of our interviewees had unique schooling experiences. For instance, many participants had to learn the English language when they started school. Interviewee Violet Laska stated how "when I started I couldn't speak English. Of course, I learned quickly" and then helped her younger siblings learn the language as well (Violet Laska, personal communication, April 21, 2021). Many Albanians in the neighborhood spoke Albanian at home since many of the mothers and grandmothers did not speak English fluently. Likewise, Dorothy Mitchell recalled,

> My first language was Albanian. So when I went to school, kindergarten, I only knew how to say "I want my mommy", "I want milk", and "I want to go home". But I learned it pretty quick, English. And you know, we had no second language like they do now. We just, you know, acclimated to the English language. (Dorothy Mitchell, personal communication, April 5, 2021)

Dorothy learned English relatively quickly, and even skipped half a year of the first grade because of her strong reading skills. The people we talked to mainly spoke Albanian at home with their close family, and at Albanian School, while they primarily spoke English outside the home.

We discovered that it was also common for young Albanian children to attend Albanian School, or Sunday School. At this school, children would be taught by a woman from Albania, commonly referred to as "zonjushe" (or "Miss" in Albanian). They would learn how to speak, read, and write the Albanian language and about the culture and traditions.

Figure 25: St. Mary's Albanian School in 1926-27 (Provided by Greg Steffon)

Tom Wasso details how Albanian School was more like an activity for him to do rather than a chore. He states:

> We liked going to Albanian school but more for the social side of it. Sitting down and listening to a teacher teach us Albanian was a little boring because we had just spent several hours in school. And then we would get out of school and go back to school. The woman that was our teacher had one class. I can't remember exactly how many people were involved, but I would have to say 20 or 30 people. She had to teach 20 or 30 kids, and the kids ranged anywhere from 8-9 years old to 12-15 years old. Some of the kids spoke very good Albanian. Some of us didn't speak very good Albanian at all and really didn't have an awful lot of interest in learning Albanian. (Tom Wasso, personal communication, April 6, 2021)

This illustrates the role the Albanian School played in the daily lives of Albanian-American migrants. By creating shared experiences and an opportunity for them to spend more time together, Albanian School brought children of the community together to form lasting social connections as well as preserve their culture.

Culture and Community

The earlier arrivals from Albania built a strong community in the Beacon Street neighborhood. Their shared experiences and ethnic identity brought them together and connected their new community in Worcester to Albania. Community wide events involving traditions from their home country not only highlighted the shared identity of community members but also provided opportunities for them to spend time together. Traditional rituals and events carried over allowed members of the community to relive and reinterpret the past, as well as to pass on the sense of cultural identity to later generations born in the United States.

The Albanian-American community in Worcester would put on several dances and plays.
There were a variety of plays that were produced by the church that people from the community would participate in and attend. Peter Christopher shared a photo of a community play from 1932 that his father and two of his uncles were in (as seen in Figure 26). Peter Christopher also stated that:

> I do recall actually putting on plays at the church hall. In fact, when I was about six years old, we put on a play with the youngsters, including me. I was Prince Charming. And I remember who Cinderella was [laughter] but yeah. So anyway, we always had something going on, in terms of, you might say, cultural activities. (Peter Christopher, personal communication, March 25, 2021)

Figure 26: Albanian Drama Production - 1935 (Provided by Peter Christopher)

Peter Christopher described how his aunts were part of a group that entered a dancing competition, and won. He mentioned,

> I remember one time though, that I actually took--- first felt a sense of pride in being Albanian. At City Hall, downtown, they would have ethnic dances for an evening. And it'd be a competition between all the different ethnic groups. And so there would be Irish dancers and, and whatever group there are all kinds of groups, but some, some other women, including my mother's sisters were in this dance group of Albanian dancers. And they won the prize as the best dance group. And I don't know, I just took a lot of pride in that as a kid. Well, we can do something. (Peter Christopher, personal communication, February 23, 2021)

There was a similar pride shared by the community in their support of the local sports teams. They especially rallied themselves around basketball. There were not only several local

teams, including ones at St. Mary's Church and the Boys Club, but basketball tournaments were a part of the annual Albanian American National Organization, or AANO, conventions. The conventions were a great place for members of the Albanian community living in different cities to meet each other. Many of our participants mentioned that they or someone they knew had met their spouse at an AANO convention. Bob Steffon, who grew up in Worcester, met his wife, Diana, who grew up in Southbridge, at a convention,

> And it was a Albanian American National Organization, that we're having a basketball tournament in Worcester. And I always thought she was a cute kid. And so she said to me, "I'll bet you"---- her brothers were on the Southbridge team. And we were playing for the Worcester team. And she said to me, "I'll bet you a quarter that the Southbridge team beats you". And I said, okay, I'll go. So we know we're going to win anyways. So we won, and she came over to me to give me the quarter. So I told her, I said, "keep the quarter and go buy yourself an ice cream cone". And that was it. (Bob Steffon, personal communication, April 8, 2021)

The Saint Mary's Church basketball team was undefeated in the church league at the time and was a major source of entertainment. The games served as a way to socialize with other people in the community.

Competitiveness over basketball was not relegated to just other Albanian teams, there existed a particular competitiveness with members of the Greek community when it came to basketball. Peter Christopher, when talking about his time playing basketball when he was younger mentioned,

> But...so we traveled about, and we were pretty good, I think, as church league's go. Had some rivalry with certain teams like the Greek team. We were friendly with Greek teenagers and everything. But when it came to basketball, it was a

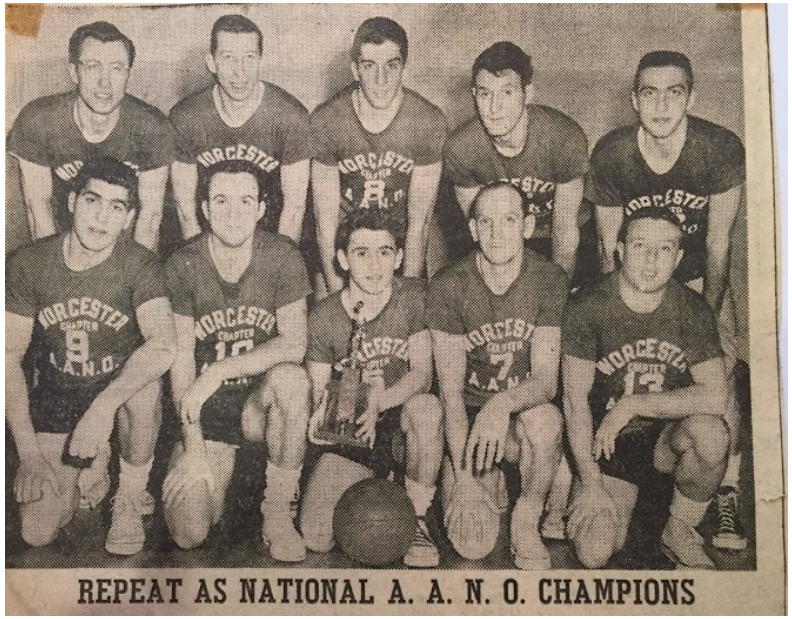

Figure 27: AANO Basketball Team (Provided by Peter Christopher)

> competition. (Peter Christopher, personal communication, February 23, 2021)

However, Tina Thamel mentioned that the attitudes of the parents were particularly passionate and that she still sensed a sort of divide that existed outside of the basketball games. She said,

> They were good friends. However, when the Albanians and the Greeks played each other, the rivalry from the parents was wild, they screamed and hollered, all of us kids were embarrassed. Occasionally they were dances at the church, at Albanian church, but the parents on each side discouraged us was not a good feeling at that time, when I was growing up between the Greeks and the Albanians (Tina Thamel, personal communication, April 19, 2021)

This competitiveness against the Greek sports teams is also reflected in a comic from the Evening Gazette (Figure 28), which advertises an upcoming basketball tournament while heavily alluding to the sports rivalry. There was also a similar comic advertising a tournament at St. Mary's with Mt. Carmel, which was a predominantly Italian church (Figure 29). Cartoons like these, about the antipathy toward the Italians and the Greeks, both colonizing forces in Albania, were a way to create solidarity in Worcester based on a shared sense of victimhood and oppression. The rivalry that existed between the Albanian teams and the Greek and Italian ones was not just an ethnic rivalry, but a way to bring the past into the present. This also connects to Tina's point about the parents being more involved in the rivalry, because the older members of the community were less separated from the past.

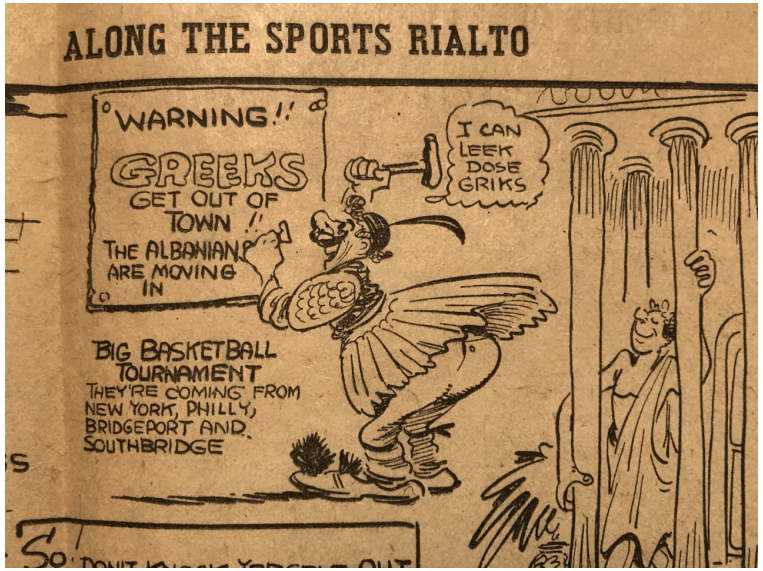

Figure 28: Cartoon from the March 22, 1956 issue of the Evening Gazette (Provided by Tina Thamel)

Figure 29: Cartoon advertising St. Mary's Tournament (Provided by Tina Thamel)

Aside from basketball, another thing that connected the Albanian community in Worcester was the church. One of the driving factors for establishing the Albanian Orthodox Church in the United States involved the Greek Orthodox Church in Massachusetts refusing to properly bury an Albanian priest. One of our participants, Violet Laska, also told us about a notable baptism celebration when her younger brother was baptised. This is because her father wanted them to go to the Greek church, and her mother wanted them to go to the Albanian church. She said,

> My mother took me to church, when she took me to the Greek church. She was unhappy because she was not in the

Albanian church. So she told my father that she would not go to church unless he took us children, but, but prior to that, when my brother was born, and he was Christened, and I was Christened in the Greek church, and when he was born, my father of course would go back to the Greek church. And my mother said, No. My father's first cousin was a priest, an Albanian priest, and he told my father that his cousin was not going to be baptized in the Greek church, that he would take care of it. And my father said, No, we're not going to the Albanian church. He said that he would Christen my brother on the kitchen table, which he did. From then on, my father just conceded and we just all went to the Albanian church-- it was not fighting. It was not worth discussing it with my mother. So we continued--all of us, at the Albanian church. (Violet Laska, personal communication, April 21, 2021).

Figure 30: Photograph of Jeanette as a baby at her christening (Provided by Jeanette Anas)

Family Divided Over Boy Friend

Missing Girl Apparently Not With Him

Differences with her family over the question of her association with a boy friend, preceded the disappearance of Christine Mitrush, aged 20, of 19 Lagrange Street, yesterday, according to a report made to the police.

The girl's father, Louis Mitrush, storekeeper, notified the detective bureau that his daughter had run away, and added that he suspected that she had eloped.

Mr. Mitrush furnished the name of the young man with whom she had been associating, but subsequent inquiry by the police disclosed the fact that he had not been with her last night, and that he had returned home, gone to bed, and left the house for work as usual this morning.

The girl's family had not approved of the young man, and had differed with the young woman because they sought to select another boy friend for their daughter, police were told.

That Christine might still be in Worcester was indicated by the fact that she telephoned the young man's home last night, apparently on a local telephone call. He was not at home at that time, and the person answering the phone did not learn where Christine was 'phoning from.

Mr. Mitrush requested that police hold his daughter as a runaway.

Girl Elopes But She Forgets to Take Man

Worcester, Nov. 7—If Christine Mitrush, 20, of LaGrange st. eloped, she forgot to take along a man, police announced today after investigating the report of her father, Louis Mitrush, a baker, that she had run away with a Taine st. youth. They found him at home, in bed. But they're still seeking the young lady, against whom her father has lodged a complaint as a runaway.

PARENTS WORRY OVER MISSING GIRL

Christine Mitrush, 20, of 19 Lagrange street, is still missing from home, but the youth her parents accused of taking her away was home, Friday night, and was at his work yesterday morning. The girl's parents say that the youth drove up to the Mitrush home, Friday night, and that the girl took her belongings and went with him, according to a report to the police.

The girl's parents told the police they do not approve of the youth.

Figure 31: Newspaper Articles about Tom Foisy's mother, Christine Mitrush Foisy (Provided by Tom Foisy)

Another aspect of Albanian-American culture that evolved over time was the perception that children in the community must marry someone who was also Albanian. As mentioned earlier, many Albanian marriages were arranged. Then, instead of being actually arranged, it was just the standard for young Albanian people to marry within the community. Although, parental and family approval of a prospective spouse still played a role. Eventually, it became normalized to marry non-Albanians, but for a while dating and marriage with people outside of the community stuck out and was partially disapproved of. Tom Foisy

discussed how his mother, Christine Mitrush Foisy, had a French boyfriend that her parents did not approve of, as he was not Albanian and they had selected a different man for her to marry. Figure 31 depicts various newspaper articles about Tom Foisy's mother, and how her family was divided over her non-Albanian boyfriend. She ran away from her home in the Beacon Street neighborhood because her parents did not approve of her marrying her non-Albanian boyfriend. Furthermore, Helen Athanas explained how marrying an Albanian was considered mandatory at the time, and that "You couldn't and wouldn't even think of looking at anyone else" when finding someone to date (Helen Athanas, personal communication, April 2, 2021). She said there was an instance where,

> When I worked at the bank. I was asked out by one of the boys working there, okay. And I went home and told my mother and she said, Oh my god, no. And of course, I begged and begged and begged her. She let me go out. Since we lived in a neighborhood of Albanians you can't let any Albanian see you going out with a non-Albanian and going out. It was only once. And I mean, you know, ducking down in a car so that nobody would see you and that was it. (Helen Athanas, personal communication, April 2, 2021)

Conversely, however, Helen's younger sister, Janet Leacu Rouvina, did not feel the same pressure to marry another Albanian. When asked about the sentiments towards marrying someone outside of the community when she was growing up, Janet said,

> We know most parents liked to have you marry within the Orthodox religion. But that doesn't always happen. And my mom never really pushed it and said, "this is what I'd like you to do, what you should do". We fell in love, got married, and it just happened that our spouses were Albanian. (Janet Leacu Rouvina, personal communication, April 1, 2021)

While Helen felt that she had to fight to be able to potentially date anybody, her sister did not feel the same limitations. Even within the same generation, it can be seen that the perspective on marriage evolved. The trend appears that as time progressed, selecting spouses became less and less within the control of one's family members, moving from arranged marriages being commonplace to people having full freedom to choose their spouse without their family's recommendation.

There were also traditions followed in the community involving marriages themselves, such as traditions for proposals, the night before the wedding, and the wedding itself. One prominent pre-wedding tradition that people brought with them to the United States is visiting bodies of water the night before the wedding to collect water and throw change. Janet Leacu Rouvina recalled at her wedding that,

> We would go to three different bodies of water. It can be a lake or a pond. If there's no water, you go to a faucet. And you just take a little bottle, a little jar. The bride and groom go and they [fill] the jar with the water from the three ponds. And as they're doing that, there's all kinds of people that go, it's like a big party. And then they throw the coins to everyone standing behind them. And this is at midnight, or 10 o'clock, it's dark. So everybody's got a flashlight. And you're down there on the ground trying to figure out where [the coins are]. You should see how frantic they'd get, it's like they're stepping all over you. It's not the money. It's just so much fun. I think it was when I got married, we went to Elm Park and there was a policeman there. And he came over and he wanted to know what we were doing. So we had to explain it to him and then he said "oh okay", because you know you have this big crowd of people and everybody's all over each other, you got all these flashlights going. So he was very nice. He just said okay, we understand just don't hurt anybody. But it's things like that that make you remember all the fun times and I don't know, today it's a lot different.

(Janet Leacu Rouvina, personal communication, April 1, 2021)

Also, there was another tradition that many people practiced, which was after visiting the three ponds the husband-to-be would bathe and shave with the water from the three bodies of water. Bob Steffon describes how when he was getting married after visiting three lakes,

> And then we would come back to the house. And we would knock on the door. And my mother would be waiting at the door to find out--- I forget what the reasoning is behind it. But like am I worthy to be coming into this house that I'll be married to this woman. I think that's what it was all about. But as soon as I knocked on the door, she took the towel and I was supposed to take that water and use that water to shave with and to put it in a tub to take a bath. And I don't know if it was purifying me or what it was doing. I don't know what their reasoning was behind it. But I did it, just because it made them happy, so I did it. (Bob Steffon, personal communication, April 8, 2021)

It was also very common with our interviewees to be unaware of the exact meaning or origin of these traditions. Bob just said that he was doing the traditions to please his family. This also supports the notion that growing up in the United States somewhat distanced members of the community from traditions and sentiments that were held more closely by parents and older relatives that grew up in Albania. Traditions like this may persist because of the celebration of them and not solely because of the meaning.

There are other customs and traditions that the early arrivals brought over with them that have persisted and evolved over time. For instance, choosing godparents for a new child is still a common practice today. Although, unlike in the early days, it is no longer expected or even considered that the godparents get to name the child at their christening. The results of the efforts of the early Albanians in Worcester to keep the community together and preserve traditions from their native country are still able to be seen today.

Figure 32: Photograph of Ted Thamel in traditional costume (Provided by Tina Thamel)

Conclusion

The COVID pandemic made interviewing much more difficult. Not being able to interview participants in person did not allow us to read the participants' body language or to easily look at the same images during our photo-elicitation activities. This was even more problematic if we had to resort to phone interviews. Not having the ability to conduct in person interviews also hindered potential for gathering materials because a lot of the participants are not tech savvy and were unable to easily send over good quality scans of photographs. This limited the amount of photographs we were able to collect, which made it hard to supplement stories with appropriate visuals. Being able to review transcripts with participants in person would have also been helpful for ensuring everyone is on the same page regarding the material.

While the foundations of our research and initial interviews were important, there still are many steps that can be taken to build on our story map (story map viewable here: https://arcg.is/0SaiuO). Recommendations for the improvement of the story map include adding short biographies attached with pictures of the participants to create a human connection between the viewers and the stories told. Given time constraints, the team was not able to edit the audio recordings to match the edits that were made to the transcripts, however, we think the viewer would want to listen to the full recordings rather than read the transcripts. There are also several lines of inquiry that the group recommends be pursued further in future interviews. For instance, we did not explore the stories of the later arrivals and the role the already established local community played in their lives. We also heard a little bit about community-wide conflict regarding religious succession following the death of Bishop Fan Noli. We did not pursue this topic with most of our interviewees, not only because it wasn't pertinent to our time period of interest but also because it is a sensitive topic. Furthermore, we also sensed hesitation when asking interviewees about any prejudice they've felt throughout their lives. We think participants would be more receptive to answering sensitive questions if they were talking to a trusted interviewer in person.

Our interviews and transcripts will be submitted to the Worcester Historical Museum to inform and shape the exhibition on Albanian life in Worcester that is being planned in partnership with the Albanian Festival Committee. Our project, we hope, will serve to encourage the Albanian community in Worcester to write its own history.

Life during COVID can be very isolating, and it was especially pleasing to have a chance to form connections with members of the Albanian community. We truly enjoyed sitting down with each and every one of our interviewees and listening to their rich and meaningful stories. It was refreshing to see how animated everyone was when talking about their lives and their families. It was eye opening to compare and contrast the world our interviewees lived in versus what life is like for us. Without all of our interviewees it would not have been possible to create such a captivating story map. We cannot wait until we will be able to attend the completed exhibit in a few years. We are so thankful to have had the opportunity to meet everyone and words cannot express how life changing this experience was for us.

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Picture of Helen Athanas and her parents [Photograph]. Helen Athanas

Picture of the key to the city along with the note that Janet's father received [Photograph]. Janet Leacu Rouvina

Picture of Jeanette's uncle standing outside of his store, Anas Bros Groceries Stores [Photograph]. Jeanette Anas

Picture of Jeanette as a baby at her christening [Photograph]. Jeanette Anas

Picture of AANO Basketball Team [Photograph]. Peter Christopher

Picture of community drama production [Photograph]. Peter Christopher

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