

Our nation's railroads were built by men from points all around the globe. In the 19th century, the majority of immigrants working on the railroad were German and Irish. In the first quarter of the 20th century, Eastern and Southern Europeans, and especially Italians, arrived in large numbers.

As successive groups of immigrants arrived in this country, they took their turn doing the toughest, nastiest jobs we had to offer. Many railroad companies actively recruited, looking for hard-working and adventurous men to make the move across the Atlantic. One of these men was Tomasso Caporuscio. Born in 1886, he emigrated from Italy in 1905 and went to work for the PRR in the Altoona Works, where he was a custodian in the General Office Building at the Juniata Locomotive Shops.

Mr. Caporuscio had a green thumb and cultivated a wonderful garden, where he grew and grafted his fruit trees. Paraphrasing his grandson, Jim Caporuscio, land was sacred to him and to use it for grass or planting flowers was sacrilegious. Good land was only meant for growing food! Mr.

Caporuscio had a strong work ethic, believing that labor of any kind was noble. Everything he did, he did thoroughly, and with every task ever assigned to him, he always went the extra mile. Occasionally he brought the best of his vegetables and fruit in for his employers. He continued this practice from his first day of employment until the day he retired in 1955.

Tomasso and Rose Caporuscio raised four sons and three daughters. By the time the boys were old enough

to work for the railroad, they had assimilated into the American culture—unlike their father, who continued to speak Italian because his English was very poor. One day the boys accosted their father and accused him of humbling himself before his bosses and of “brown-nosing” them—he was nothing more than a lackey!



*Unidentified Italian track walker for the PRR. In 1914, the PRR reported that 11,000 Italian immigrants worked for the company. Italians comprised half the 600 track walkers and 1 in 14 of all PRR employees in its East of Pittsburgh and Erie division. From the PRR's Information for Employees and the Public, June 17, 1914.*

With pride in his voice he told his sons, “When I bring the produce from my gardens, I am showing my employers the fruit of my labor. This puts me on a first name basis with my employers and they see the quality of my work in and outside the job. I know that I will always be a custodian, but I pave the way for you—my sons. For one day you will be the bosses of these shops and have a better life.” He taught his sons a valuable lesson.

This story continues to be told within the family, now four generations in America. All four of Tomasso Caporuscio's sons served in the apprenticeship program and worked for the PRR, each in a different discipline. Within those two generations alone the Caporuscio's gave over 150 years of service to the railroad. There are many human characteristics of railroaders that are timeless and enduring. Regardless of the industry changes over the years and the advances of technology, the human

element of railroading is its greatest attribute. The basic fundamentals of pride in your work, a feeling of doing a job of importance and value to society, and the desire to improve the lives of your family and country are elements that transcend time and are the hallmark of railroaders everywhere. 