



JAN 22 1999

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

Ala. Historical Commission

1. Name of Property

historic name Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Primitive Ridge Road not for publication N/A
city or town West Blocton vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Bibb code 007 zip code 35184

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 3/12/99
Signature of certifying official Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that this property is:
- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 - determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 - determined not eligible for the National Register
 - removed from the National Register
 - other (explain): _____

[Signature] 4/22/99
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State Bibb County, Alabama

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

_____ buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Funerary Sub: Cemetery

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Funerary Sub: Cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

No Style: Cemetery

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

roof N/A

walls N/A

other Monuments: Granite, Concrete, Marble

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery

County and State Bibb County, Alabama

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
X D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage - European

Period of Significance 1896-1949

Significant Dates 1896 1901

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS) N/A
preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data: N/A
[] State Historic Preservation Office
[] Other state agency
[] Federal agency
[] Local government
[] University
[] Other
Name of repository

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State Bibb County, Alabama

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone Easting	Northing	Zone Easting	Northing
1	<u>16 489400</u>	<u>3663000</u>	3	_____
2	_____	_____	4	_____
	<u>See continuation sheet.</u>			

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeff Mansell, Cahaba Trace Commission and Trina Binkley, National Register Coordinator

organization Cahaba Trace Commission date January 11, 1999

street & number 240 Furnace Parkway telephone 205 665-7982

city or town Brierfield state Alabama zip code 35035

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Steve Sobat - USX, Governmental Affairs

street & number 600 Grant Street telephone 412 433-6770

city or town Pittsburg state PA zip code 15219

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Name of Property: Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State: Bibb County, Alabama

Description

The Italian Catholic Cemetery was established in 1896 and largely developed in the 1910s and 1920s. This cemetery was developed as a burial ground associated with the large immigrant Italian Catholic population who worked in the surrounding coalmines of Bibb County, Alabama. The cemetery is located in what was then the coal mining community of Blocton, a Tennessee Coal and Iron Company (TCI) town. To the north of the cemetery lay Hill Creek and to the east, the railroad tracks of the Louisville and Nashville, Mobile and Ohio, and Great Southern Railroads. Originally, the approach road for the cemetery lay to the east, winding down the hill, beneath the railroad bridge of the Mobile and Ohio railroad, to St. Francis Catholic Church (demolished) on Gunlock Hill. Little Italy, the immigrant's separate community, was located approximately 1/2 mile to the northeast of the cemetery, straddling a railroad spur which served the Klondike Mine and TCI's #3, 6, and 9 mines.

Today, the Italian Catholic Cemetery is located within the city limits of the town of West Blocton, the former residential and commercial center which was a counterpart to the TCI owned and controlled community of Blocton. West Blocton eventually consumed the Blocton community after TCI shut down its mining operation in 1928. Relatively small in size, 200' x 300', the cemetery is basically rectangular with a north/south orientation; all of the monuments and markers face north. Although the cemetery is surrounded by a simple cut wire fence, the dominant feature of the site is the six-foot tall iron cross erected in 1901 when the cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Alabama. Natural terrain and vegetation dominate the landscape and no formal plantings have been introduced. Trees surrounding the cemetery are primarily pine, with some sweet gum and oak. Scrub trees, particularly the mimosa, are found outside and inside the cemetery fence.

Funeral plots appear to have been laid randomly although monuments are usually found in familial groupings. One stone and eight concrete curbing or coping walls are found within the boundaries of the cemetery. In addition to helping deter erosion, these walls also tend to delineate family plots. Seventeen plots are enclosed with some type of fencing, typically a cut wire or cast-iron fence. Usually, these fences enclose a simple plot with a monument and corresponding footstones.

The Italian Catholic Cemetery contains approximately 86 monuments of modest range and variety. Headstones include materials of primarily granite and concrete with some marble. The majority of monuments are simple headstones (some with accompanying footstones) although one does find small obelisks. While most gravemarkers reflect the density and embellishment representative of small late 19th and early 20th century cemeteries in primarily rural areas, the Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery contains a majority of markers with epitaphs in Italian. Markers are embellished with Christian symbols such as bibles, flowers, trees, vines, doves, lambs and crosses. A particular popular motif is sets of open gates, which appear on approximately a dozen headstones. Also, at least five markers (those of the Torreano and Columbini families) still retain photographic images of the deceased, which have been placed behind protective clear glass coverings. Unfortunately, some of these images have been removed either by descendants of the family or vandals.

With the Italian community's association with TCI and coal mining, many of the monuments are embellished with mining symbols such as a cap, pick and shovel. Often these same stones carry the words "morto nella mina", which translated means "died in the mines". Unfortunately, none of the monuments in the Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery bear any stonemason's mark of any identification denoting the place of manufacture. It would seem logical that some of the monuments may have been crafted by a number of talented Italian stonemasons who resided in Birmingham around the turn of the century but there is no historical documentation to confirm this assumption. While the cemetery was almost exclusively for Italian Catholics, one marker denotes a different nationality. A small obelisk reads "Julian Matten, 1870-Belgium, 1915-Piper".

Although TCI closed its mining operation in 1928, the cemetery was used up through the 1960s. In the 1940s, the cemetery became the final resting-place for Italians who died while serving their country in World War II. Willie Burnett's monument notes that he was "killed in action on Lazon, March 22, 1945. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith." Brunetti's sister was interred in the cemetery in 1952 and his two parents in the 1960s. The most recent marker, that of Domenico Brunelli, was laid in 1970.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7.8 Page 2

Name of Property: Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State: Bibb County, Alabama

Today, the Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery is cleaned periodically by concerned volunteers and citizens of the town of West Blocton. Although occasionally overgrown, the cemetery retains its original character and represents a rural cemetery of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The cemetery is the place most importantly associated with the Italian immigrant settlers and provides a tangible link with their contributions to the area's period of significance. The nomination contains one contributing site.

Archaeological Component

Although no formal archaeological testing has been conducted, the potential for subsurface material is good. This property could provide information on the Italian community at West Blocton through burial location and grouping; use and quantity of markers, or no markers; inscriptions indicating identity, cultural affiliation, birth and death dates, and cause of death.

Statement of Significance, Criterion A – Ethnic Heritage

The Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A – Ethnic Heritage as the site most importantly associated with the Italian immigrant settlers who migrated to Bibb County in the late nineteenth century and lived and worked in the area into the 20th century. The cemetery reflects an important aspect of the area's settlement and evolving sense of community. In the late 19th century, hundreds of Italians immigrated to Bibb County, Alabama to work in the coalmines of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company. In spite of segregation and discrimination, these immigrants established a thriving and vibrant community in Blocton, Alabama. In addition to their own community known as Little Italy, the Italian immigrants founded St. Francis of Assisi Church and in 1906, the Catholic cemetery. Consecrated in 1901, the cemetery was used until 1970 for the interment of these immigrants and their descendants. The cemetery retains a high degree of integrity in regard to its location, plan, setting, monumentation, feeling and association. The cemetery retains its original character and the burial ground's monumentation range and variety remain intact. Infill of modern stones has been minimal and does not compromise the graveyard's character. Most markers appear to be in relatively good condition. In regard to feeling and association, the Blocton Italian Catholic cemetery successfully represents a community cemetery of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, the cemetery successfully conveys its most important period of use, the years between 1896 and 1949, when many Italian immigrants were interred there.

Statement of Justification, Criteria Consideration D: Cemetery

The Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery meets criteria consideration D as it derives its significance from its ethnic association under Criteria A.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 3

Name of Property: Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State: Bibb County, Alabama

Historical Summary

The following historical summary is taken from the article "Little Italy in Rural Alabama" by Rhoda Coleman Ellison, Alabama Heritage, Number 2, Fall 1996. Sources for this article included Bibb County newspapers of the period, the biennial reports of the Alabama State Inspector of Mines, 1892-94, the Bibb County Circuit Court Indictment Record, Vol. 5, and personal interviews with numerous Italian-Americans and their descendants.

The first immigrants arrived in Blocton, Alabama in the mid- 1880s. Some were Slavs, other Poles, but the majority were Italians. Many had come from villages in the hills above Bologna, south of Florence, and from the Italian colony on the island of Corsica. Employed as shepherds, farmers, or gardeners in their native land, they had been lured to Alabama by coal-mining company recruiters looking for cheap labor, and later, by letters from relatives and friends who had preceded them to the Bibb County hills.

For the untraveled and unworldly immigrants such as these, the journey to Alabama was fraught with difficulties. Surviving an Atlantic crossing in the stench of steerage was a minor challenge compared to the one that awaited them on Ellis Island, where daunting immigration regulations prevailed. The language barrier only made the ordeal worse. "Just say what I say," the man standing in line in front of Giuseppe Globetti suggested kindly, and, by imitating the stranger's words, Globetti managed to obtain his immigration papers. Afterwards, still wearing around his neck the tag, "Deliver to Blocton, Alabama, U.S.A.," he succeeded in reaching his destination by train. Fellow immigrant Serafino Castelli, however, was less fortunate; although his tag was identical to Globetti's, he was first "delivered" to New Brockton, in Coffee County, 150 miles from his intended destination.

Unable to communicate with their countrymen, the immigrants encountered problems with even the simplest aspects of American life. Eighteen-year-old Joseph Providenza, unfamiliar with the fruit peddled on the day coach he was riding, bought a banana and attempted to eat it without peeling it first, much to the amusement of the American passengers. Hungarian John Samsel laughingly admitted years after his own arrival in this country that he had once eaten ham and eggs until he was sick of them because they were the only English words he knew at the time. But communication problems between natives and immigrants were not always of such a trivial nature, and during the early years of the migration to Blocton the strange sounds of a foreign tongue aroused suspicion on both sides.

Religious differences also separated the immigrants from their new neighbors in Alabama, for the staunchly Protestant Blocton residents, most of whom had never seen a Roman Catholic before, were frightened of creeds and rituals they did not understand. The extent of the community's aversion to the newcomers became apparent early in the immigration when one of the immigrants - an Italian child - died and Protestant Blocton refused the family interment rights in Mt. Carmel, the Protestant cemetery. Rejected even in death, the Italian Catholics began a cemetery of their own atop a wooded hill in Blocton. Separated from other graves in the area and marked by a six-foot iron cross, the Catholic Cemetery had its own identity, as the immigrants kept theirs from the beginning of their lives in Alabama.

In the unfriendly environment of Blocton, the imported miners drew together in a community of their own. Until they had worked long enough to reimburse mine owners for their boat passage, they slept in company-owned stockades, derisively called "dog pens" by the natives. When the men had paid their debt in labor and had accumulated enough funds for their families' passage to America - usually after about two years - they sent for their wives and children. One immigrant, Serafino Casetelli, whose first wife, Gaetana, died after her arrival in Bibb County, proposed marriage and offered passage to an Italian widow recommended by another immigrant, and she, with her two children, soon joined him in his new home.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 4

Name of Property: Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State: Bibb County, Alabama

Unlike their fellow countrymen who were transplanted to the slums of urban industrial centers such as Boston and New York, the Italians who immigrated to Bibb County established their Little Italy on the side of a rugged hill (called "The Hill") at the bottom of which were a small stream and a rail line connecting Tennessee Coal and Iron Company's Number Three and Number Nine mines. The community - known as "The Hollow" to its inhabitants, dubbed "Dago Hollow" by non-immigrant residents of the area - was located in Blocton, a company town wholly owned by TCI. Adjoining Blocton was the town of West Blocton, which developed in the 1890s as a residential and commercial community supporting Blocton. Although some Italians settled in nearby mining communities such as Marvel, Garnsey, and Piper, the majority made their home in Blocton's Little Italy.

In The Hollow, and later on The Hill, reunited families moved into simple, company-constructed homes, and miners whose families had not yet arrived obtained board and lodging in crowded quarters. The immigrants provided for each other's needs as much as possible in their self-contained community, and some residences in Little Italy, in addition to accommodating lodgers, also included a small general store. In such cases, living quarters for the family were relegated to the rear of the store or to its upper floors. One particularly hard-working couple, Nargisso Nuggi and his wife, established a restaurant in their home and a large boardinghouse next door.

For the women who operated these boardinghouses, the workday lasted from dawn till late at night, and usually the children of the family assumed a position of the workload. Mrs. Albano Ferrire, who was three months old when she immigrated to Blocton, recalls that as a young girl it was her regular morning duty to assist her family's ten lodgers by washing their lunch buckets and cleaning the reflectors on the carbide lamps each wore on his miner's cap. Her industrious mother, who cooked meals and washed clothes for all ten lodgers, as well as her own family, served the community as a midwife and also located wet nurses for babies whose mothers had no milk.

For the men who worked in the mines, life was equally hard and considerably more dangerous. During the early years especially, when working conditions and mining methods were still primitive, the Bibb County mines claimed many lives, and of course the novices from Italy were not exempt. "The miner risks his life as no other man does," declared the editor of the *Blocton Messenger* on July 3, 1903. "In the morning when he enters the dark hole that carries him away from the light of the world, he knows he is risking his life." The local newspaper frequently reported the injuries and deaths of miners, identifying the Americans by name and the immigrants by nationality only. On March 13, 1903, for example, the paper noted: "Wednesday Mr. Jim Dykous was so seriously injured that his right leg had to amputated immediately A large rock fell on his leg crushing it Just the day before Mr. Dykous had been injured in the face." In the same account, however, under the heading "A Bad Day in the Mines," readers learned that "An Italian [was] so badly injured in No. 3 mine Wednesday that his leg had to be taken off at once." A decade later, injured foreigners were still seldom referred to by name: "Two miners, an Italian and a Hungarian, were badly hurt by a fall of rock Monday night, one in Number 1 and the other in Number 8," noted the *Blocton Enterprise* on May 27, 1913. In the same issue, the *Enterprise* reported the fatal injuries of "a negro convict named Tom Johnson."

Although the difficulty of spelling the European names was probably a more significant factor in Bibb County journalism than was ethnic discrimination, no question remains about the existence of discrimination in the mines. Frequently the Italians and Slavs had to defend themselves against American miners, who regarded the foreigners as threats to their own employment. Because the miner was responsible for furnishing all his own equipment, clashes also occurred over materials and supplies. Like other laborers, the immigrant was obliged to obtain a company mule to haul coal, but he soon discovered that he was allowed to use only the poorest animals. The amount and quality of the timber each miner had to supply to support the little "rooms" they excavated were also frequent sources of conflict. One such incident was reported on December 9, 1892, by the *Blocton Courier*, involving "a fight between Edgar Brown and an Italian named Antonio Dratz about some timber used in Number Five mine. We understand Dratz attempted to strike Brown with a pick, when Brown picked up a miner's needle and pierced it about 2 inches deep into Dratz's stomach, inflicting a dangerous but not necessarily fatal wound. At last account

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section 8 Page 5

Name of Property: Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State: Bibb County, Alabama

Brown had not been arrested." In such confrontations, the immigrants seem to have been at a disadvantage even with the law enforcement officers.

Ethnic discrimination was evident in social situations as well. A number of fraternal societies popular in America around the turn of the century operated in Bibb County, claiming the loyalty of Blocton residents of Anglo-Saxon blood. The Elks, Freemasons, and Knights of Pythias met in their respective halls; the Improved Order of Red Men assembled in their "tents," and the Order of the Owls, in their "nests." But Italians were no more welcome to membership in these groups than black men would have been. The social categories observed by the community were bluntly defined at the Smith Hill liquor dispensary, where, according to the *Blocton Messenger*- of May 22, 1903, three "compartments" were marked off for drinking: one for whites, another for "colored people," and a third for "dagoes."

Rejected by their non-immigrant neighbors, the Italians followed their own customs in their own compact little community, the social and religious center of which was St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, organized as a congregation in the late 1880s. A simple frame structure, twenty by thirty feet, the church was constructed in 1905 by immigrants under the direction of Father McCafferty, a Roman Catholic priest who had been transferred to Blocton from St. John's parish in Tuscaloosa. Located on Gunlock Hill, the church served both Italian and non-Italian Catholic immigrants, who decorated the edifice with two stained glass windows. In this small church, the important religious lives were celebrated. Here, the bishop of the diocese came annually from Mobile to confirm new members. By 1912, the children in the church's confirmation class numbered sixty-five. Here, too, Lenten devotions were held with "appropriate hymns rendered in English and Italian as well as Latin.

Although the residents of Little Italy attended Mass at St. Francis Church with other Catholic immigrants, their social life rarely included non-Italians. On The Hill and in The Hollow, where for many years nothing but Italian could be heard, the immigrants entertained themselves. In the evenings, the women, many of whom had shared an outdoor oven for baking bread during the day, sat together outside the general store on The Hill and gossiped. Nearby the men played their favorite game of outdoor bowling, "bocce." The chief social events for the community were baptisms and weddings, both considered equal occasions for feasting and merrymaking; weddings were sometimes enlivened by the sound of shotgun and pistol fire, used in place of firecrackers. Soon after the turn of the century, the more ambitious citizens of Little Italy established a social and literary club called The Prosperity Society of Blocton. Later, the women formed a social club, which they called "Yolanda," and the men formed another, "I Figli d'Italia" (Sons of Italy), and each had weekly meetings.

Especially dear to the Italians was musical entertainment, particularly dances, which were held every Saturday evening and were attended by young and old, the children going along to watch their parents swing around the room. Because Italian daughters were brought up very strictly, according to the style of their European homeland, none were permitted to drink alcoholic beverages; consequently, when a young man escorted his dance partner to the bar, he ordered a piece of fruit for her while he took a drink for himself. The girl who carried home the most fruit was considered the evening's most popular belle.

The Little Italy Band, later called the Italian Concert Band customarily furnished music. The band may have been organized as an answer to two local bands formed by non-Italian miners. Besides playing weekly for dances and performing concerts regularly, the Little Italy Band occasionally had the somber duty of accompanying Italian funeral processions from St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church to the Italian cemetery. In the years when the casket was borne by a horse-drawn hearse, the band played the funeral march as the cortege wound its way down Gunlock Hill, crossed beneath the Mobile and Ohio Railroad overpass, and slowly mounted the hill to the Catholic Cemetery.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 6

Name of Property: Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State: Bibb County, Alabama

On a number of these occasions, the Little Italy Band accompanied the remains of miners who had died in work related injuries. Today, visitors to the Catholic cemetery in Blocton can still identify many of these graves: on some tombstones, death from an accident in the mines is indicated by the words "morto nella none"; on others, by the miner's emblem - cap, pick, and shovel - carved in the marble. The inscription for three Italian men buried in one grave tells the same story in English: "Killed April 23, 1897."

By 1892, working conditions and low pay had become such an issue with the miners that immigrant and American laborers put aside their differences to fight Tennessee Coal and Iron Company. Among other grievances, workers were dissatisfied with the low pay allowed for the coal each man dug, the long periods between payments, and the high price of supplies at the company commissaries. By 1894, Bibb County had become a fertile field for United Mine Workers of American organizers, who encouraged a strike that year. As would happen many times, the Alabama National Guard was called in and the company managers managed to suppress the local union by firing its members. The summer of 1908 was particularly volatile for Blocton after labor leader Joe Poggino arrived in town and "addressed the Italians in their own tongue," according to the *Blocton Enterprise*. In mid-August of that year, Blocton's striking miners made national headlines when a Louisville and Nashville train importing European strikebreakers to Blocton was fired upon in the middle of the night. Three men were killed - the conductor, a deputy sheriff, and one imported miner - and eleven others were injured. Three Slavs were convicted of the crime and five other Bulgarians were allowed to plead guilty and given lighter sentences.

Other hardships and misfortunes befell the hapless residents of Little Italy. One particularly tragic event is recorded on a tombstone in the Catholic Cemetery. The epitaph, loosely translated, reads: "Here lies Elizabetta Castelli born 1864, murdered at the young age of 36 years, robbed and killed by a murderer of the black race in the morning at 8 o'clock on December 15, 1902, leaving behind her husband and son, weeping and sorrowing." The convicted man was hanged in a public execution, after which the hangman's noose was cut into bits and passed out as souvenirs to the crowd of spectators. A white man, suspected of being an accomplice, if not the murderer himself, disappeared and was never indicted.

Although the little Italy and West Blocton communities remained largely separated from each other and moments of friction between the two groups continued to occur, relations gradually improved. In 1913, for example, the local newspaper editor took civic pride in Aden Castagnoli's graduation with high honors from Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University) and his immediate appointment to an instructorship in the Department of Mining Engineering. In later years, Castagnoli was one of a team of engineers commissioned to reconstruct the foundations of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. By 1913 the Italian Band was performing concerts regularly at the West Blocton theater, entertaining appreciative fairgoers at the Bibb County Fair in the county seat, Centreville, and furnishing New Year's music on West Blocton's Main Street.

The First World War, by bringing Italy and the United States together as allies, perhaps forged the first sympathetic bond between the two communities in Blocton. On September 3, 1914, the *Blocton Enterprise* reported: "Mr. A. Castelli has received a call to go to his country, Italy, to serve in the army. He will leave next week." The joyous celebration at the conclusion of the war momentarily brought the two Blocton communities together as never before, and although the Blocton Band led the local victory parade, the Italian Band, performing in a brightly lighted pavilion, proudly furnished music for the evening festivities.

The most significant factor in lowering the ethnic wall separating the two communities, however, was probably the decrease in local population, both Italian and non-Italian, after the closing of TCI's Blocton mines in 1928. Many residents of Little Italy migrated to New Jersey, Ohio, and California. Some moved to Illinois to work for country clubs or affluent families as gardeners or caretakers, following their employers to Miami in the winters. Still others found employment as merchants or miners in Birmingham, where a number of them still reside. As a result of these migrations, the remaining inhabitants of the Blocton area drew closer together and eventually became one community.

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National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8.9.10 Page 7

Name of Property: Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State: Bibb County, Alabama

Today, the Italian Catholic Cemetery is the only remaining vestige of the once thriving and vibrant Italian community of Blocton, Alabama. A recent count reveals over one hundred Italian family names on the grave markers in the Catholic cemetery. Although the earliest markers and monuments date from the mid-1890s, the majority of interments took place in the 1910s and early 1920s. While the cemetery may still be used for burials, the most recent marker dates from 1970. Still marked today by the six foot iron cross the immigrants erected and separated from other graves in the area by an iron fence, the Catholic Cemetery keeps its own identity, as the immigrants kept theirs from the beginning of their lives in America.

Bibliography

Ellison, Rhoda Coleman. "Little Italy in Alabama." *Alabama Heritage*, No. 2; Fall 1996.

Verbal Boundary Description

That one acre more or less lying in the city limits of West Blocton, Bibb County, Alabama known as the Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery as represented as parcel number 07-05-06-24-1-000-003.000 on the Blocton tax map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary lines were drawn to include that area historically known as the Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery.

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Section photographs Page 8 Name of Property: Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
County and State: Bibb County, Alabama

Photographs

The information contained in items 1-5 is the same for all photographs

1. Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery
2. West Blocton, Bibb County, Alabama
3. Jeff Mansell, Photographer
4. August 23, 1998
5. Negatives on file - Alabama Historical Commission
6. Photograph #1
7. Camera facing northeast

6. Photograph #2
7. Camera facing east, detail of headstone

6. Photograph #3
7. Camera facing east, detail of headstone

6. Photograph #4
7. Camera facing west

6. Photograph #5
7. Camera facing east

6. Photograph #6
7. Camera facing east/northeast

6. Photograph #6
7. Camera facing east, detail of headstone

6. Photograph #7
7. Camera facing east/southeast

6. Photograph #8
7. Camera facing west

6. Photograph #9
7. Camera facing east

6. Photograph #10
7. Camera facing east

6. Photograph #11
7. Camera facing south

6. Photograph #12
7. Camera facing southeast

Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery (not to scale) Bibb County, Alabama

- Headstone
- Iron Cross
- Obelisk
- Concrete Retaining Wall
- - - Iron Fence

(#1) Corresponding Photograph Numbers



