Johns Market Anthony Benevento & Joe McCardle 10-29-15
These interviews, like the ones with Paul Modugno and Louis Ginefra on 10/22, take place in John's Market, where a number of former neighborhood buddies get together on Thursdays. [sbh: It would be interesting to know if any of the Market regulars ever hung out at the Key Club mentioned by Debbie Gallo.] Both men interviewed here lived in the Father Rasi Hi-Rise Projects [demolished in 2004], which housed the mostly white ethnic population, largely Italian and Irish, that lived west of the Oakwood Avenue neighborhood where the Alexander Projects on Parrow Street were located. Both men think Orange was a good place to grow up when they were growing up and starting families, and, as one remarks, "Orange is in our heart," but they also agree that the place has undergone drastic changes, especially demographic changes, in the years after the construction of 280. They are at pains to explain that their evaluation of the incomers is not based on race, but on social and cultural characteristics.

At the beginning of the interview, they ask how the interviewer found the Market, and Chris Matthews says Pat Morrissy, director of HANDS (Housing and Neighborhood Development Services, Inc.) helped him.

[sbh note, probably to be deleted: Anthony is extremely friendly and assertive, frequently repeating his remarks for emphasis, but occasionally betrays an underlying sense of victimhood; Joe seems quieter, non-confrontational, less eager to complain, but is clearly interested in correcting or elaborating on assertions that seem to him to be exaggerated or incomplete. I often found him hard to hear, and may have misattributed a few of his remarks.]

Main participants

Anthony Benevento b. 9/06/1944
973 884-0421(home) 973 704-5043 (cell)

Anthony was a police officer in Orange. He was born on Cary(?) Street "a few blocks from here." [Cary runs parallel to the highway west of Scotland Road.] His family moved with every new baby, and in 1952, when the Father Rasi Projects opened up, they moved to 340 Day Street. After the next baby they moved to a tenement across the street, then went to Center Street, then N. Center Street, but "basically always in Orange." Eventually there were eleven young Beneventos.

The father ran a little car radiator shop on South Jefferson Street in Orange, across the street from the Orange Tornado Football Club, which developed into the Washington Senators or a similar team. As the boys from the family grew older, they would help out at the shop. After a stint in the shop, but before joining the police force in 1967 (after missing the height requirement the year before), Anthony "climbed trees for the Aspen Tree company." He served on the force for 25 years, and retired in 1992, at least partially because of a change in the caliber of the younger recruits, whose errors, he, as

an acting chief, would be held responsible for. He taught for five years and then became police director in another city.

He married young, and, in 1972, he and his brother, with growing families, clubbed together to come up with a down payment of $7,000, but could not find a house in Orange that they could afford. As a consequence, they bought a duplex right over the line in West Orange; he continued to walk to work in Orange, however, because his employment (and heart) were still there.

Anthony now lives in East Hanover, but when asked about that explained that in 1972 or 2973 a Black Panther group had written a letter threatening him, his wife, and his child. He sent the wife and child down to the shore temporarily and decided that a permanent move to West Orange was imperative as soon as it could be arranged. [sbh: I cannot reconcile these accounts, and may have confused the voices of the speakers.]

The father also worked as a custodian and as a delivery man. "He put us here, and he took care of us." After the construction of 280, Benevento Senior bought a small piece of property from the state and built a larger radiator shop, and Anthony's parents lived above that shop from then on.

The father was originally from Italy, and settled first in South Orange, then moved to Orange. Anthony's mother was born "right around the corner" on Reock Street [a one-block street now north of the highway, south of the train tracks, running between S. Day and S. Center]. Reock itself was not a residential street, did not have many houses; the woman's family lived "in the back" behind a bakery,

Joe McCardle b. 9/17/1941
973 740-0320(home) 973 365-6460(cell)

Joe was born at St. Michael's hospital in Newark, but his family soon moved into Orange, then into the projects. His father worked at Edison, on Main Street in West Orange, "making the batteries," and drove a camper part time for (?)Bolin(g)/Balin(g) Tech in Orange. [Joe typically drops nasal 'g' at word endings, making it hard to conjecture what this company's name was.]

Twelve McCardle children were born, but three died at birth.

Joe started out as a file boy for a (?)journal, then got a chance to apply for a job as a claims adjuster for an insurance company, where he subsequently worked for 40 years or more, at least part of that time for Prudential. After retiring, he worked part time at the library. He started out working on claims in Orange and West Orange, but at one point was sent to Middletown, which his wife liked—"It was different"—but with his entire family "up here" he was happy to be sent back to West Orange after two years. Later he moved to Livingston, where he is now.

Father Rasi Public Housing went all the way through to Lincoln Avenue. Joe's building, despite its 332 Mechanic Street address, was, like 340 Day, actually on Day. Both these buildings faced north; two additional buildings faced onto Mechanic, with space in between for outdoor activities like basketball.

Back then Holy Roller church was across from where John's Market is now, on S. Essex, with "a building" [part of the projects?] right behind a row of houses, a store, Mike's, across the street, a tavern (Ronzuli's? - unclear) on the corner, a bakery, and 3- to 5-story wood construction apartment buildings or tenement houses "going all the way down."

The Rasi buildings had eight stories, with five or six apartments per floor in the two buildings on Day Street. [sbh: Media sources claim there were 140 apartments in the four Rasi buildings, and 140 more in the Alexander Projects on Parrow.]

The first floors were the most desirable due to the fact that apartments on the higher floors were smaller and the elevators broke down frequently.

Anthony's ten-person family moved onto the first floor at 340 Day, and had a six-room apartment: four bedrooms, one bathroom, the kitchen, and the living room. At about the same time (1951-52), when Joe was around eleven or twelve, his seven-person family moved into the second floor of 332 Mechanic, with three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a parlor.

Life in the neighborhood
Joe (or someone) recalls photos of kids who lived in the projects.

In the summertime, families would hang out on park benches in front of the buildings, sometimes, when it was very hot, pretty much spending the night there. One person remembers a favorite nighttime activity involving dashing to a local bakery to buy a 10-cent loaf of Italian bread just out of the oven and running back quickly so that it would still be hot when the butter went on.

These men do not recall racial conflict when they were growing up, and claim that it developed after the Newark riots in 1967. "It just so happened," due to the ethnic makeup of the neighborhoods, that the Rasi buildings were predominately but not entirely white, while the Alexander Houses on Parrow were entirely black, but when there were youthful fights with groups from elsewhere, especially from outside Orange, all the Rasi kids would stick together to defend their neighborhood.

Later in the interview, Anthony tells a story along the same lines: When a group from his neighborhood was visiting some friends in the (black) Oakwood neighborhood, they were threatened by a bunch of black kids from East Orange. The Rasi boys were preparing to defend themselves when their Oakwood friends, saying, "We told you to come down here—we'll take care of you," jumped in front of them and "beat the hell out of" the aggressors.

After the Newark riots, a lot of "good people," white and black, moved out of Orange, while less socially and financially stable groups flowed outward from Newark, "skipping" East Orange. According to one of the men, there are still plenty of good people in the Oakwood neighborhood [sbh: perhaps because they had fewer options for moving out], but from 1968 on there were problems at the high school every day and Anthony, being "a midnight guy" on the police force, would be called in a couple of times a week to stand outside and guard the building.

Community Facilities

These men used the "Y" on Hurlbut Street. The two "Ys" on Oakwood were for people from that neighborhood, which was black, and Italians were not welcome at the Main Street "Y," or in West Orange generally. Anthony comments about prejudice against Italians that "it was part of life, we understood,…we didn't care" (because they knew community facilities were meant for the communities they served), and Joe adds that churches were similarly organized: "Whatever neighborhood you lived in, you supported the church in that district," although you could attend services in any church in the city where you lived.

The churches: Mt. Carmel (Anthony's church, "built by Italians for Italians"); St. John's (a predominantly Irish church which did not want Italians); the church in the Valley; St. Jude on Main Street; and St. Cynanthis(?), which was a German church. [See note on Gallo interview, where some of these churches are also listed.]

Orange had two major hospitals: Orange Memorial and St. Mary's, plus the little orthopedic hospital, Orange Orthopedic, originally on Lincoln Avenue.

The Orange Library, according to Anthony, was "second to none," although he adds that the Newark Library "might have been better."

Anthony also points out that these facilities added up to a lot of tax-exempt real estate for the 2.2 square miles of Orange, and he asserts that a lot of things are driven by money, giving as example name changes from "City of Orange Township," to "City of Orange." [sbh: The form of local government and its financial relationship to the state probably changed at the same time, or at least that's the way it works in New York State.] Orange was definitely a city from way back, unlike the more suburban communities of West and South Orange.

Building 280 was a mistake

Anthony says the police would work side jobs at $5 an hour, and he spent part of every day on the construction site in all the dust and dirt, which necessitated daily uniform changes [sbh: at considerable expense to the officer involved]. At first he considered the highway project a good thing, until "when it started taking away all the good people that lived all along here, and it changed the complexion of Orange immensely…I never would have believed that this place would've changed that much. That turned out bad. That turned out to be a bad thing. Y'know, progress didn't work. We had Rheingold

here…." [The brewery is mentioned again, later on, as a source of jobs and money for the city.]

Joe states that the route was originally meant to go through (?)downtown, but Anthony is not aware of any such plan. Joe says "some of us used to call it [this area] shantytown." The men agree that, like people who live in Biafra and don't know any different, "we didn't know any different," and they have fond memories of the place where they grew up.

"My sister and his sisters, they could walk all over town, all over. Today you can't walk anywhere." They add more in this vein, commenting that people did not have to lock their doors, and young people respected their elders, who could call out other people's kids and get support for that, but now "every day there's a shooting." Joe tells a story about impressing a girl by putting "Joe McCardle, Orange, NJ" on a stamped envelope, and showing her that it was delivered. "Everybody knew everybody."

In response to a question about how this close feeling came about, the men agree that everyone was poor together so they stuck together. They were happy to drink out of one glass, one bucket, one ladle, no matter who had drunk first.

After talking about having black friends, Anthony says, "I wish my children, I do, would grow up the way I grew up. We didn't have nothin' … but we had everything. We had friendship, we had respect…" Joe interrupts, saying, "We didn't know we didn't have anything." [sbh: Before the living room TV became common, it was much easier not to know how other people lived, and this may have encouraged the idea that one's neighborhood way of life was typical of the rest of the world.]

From 1968 on, there were problems, especially in the schools, causing people to want to move out. Anthony claims the police were "out there" at the school every week in riot gear. He cannot give eyewitness evidence because the police were not allowed into the building, but understood that there were fights between blacks and whites, and "they were beating up the white girls, they were doing all these things, but they wouldn't let us into the building."

More memories of the time of construction (from end of interview)
Anthony did traffic on the highway, and at first both men thought the highway was a good thing; Joe adds that "They wanted it elevated, at first." Also, at first there was no westbound exit into Orange; you had to go to West Orange "and swing around."

Joe says he lived right there, and Anthony keeps emphasizing that "It ruined the town," and "They took away good houses," and our "Y." Both remember the demolition. Joe says if the demolition had been done today it would be done better, they would have more high tech equipment, but at that time they just used wrecking balls.

When asked where the displaced people went, Anthony comes out against eminent domain, saying that in a free country it is not right for the government to come and take

your house. Joe says people didn't want to move into the projects because they were associated with poor people, but, "You had to find your own."

Anthony says many people were forced to move out of town, as they already had 35,000-40,000 people in 2.2 square miles, pointing out that the population subsequently fell to around 29,000. [Official figures: <http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/census/1990/poptrd6.htm>]

Many people worked on the project, including Joe's father: "Everybody wanted that job." Anthony remembers an area [part of the work site?] with free beer, so that there were a lot of drinkers there, and when he got off work at 12 he would go there, have beer and pizza, and hang out with the guys.

At this point, right at the end of the interview, the conversation veers back to "what things used to be like," as Joe recalls the little ice house on Oakwood Avenue where they would make ice. Anthony adds that there used to be a milkman, a ragman, a fruit man, and a knife sharpener with his little bell. [sbh: The last knife sharpener I can remember coming around, in Westchester County, also gave up right around this time ~1968-1972 as electric sharpeners became more common.]

Mr. Goldman would come in, measure for your curtains, sell them to you, and put them "on the arm" for you.

Joe remembers having a coin box on the refrigerator, where you had to insert a quarter a day to use it, with the money going to the purchase. He also recalls the coal stove. Anthony says he lived in an unheated cold water flat when he first married, and they would put sheets up to isolate the bedroom(s) and keep the heat from the stove concentrated right there where they heated water for cooking and washing. His wife had a washing machine with a roller that had to be near the sink for the water to flow out.

Summing up, they assert once again that, although poor, they were happy. Anthony recalls the celebration when he got onto the police force: he bought a big sub for fifty cents from Lou and Steve's subway shop on the corner. Joe says Lou and Steve now "around 85," are still alive, living "on top of the Stop and Shop."

Although they didn't have money, Anthony's father used to take them to a Chinese Restaurant, Hang Gow/Kow, right up the street on the righthand side, for a Sunday night treat. They also recall the Good Humor truck, lemonade and lemon ice, and some sort of frankfurter, sausage, or ground beef truck.

Games that used to be played:
Scotalabot: There is considerable discussion of this game, also known as Johnny Rides a Pony, Johnny on a White Horse: [See sbh note on this Buck Buck game in the Modugno/Ginefra interview.]

Amora [Morra]: No one is entirely sure how to spell the name of this quick throw-the-

fingers game where one player attempts to guess the sum of the fingers that will be thrown by both (or all) players. It can be used for drinks, so must not be limited to children.

Odds and evens with coins (Joe; this game was unknown to Anthony): Two heads vs a head and a tail from the top of a stack of coins, plus a similar game.

Card flips: Players would flip baseball cards onto the ground, and the cards that ended up on top of the other cards would take all the cards.

Boys played marbles, or jimmies, girls scotch or hopscotch. [sbh: Immies may be "imitations" of more expensive marbles like Aggies. The cheapest of all—these probably went out of style in the thirties or earlier—were made of clay, and quite small; my sister and I had a hand-me-down collection of them.]

Sledding (recalled during discussion of holidays like Christmas)
Joe asks, "Who remembers going sleigh riding?….Some of us had sleds, and some of us had cardboards." Anthony adds that some had garbage can lids. He would go to Cameron Field, where there was a hill, and Joe says he went to Maryland Street. [sbh: The Cameron Field hill may be in South Orange; Maryland Street is north of 280, and runs west off Scotland Road. Does the difference in sledding locales suggest some social separation between Irish and Italians (who would have attended different churches) or was it just a family thing?]

Sports, Movies, Dances, and Hanging Out:
Sports were a major occupation during their teen years: During the day the boys could go to the "Y" or the park to play sports, baseball or basketball or football, or to Jenkins Playground in West Orange, pretending that they lived there.

There were also six basketball courts behind the Rasi houses; you could look out the window, see kids out there, and go down to play. They would get together at 9 AM on Saturday mornings and organize their own games, playing the entire day. "Whoever was there, we had a game, and our mothers and fathers knew where we were." "That's how we got to meet other people, because we played sports against—we would play ball against the other side of town." Anthony points out that there were north, east, and south sides of town, and the Rasi Houses were in the middle.

Joe asks if there were four or five wards, and Anthony says there were four, north, south, east, and west, no middle, plus three at-large seats.

Because the Hurlbut "Y" closed early, youths would "hang" on street corners in the evenings, having nothing else to do, or sit out in front of the project buildings. Later, when Anthony was on the force, kids still did this; he states that the police would let them hang out on corners or in the parks, even after 10 PM closing time, as long as they were quiet, but if they made a lot of noise or someone complained, they had to chase them away. He says the police "couldn't win" because the white kids would tell

them to go chase black kids, and the black kids would complain that the [mostly white] police officers were picking on them.

Like Debbie Gallo, Anthony and Joe would attend the Saturday Night CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) dances.

Young people could also take a bus from Main Street down to Newark and see a movie for 25 cents, sometimes sneaking in, or go by trolley to the Embassy Theater. The trolley went to the "Swamp Line" in West Orange. A general discussion of the date when the trolleys stopped running concludes that this was in 1946 or ’47, about 65 years ago.
Joe adds that the tracks used to cause a lot of trouble for drivers on Main Street for years after the line closed, especially when parked cars forced their (then thinner) tires into the ruts.

Joe mentions a Willie (?)Demeara/DeMera, who owned a diner, Willie’s Diner, on the Swamp Line. On Friday nights after the bars closed, a group of musicians, Victor (?)Rosen or (?)Maloney who played the accordion, with Tommy Pirro, bass, and Mike Deloyer, guitar, would show up for a two-hour jam session during which Willie locked the doors, preventing patrons from entering or leaving. Sometimes a certain Lou Monte would stop by and join in. Anthony interrupts to say he has his uncle’s accordion.

Joe says his father used to walk from one side of town to the other, and someone let his father use land between Center and Ogden Streets, near where Joe’s brother Sal lived, for a little farm.

Anthony mentions Tulip lane as "a little dirt road." [sbh: This seems to have become the beginning portion of Park Drive, in the park, that runs from the corner of Hickory and Central.]

Anthony then says people from all over want to come to John’s Market, including even the South Jersey branch of The Sons of Italy, a charitable organization to which he belongs, because it’s such a great place to hang out, play cards, etc. "It’s not the safest neighborhood in the world at night, but we feel safe. This is our house. This is our house." The men say they’ve been coming here on Thursdays for thirty years, and Anthony says he used to have lunch here when he was on the force despite the fact that only Millie, the proprietor’s mother, would allow anyone to have mayonnaise on, e.g. a sandwich of ham, provolone, and tomato, because mayo not Italian.

Joe says he never had peanut butter as a kid, but Anthony says he and his siblings ate peanut butter and jelly all the time. He also likes banana and mayonnaise sandwiches instead of the peanut butter and banana some other people had.

Holidays
Holidays were family affairs for Joe and Anthony; they do not remember any neighborhood holiday traditions. Both recall eating "Seven Fishes" on Christmas Eve:

smelts, bacalao, shrimp, scallops, clams/spaghetti with clam sauce, calamari, and mussels, eels, or some other fish.

Anthony recalls a toy store that used to hand out [Christmas] toys back when there were only five in his family; his mother would take all five over there and stand in line so each one could get a little toy. Joe says he used to go to Catholic Charities, which was located on Main Street over where the Acme is now, to get his toy, again one per child for the eight or later nine in his family, and states that he was well aware that there was no Santa Claus; Anthony says his Catholic Charities was by the playground, adding that nowadays his church sponsors a giving tree.

Holiday meals, "You hadda be there, you had to sit down…you always got dressed, it didn't have to be the best clothes in the world, you didn't have…you got dressed and you went to church." (Nuns would have clickers to direct the children to sit or stand.) [One wonders if this means that on ordinary days they would help themselves in the kitchen (sometimes making their own peanut butter and banana sandwiches), or eat in shifts, as some big families do.]

When asked about a feast and procession that the church did every year, Anthony responds, "Yes, every year, and they still do," and adds that different organizations did it, for example "the Marine (?)Coronada [and] our Italian feast, they did it, and they used to have the feast at Mt. Carmel, the feast at Mt. Carmel, every year until it started getting crazy and people were stabbing each others with needles, and things like that."

Joe points out that they had it [a celebration] again, to honor someone, and a mostly inaudible interchange mentions one of Anthony's brothers.

Anthony says when he was a councilman, Bob Brown was the first black mayor "in years" to sponsor an Italian parade: "He started the Italian parade, raised the Italian flag, had people from Italy come over." Paul Ippolito was the first Man of the Year, and then, the following year, Anthony himself: "This black man was the first one to do it [an ethnic parade] for us." [This ethnic parade was separate from the Italian feast day and the Mt Carmel feast already mentioned.]

Joe says John Basilone was the first Italian mayor.

Joe mentions going on a Saturday night to Webster Hall in NYC [in the East Village] to see a celebrity [name absent or inaudible]. This was when his daughter was in the CSO [?Catholic Student Organization] and they went with a friend of hers named Halsey; afterwards they went to Little Italy, which was close by and turned out to be pretty little.

There might have been more to this story, but the mention of the Yankee announcer Mel Allen in connection with a town anniversary celebration took the conversation back to celebrities who had some connection to Orange. This material, along with similar material from earlier in the interview, is collected below.

When you go outside NJ—or Orange—people think you have an accent and are impressed by the other people who lived here.
Anthony recounts a story in which Joey Maxim, Light Heavyweight Champion of the World, accosted him in Florida and questioned him about his accent, saying it was like that of Tony (?)Golano (a boxer from Orange who once knocked him down). Anthony worked with Golano's son.

Joe adds a story about being in an Atlantic City bar around 1962 and being asked where he was from by the bartender/owner, who "took a liking to me" and pulled up the name of one of Joe's friends, Jimmy Palmieri, from a bill in his roll. This connection to Palmieri made him (Joe) and the bartender "seem like celebrities" when they went out together after the bar closed.

Anthony: "I don't know where you go, believe me, people know Orange, New Jersey." He then mentions "It Happened One Night," a "major movie" starring Cary Grant, in which the actor Roscoe Karns states that he was from Orange, New Jersey. [sbh: The real life Roscoe Karns was not from New Jersey according to various internet sources, and the reference to Orange in this scene may be connected to the NJ reputation for mob activity.]

Joe points out that there are three other Oranges in the US: in Florida, in New York, and in California.

Anthony mentions Monte Irvin, the athlete, who appeared at a "Y" dinner and impressed him as "a regular guy."

Mel Allen, an announcer for the Yankees, came to Orange in the fifties to help celebrate a city anniversary.

Someone from Orange with a German name was a Medal of Honor winner, as Anthony discovered when he went to Gettysburg. [sbh: He may be conflating memories of two different NJ men honored at Gettysburg.]