Michael Devine (1896—1974)

“He was a quiet, gentle man who always doffed his hat when passing a Catholic Church. He frequented Fenway Park where he enjoyed the Red Sox. He played a local card game called 45s, and liked 500 Rummy. He enjoyed his friends, reading the daily news, and his great-nieces and nephews. He always had a candy “stash” and some loose change for them. He taught us all how to drive...” ~ Michael’s niece, Monica Sharpe

Hine was exposing child labor because he strongly disagreed with it, but he wanted to show that his subjects were real people, not just poster kids to be pitied. He didn’t want us to forget that even though they worked very long hours, and working conditions were often brutal and dangerous, they had another life when they went home. Though that life was surely a struggle by today’s standards, many of these children nevertheless had stable and loving families, went to church regularly, and played with friends.

In 1911, Lawrence was populated with immigrants from about 100 nationalities, predominantly Irish, Italian, Eastern European, and French Canadian. In this picture, Hine gave us the names of 13 of the children. With a bit of research, I was able to establish the correct spelling of each of those names. Gopen (Gopoian) was Armenian; Stone (St. Onge) and Davis were French Canadian; Black and Greenfield were Russian Jews; Ganz and Quatritto (Quarterone) were Italian; and Michael Devine was Irish. They worked in the same mills and lived in the same general neighborhood. Four months later, when the Bread & Roses Strike broke out, workers marched and sang together despite their cultural differences.

Though Hine gave us the names (and addresses), he didn’t point out who was who, giving me the daunting task of trying to figure that out myself. In the case of Michael Devine, I got lucky. I found a niece, Monica Sharpe, who recognized him immediately.

Michael Francis Devine was born in Lawrence on November 28, 1896, and died on September 23, 1974, at the age of 77. Ms. Sharpe was very fond of him. Instead of doing an interview, she sent me a detailed and affectionate summary of his life.

“My name is Monica Sharpe. I am the niece of Michael Devine. I am also his Goddaughter. Michael’s father Patrick was born in County Mayo, Ireland in 1871, and came to the USA in 1893. He worked as a laborer on the railroad in the late 1800s, and as a fireman in the mills in the 1900s. He died in 1945. Mary Donnelly Devine (Michael’s mother) was born in County Cork, Ireland in October of 1872, and came to the USA in 1891. She died in 1925. They both could read and write English. They had seven children."

“Michael was the oldest of the seven children. He was born in November (28th) 1896, on Oak Street in Lawrence. His mother’s two brothers, James and Michael, and her cousin Mary Lyons lived with them. Michael attended public school until he had to work in the mills. He later served in WWI and was in the Merchant Marine. When the mills closed, Uncle Mike was 55, so he took a job delivering for a liquor distributor, and later a job as a store clerk in a friend’s package store. He always worked. Until he was 55, Uncle Mike and (his brother) Uncle Jim lived together as bachelors. When I was 10, they moved in with my family at S Garfield Street in Lawrence. In December of 1955, my sister Mary died, and a year later we moved to Phillips Street where Uncle Mike lived with us until he died of heart failure at the age of 77.”

“He was a quiet, gentle man who always doffed his hat when passing a Catholic Church. He frequented Fenway Park where he enjoyed the Red Sox. He played a local card game called 45s, and liked 500 Rummy. He enjoyed his friends, reading the daily news, and his great-nieces and nephews. He always had a candy “stash” and some loose change for them. He taught us all how to drive...” ~ Michael’s niece, Monica Sharpe.