

# American Italian Historical Association

## WESTERN REGIONAL CHAPTER

### NEWSLETTER

*A people without a past is a people without a future*

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Bolinas, California

[www.aiha-wrc.org](http://www.aiha-wrc.org)

Spring 2011

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#### President's Message

In taking the reins of this western outpost of AIHA, I am excited by the possibilities before me and happy for my colleagues near and far who help make both the national and our regional chapter successful.

It's impossible for me to convey how fortunate the WRC has been to have had in these last four years my colleague and good friend Teri Ann Bengiveno as president. Under her leadership, the WRC hosted a one-day conference, numerous lectures, book presentations, poetry readings, and film screenings. She made certain to keep the chapter strong through continued collaborations with Northern California colleges, universities, historical societies, community organizations, and social clubs, as well as with co-sponsored programs with the San Francisco Istituto di Cultura Italiana and San Francisco's Museo Italo-Americano.

I am grateful that Bengiveno is now serving in the newly combined secretary-treasurer role, from which she will continue to advise me. We are thrilled to have Richard Dunbar joining us as vice president. Dunbar has been organizing the Las Positas Film Festival over the last three years. As an Italian language instructor at Saint Mary's College and Las Positas College, he also helps us forge an important link to our Italian Studies *cugini*. Our curator and newsletter editor, Lawrence DiStasi, continues to share his experience, knowledge, and time with us.

At the same time, I give deep thanks to the WRC's outgoing officers, Rita French and Richard Vannucci, our steadfast and committed secretary and treasurer, respectively. We know they will continue to be invaluable to the work we do. Vannucci, in particular, will continue as membership coordinator and will remain in charge of our book sales at our events. I can safely say that we owe our strong membership numbers to him, and him alone.

As you can see from the rest of this newsletter, we are already chockful of programs. If you can't make it to one of our programs, visit us online either at <http://www.aiha-wrc.org/> (graciously cared for by our web mistress Jennifer Lagier Fellguth) or on Facebook.

We continue to rely on the assistance of volunteers to help with our events. Please contact, Deanna DeNurra (925-935-7343), our volunteer coordinator extraordinaire, if you are interested in helping out.

Finally, anyone who receives this newsletter by post and is willing to receive subsequent ones electronically, please email Lawrence DiStasi at [lwdistasi@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lwdistasi@sbcglobal.net).

*Alla prossima!* ~

Laura E. Ruberto

Upcoming

#### ***Unita: The Birth of Italia***

#### **Las Positas College Italian Film Festival**

**Place:** Las Positas College, 3000 Campus Hill Dr.  
Livermore, California, 94551. Bldg 2400.

**Dates:** Friday March 25 & Saturday March 26

The theme for the third annual Las Positas College Italian Film Festival (part of this year's events celebrating the 150th Anniversary of Italian Unification) is *Unita: The Birth of Italia*. Two films about the Risorgimento will be shown, both by Luchino Visconti. One of Italy's best-known directors during the 1950s and 1960s, Visconti was a part of Italy's great Neo-Realist movement, although with *Senso* he began to develop a personal style influenced by Romanticism and Realism. Along with *Il Gattopardo* and *Senso*, Visconti's best-known films include *Death in Venice*, *The Damned*, and *Rocco and his Brothers*.

#### **Friday, March 25**

**6 p.m.:** *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), 1963.

Directed by Luchino Visconti, *Il Gattopardo* is based on the novel by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. Starring Burt Lancaster and Claudia Cardinale, the film chronicles the Sicilian aristocracy's reactions to the Risorgimento. It won the top award at the Cannes film festival and was awarded the David of Donatello, Italy's version of the Oscar.

#### **Saturday, March 26**

**6 p.m.** *Senso*, 1954.

Also directed by Visconti. *Senso* recounts the Risorgimento in the north of Italy, as the nascent Italian State struggled to take Venice and the Veneto from Austria.

Both films will be preceded by a reception. Films are shown in Building 2400, Room 2420, which is wheelchair accessible. For more information, call Teri Ann Bengiveno at (925) 424-1287 or email [TBengiveno@laspositascollege.edu](mailto:TBengiveno@laspositascollege.edu).

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#### ***Una Storia Segreta: an Open Forum***

**Date:** Sunday, April 10, 2011

**Place:** Italian American Heritage Foundation, 425  
N. 4th Street, San Jose, CA 95112

**Time:** 2:00pm

In response to a recently-passed California Senate Resolution, sponsored by CA Senator Joe Simitian to note the injustices suffered by Italian Americans during World War II, the Italian American Heritage Foundation of San Jose will hold an Open Forum on April 10 to discuss the wartime restrictions that affected over 50,000 Italian immigrants in California. Those whose families were affected will be encouraged to remember and share the experiences of those difficult days.

Keynote speakers to open the forum will be Senator Simitian and Lawrence DiStasi, Project Director of the exhibit *Una Storia Segreta: When Italian Americans Were Enemy Aliens*.

Not incidentally, the *Una Storia* exhibit itself will be in San Jose at the same time, displayed for the month of April at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library in San Jose. This is its first appearance in the Bay Area in five years. An opening reception for the exhibit will take place on Sunday, April 3 at 2 PM, at the MLK Jr. Library, 150 E. San Fernando St, San Jose CA 95112.

The Forum is co-sponsored by the Italian American Heritage Foundation and the AIHA/WRC. Light refreshments will be served. To cover expenses, a fee of \$10.00 will be charged.

For information, call the IAHF at (408) 293-7122. R.S.V.P. by April 7, 2011.

For information about the exhibit, call the IAHF, or the MLK Jr. Library (408) 808-2000, or Lawrence DiStasi at (415) 868-0538.

### Una Storia Segreta in Pittsburg

Following its run in San Jose, the *Una Storia Segreta* exhibit will travel to Pittsburg CA, the town from which so many were forced to move in 1942, to be hosted by The Pittsburg Historical Society Museum. The exhibit opening is scheduled for Saturday, May 21 at the Museum, 515 Railroad Ave., Pittsburg CA 94565. For further information about the opening and other events in connection with the exhibit, call Rosemarie DiMaggio at (925) 432-3648, or the Historical Museum at (925) 439-7501.

As you may recall, the Historical Society has also agreed to keep the exhibit in its permanent collection when it is retired. What is not clear as of this writing is whether other California organizations will want to display the exhibit now that it's on the West Coast again. One such inquiry has already been received. Please forward all inquiries about hosting the exhibit to Lawrence DiStasi at (415)868-0538.

### Member Activities

**Rick Malaspina** will be discussing his new book, *Italian Oakland* (Arcadia Publishing, 2011), at the Museo Italo Americano on Tuesday, March 15, 2011 at 7 PM. Malaspina, former reporter and columnist for the *Oakland Tribune*, has gathered numerous photos and anecdotes about the immigrants who settled in Oakland early in the century. The talk is free. Please RSVP to the Museo at (415)673-2200.

**Vincenza Scarpaci's** article on Italian American lawyer and activist Nina Miglionico, "A Voice of Reason and Selfless-

ness," appeared in a Fall 2010 issue of *Primo Magazine*. The article recounts the courageous stand taken by Miglionico, elected a member of Birmingham, Alabama's City Council in 1963, fighting the racist tactics of Police Chief Bull Connor. Miglionico continued to practice law well into her 90s, receiving numerous awards and honors for her civic work.

**Teri Ann Bengiveno**, WRC Secretary/Treasurer, will be delivering the keynote address for the 150th Anniversary celebration of the annual Festa della repubblica in San Jose. The festa will be held on Thursday, June 2, at the Italian American Heritage Foundation of San Jose.

**Lawrence DiStasi's** four-part series on the 1849 Roman Republic appeared in *L'Italo Americano* starting on Jan. 27 and continuing through Feb. 17 as part of the Italy@150 celebrations. The articles describe the declaration of a Republic with Mazzini at its head in February 1849, and its defense by Garibaldi against the French army sent to restore the Pope to power. Though it ended in the Republic's defeat, the effort inspired the movement that a decade later led to independence and unification. The article was reprinted by the *Post-Gazette*, the Italian American newspaper of Boston. DiStasi is giving a talk about these events to the Leonardo da Vinci Society, on March 22 at the Museo Italo Americano.

**Luisa del Giudice's** *Watts Towers Common Ground Initiative* continues with a program titled "Communal Tables: Practicing Hospitality & Sustainability," March 18-20, 2011. Inspired by the Sicilian St. Joseph's Tables tradition, the program will include *pasta e fagioli* served to 800 parishioners of historic St. Lawrence of Brindisi church in Watts, part of an effort to encourage donations of food and support in the Watts area. Illustrated lectures on the St. Joseph's tradition will be given on March 19 at St. Lawrence Church by Del Giudice and Prof. Charlene Villasenor-Black. For more information, see [www.WattsTowersCommonGround.org/festival\\_food.html](http://www.WattsTowersCommonGround.org/festival_food.html).

**Laura Ruberto's** blog on [www.i-Italy.org](http://www.i-Italy.org), about a Ralph Fasanella painting apparently missing from the Oakland Public Library, led to a minor scandal, with articles in the *SF Chronicle* (Mar. 4) and elsewhere. It turned out that the painting had been placed at the African-American Museum in Oakland after restoration—though it has been hung in an office, not on display. City officials are a bit discomfited. **Ruberto** has also, with Margherita Heyer-Caput, organized a one-day conference for Saturday, April 2, "Revisiting the Risorgimento: Transnational Conversations About Italian Unification." Part of the Italy@150 celebrations, it will be held at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, 814 Montgomery St., SF. It will feature, among others scholars, Nancy Carnevale on "Language, Nation, and Identity in Italian America," Simone Cinotto on "Italian Immigration to California and the Risorgimento," and a screening/discussion of the Film "Bronte" by Florestano Vancini. The conference runs from 10:30 AM to 4:30 PM. A light lunch will be served. RSVP to (415)788-7142. For more information, see the Istituto's web-site at [www.iicsanfrancisco.esteri.it/IIC\\_Sanfrancisco](http://www.iicsanfrancisco.esteri.it/IIC_Sanfrancisco).

### Book Review

Given that Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* is so prominent in this year's Italy@150 celebrations—Visconti's

film will be featured at the Las Positas Film Festival and at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco—I thought some comments about the novel might be useful here. All references are to the Pantheon paperback, trans. Archibald Colquhoun.

Briefly, the “Leopard” of the title is the Sicilian Prince of Salina, Don Fabrizio, based on Lampedusa’s paternal great grandfather. The novel centers on the Prince’s lament over the losses instigated by the invasion of Sicily by Garibaldi, or, as the Prince says, by the “Piemontesi.” The difference is critical, because the Prince, a man without illusions, does not see the Risorgimento as a “liberation,” but rather as the replacement of one set of rulers by another. As to Garibaldi, the Prince refers to him not only as just another northerner, but as an “adventurer, all hair and beard.” With regard to the ‘revolution’s effect in Sicily, the Prince is quite clear (and according to many historians, quite perceptive): it would do little or nothing to change things. As he notes after the plebiscite in his hereditary village retreat, Donnafugata: “the major interests of the Kingdom (of the Two Sicilies), and of his own class, his personal advantages, came through all these events battered but still lively.” As his nephew Tancredi, justifying his decision to join Garibaldi’s rebels in Palermo, says: “Unless we ourselves take a hand now, they’ll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.” So the Prince votes “Yes” in the plebiscite, marries off his favorite nephew, Tancredi, to the daughter of the rising peasant of Donnafugata, Don Calogero Sedara, and in general accepts the new political situation—the defeat of the Bourbon Kings of Naples, and the rule of the new King from Piedmont, Vittorio Emanuele.

This is not to say that the changes attendant upon Garibaldi’s victories in Sicily and Naples do not bother the Prince. But the grief he feels concerns far greater, and far subtler changes. We know this because, first, the entire novel is shot through with motifs of death and dying. Driving through the Sicilian countryside on the way to Donnafugata, for example, he has these thoughts: “All around quivered the funereal countryside, yellow with stubble, black with burned patches; the lament of cicadas filled the sky. It was like the death rattle of parched Sicily at the end of August vainly awaiting rain.” Even in the most lively scene of the novel, the Ball at the Monteleone’s in Palermo, the Prince’s mind soaks in thoughts of death. He sees it in the embrace of the two beautiful lovers, Tancredi and Angelica, in “the mutual clasp of those bodies of theirs destined to die.” While others dance, he remains gazing at a painting in the library, Greuze’s *Death of the Just Man*, which makes him think of his own death (he is only in his 40s at the time, and will live, in the novel, for another 26 years). Still, so disposed is he to dwell on death, that the thought of his own actually “calms him as much as that of others disturbed him.” A bit later he even refers to death as “this supreme consolation,” a “safety exit” for the old.

What, then, is the impetus for the Prince’s lamentations? To be sure, it involves the new order, represented by Calogero. In the famous scene where Calogero arrives for dinner in tails, (the Prince has always worn afternoon dress in order not to embarrass those who cannot afford evening clothes) the Prince muses that “this news had more effect than the bulletin about the landing at Marsala.” More than Garibaldi’s revolution, in other words. But the Prince then goes along with this change, giving his blessing to his nephew’s alliance with it in

the person of Don Calogero’s daughter. So if not the political revolution, if not the decline of his class, if not the rise of the new bourgeoisie, if not impending death, what haunts him?

We get a hint in the great chapter describing his hunting outings with the town organist, Don Ciccio. After musing on the eternal beauty of the Sicilian countryside (“the scrub clinging to the slopes was still in the very same scented tangle in which it had been found by Phoenicians, Dorians, and Ionians when they disembarked in Sicily, that America of antiquity”), he and Don Ciccio shoot a rabbit. “It was a wild rabbit; its dun-colored coat had not been able to save it. Horrible wounds lacerated snout and chest. Don Fabrizio found himself stared at by big black eyes soon overlaid by a glaucous veil; they were looking at him with no reproach, but full of tortured amazement at the whole order of things...the animal had died tortured by anxious hopes of salvation, imagining it could still escape when it was already caught, just like so many human beings.” He then compares this vain hope of the rabbit to the whole new, and old, order—of Garibaldi thinking to find salvation in his victories, of “Neapolitan soldiers hurriedly reinforcing the battlements of Gaeta, deluded by a hope as vain as the rabbit’s frenzied flight.”

This is part of it, but there’s more. For as the Prince observes the rabbit, he notices another aspect of nature that abides: “But though a shot had killed the rabbit, though the bored rifles of General Cialdini were now dismaying the Bourbon troops at Gaeta, though the midday heat was making me doze off, nothing could stop the ants. Attracted by a few chewed grape-skins spat out by Don Ciccio, along they rushed in close order, morale high at the chance of annexing that bit of garbage soaked with an organist’s saliva...the gleaming backs of those imperialists seemed to quiver with enthusiasm, while from their ranks no doubt rose the notes of an anthem.” This is a clear reference to what is coming, and also to what is dying, i.e., the order to which Don Fabrizio belongs. What is coming is “hairy, bearded” Garibaldi; what is coming is represented by Don Calogero. And what is dying is the order that Don Fabrizio associates with himself, with the eternal Sicilian landscape, with the stars he views through his telescope.

Yet even Don Fabrizio is puzzled about specifics, until he feels it after the plebiscite: “he had the feeling that something, someone, had died, God only knew in what corner of the country.” And when he questions Don Ciccio about it, and the organist vents his rage that, though he had voted “No,” Don Calogero had announced a unanimous vote of “Yes,” the Prince finds his answer and his calm: “Now he knew what had been killed at Donnafugata...a new-born babe: good faith.” Instead of a real vote, instead of a new order, the people had once again been trapped, only this time in “the soapy tones of a moneylender: ‘But you signed it yourself, didn’t you?’” In short, new masters lacking in style, in courtesy, in compassion replace the old, but their mastery is worse for being cloaked in the idea that the slaves have enslaved themselves. Thus, this death is no consolation. It is the harbinger of a new misery.

This, it seems to me, is the core of Don Fabrizio’s lament. As Lampedusa puts it: “a great deal of the slackness and acquiescence for which the people of the South were to be criticized during the next decades was due to the stupid annulment of the first expression of liberty ever offered them.”

Lawrence DiStasi

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## **The American Italian Historical Association**

### **Western Regional Chapter**

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