

American Italian Historical Association

WESTERN REGIONAL CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

A people without a past is a people without a future

Bolinas, California

www.aiha-wrc.org

Fall 2008

President's Message

Greetings from New Haven, Connecticut, where the 41st annual American Italian Historical Association conference gathered Italian and Italian American scholars from around the country and globe to discuss *Small Towns, Big Cities: The Urban Experience of Italian Americans*. WRC member Vincenza Scarpaci discussed the legacy of Dr. Rudolph Vecoli at a plenary session in his honor. She is currently on a book tour promoting her recent publication *The Journey of Italians in America*. Vice President Laura Ruberto presented a fabulous paper on "Urbanization, the Hubcap Ranch, and Napa Valley's Italian Flavor." Dr. William Boelhower from Louisiana State University delivered the keynote address, "Figuring Out the Place of Little Italy: Down Mott Street and into the City." Mark your calendars for next year's conference October 29-31, 2009 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

On the home front Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed Assembly Bill 1863 which would have encouraged schools to include the role and contribution of Italian Americans in the social science curriculum. It is the second time he has vetoed such a bill. However, on September 5, 2008 Assembly Concurrent Resolution (ACR) 145 was filed with the Secretary of State. Assembly member Anthony J. Portantino introduced ACR 145 to designate "the month of October as Italian American Heritage Month and encourage public schools to highlight Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California..." In recognition of ACR 145 the photo exhibit "Con Le Nostre Mani: Italian Americans at Work in the East Bay" was at the state capitol for the months of October and November. Several WRC members created the exhibit.

The WRC is currently 157 members strong and growing. Benvenuti to new members Arlene J. Antinoni-Hermosen, Mr. & Mrs. Andy Bianco, John J. Brattesani, Dr. Mario D'Angeli, Albert Ferrari, Elsie Giuntoli, Andrew C. Haag, Lindsay & Michael Holcomb, Joanne Johnson, Katherine Marino, David E. Mastagni JD, David P. Mastagni JD, Kathleen N. Mastagni JD, Michael M. Mastagni, Phillip R.A. Mastagni JD, Gary Pieroni, Leon C. Pirofalo, and Rocco's Ristorante.

Volunteers, we welcome your efforts. Thank you to member Christine Vota who will collect the election ballots. Anyone who receives this newsletter by post and is willing to receive subsequent ones electronically, please email Lawrence DiStasi at lwdistasi@sbcglobl.net. As always, interested volunteers, please feel free to call me at home (925) 833-9194 or at work (925) 424-1287.

I wish you and your friends and family a happy and peaceful holiday season.

Ciao e a presto,

-Teri Ann Bengiveno

Upcoming

Mal Occhio & the Italian Psyche



Place: Museo Italo Americano, Bldg C, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA

Date: Sunday, February 8, 2008

Time: 2 PM to 4 PM

The Italian folk belief in evil eye, or *mal occhio*, operates on the assumption that a glance can cause illness or physical harm to those it strikes. In any evil eye culture—and such cultures span the globe from the Mediterranean basin throughout Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and as far east as India—great pains are taken to counteract and/or avoid the effects of such glances, most notably by the use of amulets. Lawrence DiStasi's study, *MAL OCCHIO: The Underside of Vision*, first published by North Point Press in 1981, recounts his childhood experiences with the belief, and investigates the widespread variants in the ritual cure, as well as the ancient roots of the tradition. Though it has been called a "classic of Italian American literature," it has never appeared in paperback.

This year, DiStasi has re-issued the book in a new paperback edition under his own imprint, Sanniti Publications, adding a 20-page Afterword that updates the study with new materials gathered since its initial publication. For this program, DiStasi will discuss the various manifestations of evil eye belief as he found it in his Italian American family, its roots in Italian village culture, the variety of amulets used in Italy to ward off its effects, and the ritual cure most commonly used in Italy. He will also address the varying social and psychological effects associated with evil eye cultures, noting how the underlying anxiety associated with vision plays out even in the thought of 20th century French philosophers.

For more information, call the Museo at (415) 673-2200, or Lawrence DiStasi at (415) 868-0538. To order the new edition, call or email DiStasi at lwdistasi@sbcglobal.net.

Italian POWs in WWII

Though downtown Pittsburg was a mess of construction and blocked streets, and though the day was one of those which invites Californians to bask in the sun, nothing was able to dissuade about 100 people from packing the Pittsburg Historical Museum to hear about the Italian POWs held in America after their capture in World War II. An SRO crowd paid rapt attention to the film, *Prisoners in Paradise*, and to the discussion afterwards, which featured several one-time POWs greeting each other for the first time in years, and reminiscing about their wartime days in camps throughout the Bay Area. Laura Ruberto led the discussion with informed comments about many of the lesser-known facts. In all, the program demonstrated once again the appetite for World War II history among Italian Americans. Indeed, so keen was interest in the video documentary that many were left wanting.

Fortunately, the filmmaker, Camilla Calamandrei, has offered a special for those who want to purchase *Prisoners in Paradise*. DVDs are on sale for \$25 ea., or 2 for \$35, plus \$3 shipping. VHS is \$7, plus \$3 shipping. Seniors & students get a \$5 discount off DVD purchase. To order: send check & mailing address to: Rolling River Films, PO Box 221, Tarrytown, NY 10591. For more information, email CCalamandrei@aol.com or call (917) 327-9579.

Farm Conference DVD

Speaking of DVDs, several people have asked about the availability of the video recording of our recent Conference on Italian Farming in the Central Valley. A few copies of the raw DVD footage are now available for \$10. To order, send a check, made out to the WRC, to Dr. Laura Ruberto, Berkeley City College, 2050 Center St., Berkeley CA 94704.

Una Storia Segreta

In line with the above-mentioned interest in WWII, the WRC's historic exhibit, *Una Storia Segreta: When Italian Americans Were 'Enemy Aliens,'* continues its improbable tour throughout the nation. Over the weekend of September 27 & 28, the exhibit was displayed at Seattle's Festa Italiana Seattle. Interest in the exhibit was high and crowds normally preoccupied with sausage or pasta were fascinated by the details of this little-known episode. Following its Seattle appearance, the exhibit was shipped back to the East coast, where it will begin a 3-month run on Staten Island at the new Snug Harbor facility there. It will be sponsored by the Sons of Italy's Garibaldi-Meucci Museum. After that, the exhibit will travel west, once again, to appear at the Las Positas College Italian Film Festival this spring. At this point, there appears to be no limit—save the wear and tear on its fragile materials—to the length of its run.

Member Activities

Luisa del Giudice has recently been knighted by the President of the Italian Republic. The title is part of the *Stella della Solidarietà Italiana*, originally instituted in 1947 to recognize the achievements of Italians who had played a role in the reconstruction of Italy after WWII. Of the three classes instituted, Grand Official, Commander, and Knight, del Giudice will receive the third, Knight. Her title will be *Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella della solidarietà italiana*.

Michael Parenti, has a new collection of his writings, *Contrary Notions*, issued by City Lights Books. The book includes an essay on Italian American images in the mainstream media, and two selections about the past struggles and vicissitudes of Parent's Italian American family.

Vincenza Scarpaci's new book including hundreds of vintage photographs, *The Journey of Italians in America*, has recently been released. It is available locally, and on Amazon.com.

Lawrence DiStasi read from his essay, "Immigrant in Paradise," at the Oct. 13 publication party for *Avanti Popolo: Sailing Beyond Columbus*, published by City Lights Books. Also reading was WRC-member **Giovanna Capone**. On Nov. 15 at the California Library Association Conference, DiStasi also took part in the "California Writers Panel: Experiencing World War II through the Eyes of the Disenfranchised," reading from his book *Una Storia Segreta*. The CLA conference was held at San Jose's McEnery Convention Center.

Ken Scambray, on Oct. 16, gave a slide presentation at the Italian House in San Diego on the Watts Towers and the Underground Gardens. Along with his slides, Scambray displayed the free-standing photo exhibit of 20 images of both sites he has created.

Scambray's Part I of a two-part article, "Re-Imagining Southern Italy: Sicily" appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of *Accenti: The Canadian Magazine with an Italian Accent*. Part II of the article, "Re-Imagining Southern Italy: Calabria," will appear in the Spring 2008 issue. Both articles are based on his recent return trip to his ancestral villages.

Juliet Viola drew our attention to a July 4, 2008 article in the *SF Chronicle* about the jug wine revival. The article provides some fascinating history on the early wineries in California, most of which started by selling bulk wines. Among the examples it cites are the Foppiano Winery: "After Prohibition, many locals began coming to the winery to refill their own gallon jugs. Customers would ring a bell, and Mathilda, Foppiano Sr.'s mother, would come out, wash the jugs, then help the customers fill them up. There were three barrels, with prices ranging from 10 to 20 cents a gallon. Customers tended to choose the more expensive one, though each barrel contained the same product - or so the story goes." These days, wineries like Martin Ray in Santa Rosa still allow customers to come in during tasting room hours and buy a 3-liter jug for \$13. The article also notes that Guglielmo Winery in Morgan Hill (which hosted the WRC program on home winemakers a few years ago) offers jug wines as well.

Ken Scambray, Gloria Ricci Lothrop and **Luisa del Giudice** will be among those delivering papers at the upcoming conference on the Watts Towers, April 2-5, 2009 in Genova, Italy. Titled "Art and Migration: Sabato Rodia and the Watts Towers of Los Angeles," the conference is sponsored by the University of Genova, the European Union, and the UCLA International Institute. del Giudice is also one of the organizers of a conference that, for the first time, will discuss Rodia's towers as artwork, symbol of immigrant experience, and socio-political statement.

