

Italian American Families Hosted Italian POW's in East Sacramento's Little Italy During WWII



PHOTO ABOVE: TOP ROW - Delina DaPrato, Gloria DaPrato, Jonny (POW), MIDDLE ROW - Dan Mariani (Military Escort), Pete DaPrato, Nora DaPrato, Maria DaPrato, Settima DaPrata, BOTTOM ROW - Virgil (POW) and Gaetano (POW). (DEC 1944)

One of the untold stories of World War II is that of the 51,000 Italian soldiers brought to the United States as prisoners of war.

The Italian soldiers were held at camps in 26 states across the United States, many in northern California. There were camps located at Stockton, Oakland, the San Francisco Presidio, on Angel Island, in Benicia, Sacramento, Pomona, San Luis Obispo, San Bernardino and elsewhere in California.

Though still restricted, the Italian POW's joined Italian service units organized by the US Army and worked in their respective nearby communities and designated industries. The Italian POW's had a great degree of freedom in the camps in California. The Italian POW's stationed on Angels Island held regular dances in a hall in San Francisco that they rented with their own money.

PHOTO BELOW: Guy (POW), Nora DaPrato, Dan Mariani (Military Escort), Chuck Defazio, (Military Escort), Delina DaPrato, Johnny (POW) and Virgil (POW). (DEC 1944)



PHOTO ABOVE: BACK ROW - Johnny (POW), Delina DaPrato Skaries, Gloria DaPrato Tomei, Virgil (POW) **BOTTOM ROW** - Gaetano (POW), Nora DaPrato Mori, Chuck Defazio (Military Escort) Maria DaPrato, John Baruffuodi. (DEC 1944)

Nationwide, the men were permitted both to receive visitors and to visit the homes of Americans on the weekends. Frequently they were entertained on the weekends by Italian American families. The local Italian communities welcomed them.

At the time the war broke out Italians were the largest immigrant group in the United States and in California which set the stage for a welcoming reception for the prisoners. Thousands of these men ended up marrying American women and living in the United States.

A group of Italian Prisoners held at Camp Beale, now Beale Air Force Base, near the town of Marysville were hosted on weekends by Italian American families in East Sacramento. Several Italian American families located on 48th street in East Sacramento hosted a group of the men on weekends. Four or five of the men would arrive in downtown Sacramento by bus and then were picked up by John Baruffaldi, the father of one of the host families.

These Italian American families of the 1940's spoke Italian including the teenage girls in the families. Among the Families on 48th Street that hosted the men were the DaPrato, Tomei, Baruffaldi and Dallosta families.

Photos were provided courtesy of Gloria Tomei and Delina DaPrato who were teenagers at the time.

PHOTO BELOW Antonio Midio, POW





PHOTO ABOVE: *The Sacramento City Council passed a Resolution on September 21, 2021 officially recognizing Italian East Sacramento as a "Little Italy Historic District."*



PHOTO ABOVE: In Stockton, California, Alma Bacigalupi, the granddaughter of immigrants from Genoa, met her husband, Louis Maccini from Parma Italy, who was a POW at a nearby camp. After the war, they were married and returned to Stockton to live and raise a family. Today, Parma is a sister-city of Stockton due to Alma's and her daughters efforts.

Local Italians Save the Marble Steps of St. Mary's Church



St Mary's Church is located on 58th and M streets in the heart of Sacramento's "Little Italy Historic District."

Once the Italian National Church of Sacramento, it was built by the Italians as a communal center of their Catholic religious life. Many of the Catholic Churches that served the Italian immigrant communities were founded by the immigrants who were not welcome in the American Catholic Churches. The priests were Italian, and the masses were in Italian. Many still exist and have been saved, others have not.

PHOTO BELOW: The original St. Mary's Church located at 8th and N Streets.



Originally located at 8th and N Streets in 1907, it was later moved to 7th and T Streets in 1916. In 1948 it was rebuilt in East Sacramento on 58th street.

Father Silvio Masante came to Sacramento in 1934. He helped to secure the marble used in the Italian Pavilion at San Francisco's Treasure Island World's Fair of 1939 for the new church at 58th and M Street.

There was already a large concentration of Italian families and farms in east Sacramento when the Church was built. After its construction, Italians from the other city neighborhoods moved to the East Sacramento area around the Church, making it the most Italian section of the city.

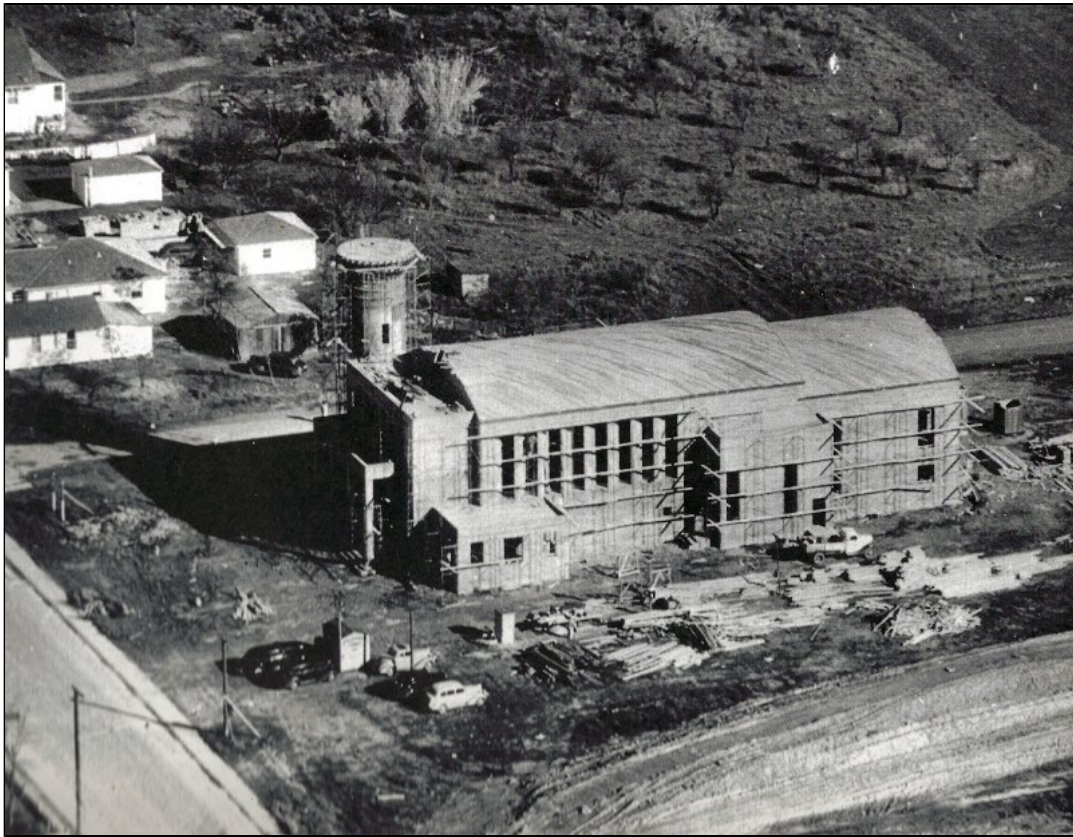


PHOTO ABOVE: The new St. Mary's Church under construction, circa 1947

The donated marble was stored at the St Mary's Church located at 7th and T Street. With the construction of St Mary's in 1948 on 58th street, the stored marble was used for the Altar and the front steps of the new St. Mary's.

A new landscaping project at the Church in 2023 included the removal of the Marble steps which were to be discarded. Janine Orsi, newly installed Local Italian Catholic Federation leader of the St. Mary's ICF chapter #45, took on the project of saving the marble steps and the Italian roots of St Mary's.

Against the odds, Janine single handily mobilized the Italian community organizations and was able to convince the new priest and parish to let the Italians salvage the marble. It was touch and go as salvaging the marble did not fit into the landscape contractor's plans. But Janine persisted. The Marble steps have been saved and are now in the hands of the Italian community.

It was a close call. Like most Italian American projects, it takes that one dedicated and passionate person to make a difference. Janine Orsi was the driving force behind saving part of our history, and part of our story, for future generations.



PHOTO ABOVE: St. Mary's Church at 7th and T Street in 1916.

The story is not over. There are more chapters to write.

The bulk of the marble has been salvaged and moved by the East Portal Park Bocce Association to its courts at east portal. The Bocce club intends to build a long-wanted patio out of the marble and dedicate a plaque to the Italian roots of the marble.

As for Janine, her mission continues. She acquired some of the marble steps for a monument at St. Mary's Church dedicated to the Italian roots of the Church. Now she must convince the people in charge to allow this to happen.

The Italian Cultural Society worked with Janine and the East Portal bocce club to achieve this success. It was a communal effort. The Society will continue to support Janine to complete this Little Italy historical project.

Many of the Italian residents of Sacramento have roots in St. Mary's Church. They can be proud that some came forward to make a difference. The Italian Cultural Society is supportive of community projects that preserve our history, promote our heritage, and tell our story. If you would like to be part of making history and supporting the St. Mary's Italian Roots Memorial Project, contact us at by email at: italy1@surewest.net.



PHOTO ABOVE: St. Mary's Church on 58th and Folsom Blvd., 2020

"Cabrini" Film Captures America



A new and powerful box office epic for Italian Americans opened nationwide on March 8. The film, “Cabrini,” captures the life of Mother Frances Cabrini and the plight of Italian immigrants around the turn of the 20th Century.

The film chronicles her courageous journey from an Italian immigrant nun arriving in New York City in 1889 to her eventual rise to sainthood. It is also an eye-opening look at the harsh living conditions our forebears endured.

Between 1889 and 1910 over two million Italians legally immigrated to the United States. The film portrays a part of American history that typically gets ignored: an unrelenting anti-Italian bigotry. The film is a great gift to the Italian American community and provides a deeper understanding of the Italian immigrant experience during a period of anti-Italian sentiment, one of too many such periods in our history.

The film is Italian, from the language spoken by the immigrants to the arias that elevate the score. But it mainly takes place in America in New York's "Five Points," the notorious Italian ghetto of lower Manhattan.

Mother Cabrini arrives in New York with her five other Catholic nuns after being tasked by the Pope in Rome to aid the Italian immigrants. She was 49 years old and in poor health. She dedicated her life to the service of Italian immigrants.

During her life, she founded schools, hospitals, and orphanages in Italian immigrant communities across the United States, in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, New Orleans, Denver, Los Angeles and Seattle.

She founded a religious Order of 4,000 sisters worldwide to change people's lives. When seeking the approval of the Pope to approve her mission, she told him, ***"The world is too small for what I intend to do."***

Born in 1850 in Italy, she died in 1917 at age 67. She became an American citizen. She was the first American Saint and canonized in 1946. 120,000 people attended her canonization at Chicago's Soldier Field. She is buried at St. Cabrini Shrine Church in New York city.

Today, she is internationally recognized for her courage, dedication and achievements. The film portrayal of her is powerful and compelling. A film goer to this movie can cry seeing firsthand the hardships the Italians suffered while at the same time being inspired by this woman of faith and the hope she gave them.

It is a legacy that stands today.

in the film, the Pope is played by famous Italian actor Giancarlo Giannini and Mother Cabrini is wonderfully played by Italian actress Cristiana Dell' Anna.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH FILM TRAILER](#)



PHOTO ABOVE: New York's Mulberry Street Italian District around turn of the 20th Century

WHITES	\$1.30 - \$1.50
COLORED	\$1.25 - \$1.40
ITALIAN	\$1.15 - \$1.25

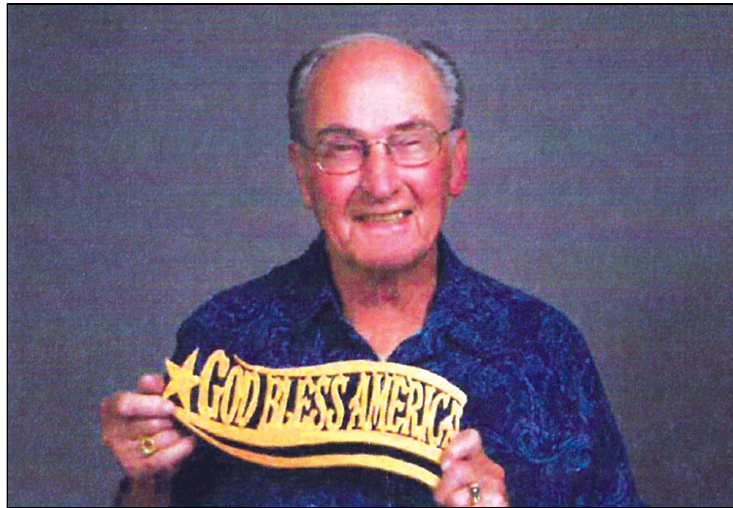
ABOVE: Text of Public Notice in 1895 advertising the pay rates for common laborers.

“Cabrine Day” is a State holiday in Colorado where the Italian immigrant miners were aided by her. A statue of Mother Cabrini was unveiled on Columbus Day 2020 in Battery Park on the southern tip of Manhattan overlooking the harbor.

A film for every Italian American.

[CLICK TO READ ARTICLE "Mother Cabrini, the Immigrant Saint"](#)

**Society Volunteer Bob Beckert, the
"Man In The White Pants"**



Longtime Society Volunteer Bob Beckert passed away in January at 88.

Bob was the Master of Ceremonies for our Annual Festa Italiana for 17 years, an event attended by thousands each year. We will always remember his tenor voice as he opened the festival each year with his rendition of our national anthem, the Star- Spangled Banner. Relying on Bob to herd the performing bands, singers and folk-dancers throughout the two-day and night event to keep them on schedule at center stage was always reassuring for the Festa Italiana team. Because of his active presence on stage, he was sometimes referred to as “Mr. Festa” or the “man in the white pants.”

Bob was also instrumental in maintaining the equipment at the Italian Center, our showplace and cultural center for our Italian community. A job few were or are willing to do. On top of that, he was also the tech support for the Society's Balliamo! Italian folk dance troupe for 30 years which performs at regional festivals. The folk dance troupe was founded by his wife Doris who has survived him. She is the Society Librarian as well. What a team. Doris was the Italian, Bob was not Italian but he was one of us.

Those of us who had the pleasure of working with Bob with his keen sense of humor and outgoing personality cannot say enough about his kindness toward all of us.

The Oldest Person In America Is Italian!



The oldest living person in the United States is an Italian American woman named Edith Ceccarelli, who turned 116 on February 5, 2024. She is also the second oldest person in the world.

Edith lives in Willits, California, a small city nestled in Mendocino County surrounded by Redwoods with a population of 4,969. Known as Edie to her friends, she was born on February 5, 1908, in the town of Willits in the lumber country of northern California.

She is the eldest of the seven children of Italian immigrants, Agostino and Maria Recagno, both of whom lived into their 90s. She has outlived her siblings. Her father was a lumber worker who then sold groceries by horse and buggy before opening a Grocery store in Willits in 1916.

When she was born in 1908 Theodore Roosevelt was president and Babe Ruth didn't play baseball in the majors yet. His rookie year was 1914. Her life has spanned over a century and witnessed the evolution of technology, shifts in global politics, and the ebb and flow of social norms. Through it all she has retained her connection to her hometown.



ABOVE: Italian workers' strike against the McCloud River Lumber Company located in Shasta County, 1909.

It should be noted that Italian immigrants to the North Coast of California, were a large part of the early Lumber industry in towns like Weed, Willits and McCloud. In 1909, 1,200 Italian lumbermen in Mc Cloud went on strike over wages in a famous strike against the Mc Cloud Lumber Company, the largest in California. Most of the Italians were from Carrara and other parts of Tuscany, and Venice, Sicily and Calabria.

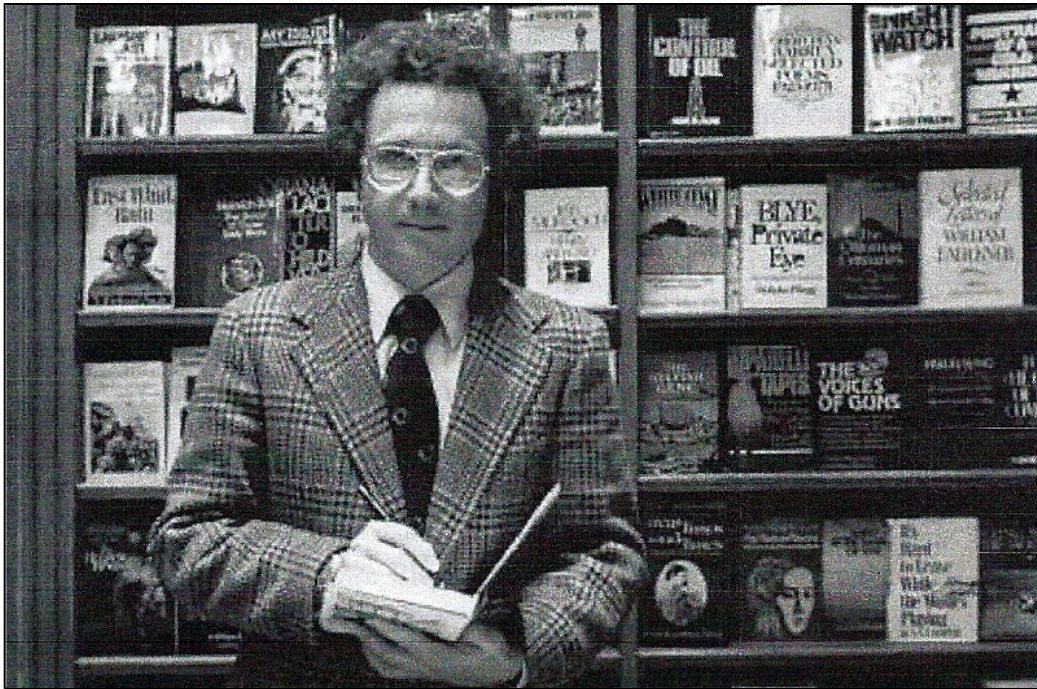
In 1907, Carmela Luigi, arrived in the Lumber company town of Weed from Bagone in Liguria, Italy where many of the Bagnonesi immigrants settled between 1890 and 1910. She lived to be 100. Weed even had an Italian language newspaper.

So, what was the secret to Edith's long life? She danced regularly well into her 90s and lived independently until she turned 107. When asked what her secret to a long life is. She always says that it's "a glass of vino at night and a healthy attitude."

The town of Willits held a parade in her honor to celebrate her turning 116. The highlight of the celebration was, of course, the carrot cake – Edie's favorite.

NOTA BENE: Just two weeks after her 116th birthday celebration, Edith Ceccarelli passed away. Now, the oldest person in the world is Maria Morera at age 116, born in San Francisco and residing in Spain.

**Richard Gambino - Italian American Champion Fought
Discrimination Against Italian Americans**



Richard Gambino was a leading critic of those who mocked Italian Americans with ethnic stereotypes in popular culture. He was a scholar who founded and directed the first academic Italian American Studies program in the United States at Queens College in New York in 1968.

Growing up in Brooklyn during the 1940s and 50s, he faced overt discrimination because of his heritage. His father, Dominic, was an immigrant from Palermo. Richard earned master's and doctorate degrees in philosophy. He was a professor, as well as scholar and author.

His 1973 book, ***"Blood Of My Blood, The Dilemma of the Italian Americans,"*** hit the top of the New York Times best seller list in 1973. The well received book was an examination of Italians as an ethnic group during their first, second and third generations.

"Blood Of My Blood," Gambino examines their immigrant origins, the central role of the family as an institution, and the persistence of their ethnic identity, to understand Italian Americans and their value systems. Who they are and how they got that way.

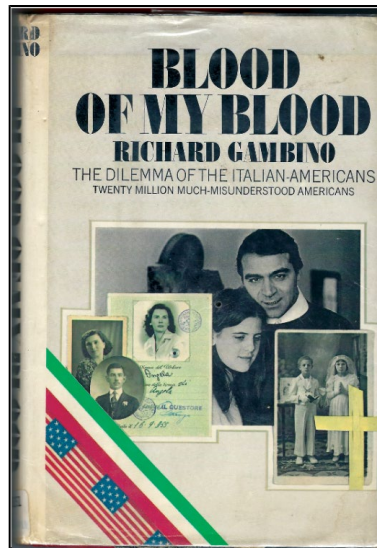
In his book, Gambino examines what it means to be Italian American. He explores their rich cultural and psychological heritage in shaping their identity, which animates their lives and withstands the alienating pressures of modern America.

Gambino dispels the myths about Italian Americans and the melting pot. He singles them out as one of the most misunderstood ethnic groups and the prevailing ignorance about their ethnic customs, values and characteristics; let alone their history and contributions.

He especially recommends the need for an educated awareness among Italian Americans, especially younger Italian Americans, to know themselves and their group identity to fully participate in a divided American society,

He takes note of the enduring bias against Italian Americans. Throughout his life he stayed alert to incidents of

prejudice and malice against them, and there are many. They confirm what one American journalist has called **“The most tolerated intolerance’ in the United States: anti-Italian prejudice.”**



In his later book, ***Vendetta***, published in 1977, he wrote about what he called, **“the largest lynching in American history.”** The mass murder of 11 innocent Italian Americans in New Orleans in 1891 by a rampaging mob of over 1,000. The incident led to the first national Columbus Day Presidential Proclamation in the United States. In the following decades, scores of Italian Americans were lynched in the United states becoming the second most lynched ethnic group in America.

According to Gambino, the incident left a lingering negative image of Italians as criminals and the use of the word mafia came into vogue. The lynchings were approved, not condemned, by the media and political leaders. The book was made into a movie starring Christopher Walken in 1999. It ends with the deportation of Italians to Italy as they are replaced by others on the docks as they sail away.

In the book, ***Vendetta***,” Dr. Gambino took note of the enduring bias against Italian Americans reflected in the Lynchings. Teddy Roosevelt commented **“it was rather a good thing.”** He quotes President Richard Nixon in 1973 telling one of his aides on a White House tape: **“They’re not like us. Difference is they smell different, they look different, act different.”**

Gambino’s book, ***Blood of my Blood***, was influential in the renewal of Italian American ethnic identity among a generation of Italian Americans ashamed to be Italian. It was written during a time during the 1970s following the Civil Rights Act when our country turned in the direction of group identity as the means to success and acceptance.

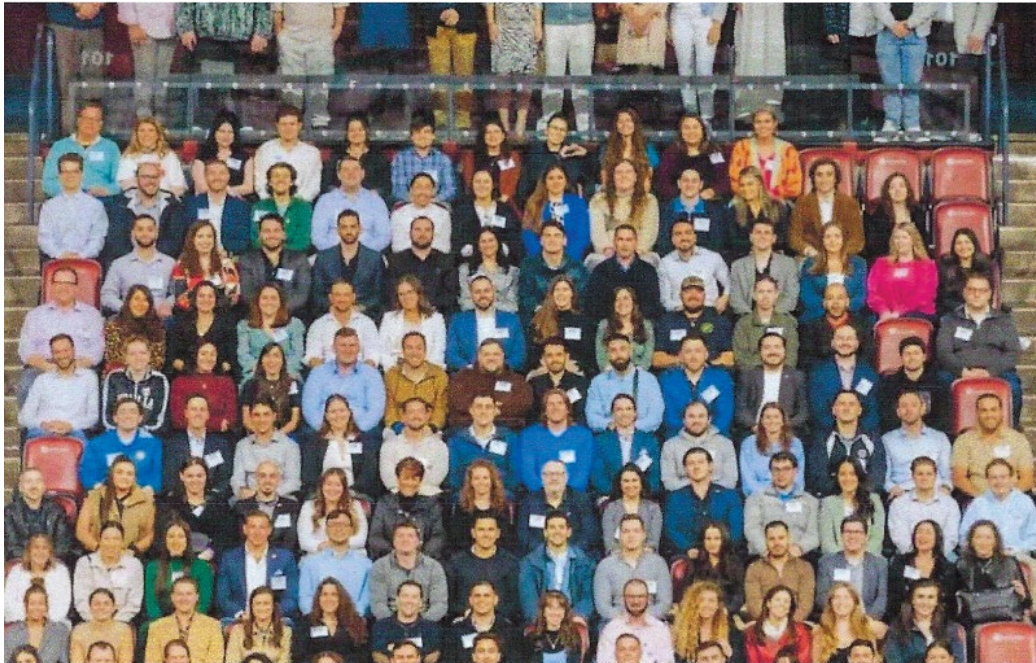
The 1970s witnessed the rise of the un-meltable ethnics in American society, primarily southern and eastern Europeans, the last large European immigrant groups. Both major political parties wooed them for their votes.

Richard Gambino passed away in January 2024. His good work made a difference for generations of Italian Americans and his legacy carries on among those whose lives he changed. Today, we can accept who we are and can be proud to be different, not ashamed of it.



[CLICK TO READ "Why I'm No Longer Ashamed..."](#)

Italian American Youth Conference



The 2nd Annual Italian American Future Leaders Conference was held in Miami, Florida in January.

The Conference brought together 200 young Italian Americans between the ages of 21 -35 to celebrate and attend workshops about what it means to be Italian American. The goal of the Conference is to educate,

connect, and develop future community building leaders to sustain our heritage.

This Youth leadership Conference is the kind of national initiative being taken by the National Association of Italian American organizations. Other national initiatives include Protecting Columbus Day, strengthening Italian American Museum and Cultural Institutions, a national Museum, Curriculum development. And more.

Save The Date for Festa Italiana!

The graphic is a rectangular box with a red and green border. It features a central logo for 'FESTA ITALIANA!' with the text 'PRESENTED BY THE SAMBADO FAMILY' below it. The main text reads 'SAVE THE DATE' in large red letters, followed by 'Sunday, June 9, 2024' and '10:00 am - 4:00 pm' in green, and 'Lodi Grape Festival & Grounds' in black. On the left, a green starburst contains the text 'Volunteers Needed! Call for more information'. On the right, a red starburst contains the text 'Members may purchase discounted tickets from PIA'. At the bottom, it provides contact information: 'Info: festa-italiana.com or 209.242.9970' and lists activities: 'Bambini Zone | Live Music | Italian Dancers | Bocce | Automobili | Italian Vendors and, of course, DELICIOUS LOCAL ITALIAN FOOD'.

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Bambini Zone | Live Music | Italian Dancers | Bocce | Automobili | Italian Vendors
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U.S. Senate Bill Threatens Our Italian American Heritage

★ **SAVE COLUMBUS DAY** ★
PROTECT & PRESERVE OUR PAST

Columbus Day is at risk In the United States Senate. Senate Bill 2970 has been introduced to replace Columbus Day as a national holiday with Indigenous People's Day.

Italian American organizations are protesting the federal Bill to replace Columbus Day. The Italian American Conference of Presidents has asked its member organizations for support to preserve the Columbus Day holiday. The Italian Cultural Society is a member of the Conference.

“The Indigenous People’s Day Act” is being pushed by a Native American coalition. A similar push by native Americans in California in 2021 replaced Columbus Day as a State holiday with Indigenous Peoples Day, despite Italian Americans requesting they chose a different day. Same happened in Sacramento County in 2023, when the counties DEI diversity unit engineered a ban on Columbus Day as a longstanding County Holiday in favor of Indigenous Peoples Day as a new county holiday on the same date.

Abolishing Columbus Day is part of a national strategy to replace the history, the monuments, the art, the culture and the holidays of our American heritage. And Columbus Day is part of that American heritage. It is a holiday for all Americans.

During the riots, protests and hysteria of 2020, Columbus Day Holidays were replaced, and Columbus statues and monuments were torn down by the mobs or removed in many parts of the country dominated by the rioters and their political allies. The hysteria continues in the Halls of Congress.

Columbus Day was adopted as a day of celebration in Italian America and is associated with Italian Americans as their holiday. The holiday is a symbol of Italian American cultural identity, pride and heritage. It is that one day of unity each year when Italian America celebrates together across the nation.

It first became a national holiday in 1892 following the mass lynching of Italian Americans in New Orleans in 1891, followed by scores of other lynchings of Italians around the country.



Columbus Day uplifted the Italian American people in their quest for acceptance.

Replacing Columbus Day or recognizing another holiday on the same day as Columbus Day defeats the real meaning of Columbus Day for Italian Americans and all Americans. The fact that Columbus Day is at risk reflects the continuing threat to our cultural heritage.

Last year's Columbus Day parade in New York City was attended by over one million people. The 2023 Columbus Day parades around the nation were among the largest in history. It's a holiday we celebrate, and America celebrates. Columbus Day matters as a symbol of America and Italian America. As Columbus Day goes so goes' America and our future in it.

The voyage of this Italian explorer was one of the most important events in human history. Let's not let a vocal minority and their political allies cancel our holiday and history. While pushing a false and biased history about the real Columbus who in fact protected the native people from warring tribes and the new settlers.

We would like our readers to help us preserve the national holiday to honor the 25 million Italian Americans in the nation and the creation of America.

Save Columbus Day Call To Action!

Contact Your Senators and Insist they Preserve Columbus Day as a National Holiday

Call or email your Senators:

- Let them know who you are and that you reside in California and are contacting them regarding SB 2970.
 - Advise them you are against the Bill.
- Explain why you are against the Bill. That Columbus Day Must be preserved for the 25 million Americans of Italian descent. That replacing it discriminates against Italian Americans. That any new holiday should be on a different date, and not in October.
 - Urge the Senators to oppose the Bill.
 - Request hearing back from the Senator

The two Senators from California are:

Alex Padilla at:

EM: padilla.senate.gov/contact/form.

Tel: 202-224- 3553

Laphonza Butler at:

EM: butler.senate.gov/contact/form.

Tel: 202-224- 3841

Take this opportunity to stand up for us before they take away the gains of our ancestors who were instrumental in creating Columbus Day as a holiday and erecting the statues and monuments to his achievement to recognize their own journey and contributions to America.

[CLICK TO READ "Why Columbus Day Matters To Italian Americans"](#)



**Did You Know?
The Model for Lady Liberty Peace Dollar Was Italian**



One of the most important and beautiful coins of the 20th century was the Lady Liberty Peace Dollar released in 1921 to commemorate the end of World War I. It was 90% silver.

It was designed by Italian immigrant and sculptor, Antonio de Francisci. The model for the goddess of Liberty was the young wife of the sculptor, Mary Teresa de Francisci (Cafarelli), who had arrived in New York harbor from Naples, Italy in 1903 at the age of five years old. She was fascinated by the Statue of Liberty on her arrival and often posed to imitate it when growing up.

Antonio asked his 23-year-old wife Mary Teresa to model for the new silver dollar. For Mary Teresa it was her childhood dream come true. Eight of the nation's leading sculptors were invited to submit designs. De Francisci's design won the competition and the \$1500 first place prize. He was 33.

The lady Peace Dollar carried America through the roaring twenties and the Great depression. Over the years, Mary Teresa made personal appearances at coin collecting events where she was honored as the face of the Lady Liberty Dollar. She passed away in 1990 at 92 years old.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



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YOUR SUPPORT IS TAX-DEDUCTIBLE

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www.italiancenter.net

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The Italian Cultural Society is a regional community organization dedicated to supporting our cultural heritage through its educational and cultural initiatives.

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