



Italian
American
Studies
Association

WESTERN REGIONAL CHAPTER

A people without a past is a people without a future

Bolinas, California

www.aiha-wrc.org

Fall 2017

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

UPCOMING

Cari amici e colleghi:

In this mid-Fall season of cooler, shortening days, when end-of-year holidays are upon us, our thoughts nevertheless turn with great sadness to the tragic wildfires devastating so many areas of Napa and Sonoma counties, where a great number of our community members live and work. We have heard from some of them and are grateful to know they are safe, but our prayers and concerns are with all those whose lives and livelihoods have been so terribly affected. (*I would love to include some contact for what ways we can give support, but don't have anything specific to recommend.*)

It is my sad duty to mention here too the sadness we in the WRC felt at the passing away in August of our beloved long-time member and indefatigable chapter officer, Richard Vannucci. Without his unswerving support for the work of the WRC over the decades of his dedication to it, our chapter would not have been so successful in carrying out its numerous activities in furtherance of our organization's mission. Please see the longer obituary and tribute to Richard in this newsletter.

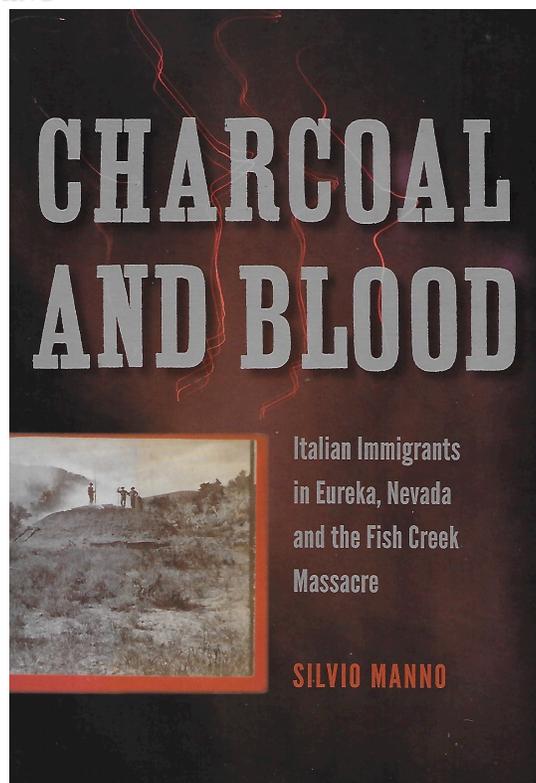
On a more cheerful note, I am happy to report that the exhibit, film showing and panel discussion in tribute to Bay Area artist, Jerry Carniglia, which the WRC co-sponsored with the Museo Italo Americano in San Francisco in May and July respectively, were enthusiastically received and brought to light the impressive work of an artist whose work richly deserved to be more widely known. Such an event indeed is a fitting example of the core mission the IASA-WRC. We are grateful to Margaret Fisher, curator of Carniglia's body of work, and Anthony Pinata, Bay Area painter and art historian, for their presentations and reflections, as well as Bongiorno Productions, creators of the marvelous video about Carniglia.

It is my pleasure to invite you all to join us at the upcoming lecture and book reading by historian Silvio Manno (see newsletter description). Stay tuned also for further details about the Walking Tour of Historic Italian American Places of Martinez, CA, which is now being planned for Spring 2018.

Finally, I encourage you, as always, to support the work of this unique and vital organization with your memberships and your participation in our events.

Distinti saluti e a presto,

Adele Negro



CHARCOAL AND BLOOD
a reading/talk by author Silvio Manno

Place: *El Sobrante Library*, 4191 Appian Way, El Sobrante, CA 94803

Date: Saturday, November 4

Time: 2 PM to 4 PM

As reviewed in our Spring Newsletter, *Charcoal and Blood: Italian Immigrants in Eureka, Nevada and the Fish Creek Massacre* tells the rarely-heard story of the Italian immigrants who worked as charcoal burners in Eureka, Nevada in the late 19th century. Charcoal was necessary to power the smelters refining the silver ore that had been discovered near Eureka in

the 1860s, and Italian immigrants were hired to convert local lumber into charcoal. But when the charcoal burners struck to get a more adequate wage, they were fired upon by a posse, and five burners died in what became known as the “Fish Creek Massacre.” This almost unknown history is what Silvio Manno has uncovered, and what he will talk about at this event. Anyone interested in the history of Italians in the West should not miss it.

Born in Calabria and immigrating to the U.S. in 1976, Manno earned an MA in Linguistics at Cal State Fresno. He worked as a bilingual elementary school teacher in Fresno until his retirement, to devote himself to Italian immigration history. He has previously written a book on *The Forestiere Underground Gardens*.

The El Sobrante Library is easily accessible from interstate route 80, going north from Berkeley. From I-80, take the El Portal Drive Exit (19A), take El Portal west to San Pablo Dam Road, then left on San Pablo to Appian Way. The library is near the corner of Appian Way and San Pablo Dam Rd at 4191 Appian Way. Free parking is available.

Light refreshments will be served.

Please come and show your support for our mission.

Una Storia Segreta

Storia Segreta Continues. Lawrence DiStasi was asked to make a presentation focused on his recent book, *Branded: How Italian Immigrants Became ‘Enemies’ During WWII*, by a consortium of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Los Angeles, the Graziadio Center for Italian Studies at CSU Long Beach, and NIAF of Los Angeles. After seeing the great interest raised by his talk at the IIC on October 3, and at a CSULB class on October 4, Prof. Clorinda Donato, Chair of Italian studies at the Graziadio Center, raised the prospect of extending *Una Storia Segreta* to Italy. Prof. Donato expressed interest in the possibility of re-making the exhibit for an Italian tour, and in translating *Branded* and/or *Una Storia Segreta* into Italian through her directorship of translation studies at CSULB. While nothing is settled yet, the response to these talks made clear that some way of getting the wartime story to vast audiences that still have no idea these events happened remains a live and urgent project. In that regard, DiStasi will be pursuing one local strand with Anthony Pinata, who has experience curating exhibits through his work at the Richmond Art Center. The most practical idea—and the one that promises to reach the largest audience—might be to find a way to turn the physical exhibit into an online exhibit that could be presented on an Internet website.

The first task will be to inspect the physical exhibit at the Pittsburg Historical Museum where it is currently stored, and decide what can be converted to digital images, and how. Next, and most important, will be determining what needs to be done to make the resulting product compelling and interactive. Both aspects will be investigated in the coming weeks. Stay tuned for updates on these prospects.

Carniglia Round Table Report. The WRC’s recent sponsorship of the round table discussion at the *Museo Italo Americano* on July 13 was a notable success. A crowd that included relatives of Jerry Carniglia first watched the splendid documentary, *Painting Rules*, featuring Carniglia, and then took part in the lively discussion on Carniglia’s work and life featuring Anthony Pinata and Margaret Fisher. It seemed a fitting way to ensure that Jerry Carniglia’s work will live on, not least among those who now know him.

Member Activities

Walking Tour of Martinez. The WRC’s planned walking tour of historic Martinez, based on the recent success in putting the city on the National Register of Historic Places, continues. **Maria Protti** has been spearheading the tour, which she plans to center on two to three blocks of vintage houses owned by pioneering Italian immigrants. Plans are now shaping up for an event in early 2018, with a gathering at a local winery to follow. Stay tuned.

WRC member Laura Ruberto has joined Joseph Sciorra in editing a new book on Italian immigration to the U.S. in the post-WWII period. Titled *New Italian Migrations to the United States*, the book focuses on a period often overlooked in migration studies, the post-war years from 1945 to the present. Various contributors write about subjects ranging from the impact of the McCarren-Walter Act to the way new immigrants fit into Italian American youth culture. The book, published by University of Illinois Press, will be followed by others in the series, and is sure to change the way Italian immigration to the U.S. is viewed.

Lawrence DiStasi has just published a book of his blogs titled *Earth Breath: Selected Blogs, 2009-2016*. The book is organized into sections including Climate Change, Food, Politics, Capitalism, and so on. Now available on Amazon.

Friends of the WRC

Recent changes in IASA’s membership procedure have meant that participation in the WRC continues to lag. To reverse this trend, we can now offer a “Friends of the WRC” membership at a reduced rate to those not deeply interested in scholarship at the national level but who would still like to support the WRC’s programs in the West. We urge everyone who gets this newsletter to join our organization as a “Friend of the WRC” and thereby support our continuing efforts to study and publicize the history of Italian immigrants in the West. A form for this purpose appears at the end of this newsletter.

Please...join and support us...today.

In Memoriam

It was with great sadness that we learned, on August 11, that our valued colleague and friend, Richard Vannucci, had died. Richard had been ill for some time, but seemed to be rallying, so we hoped he would gather his considerable will to enjoy life and persist. Sadly, his great heart gave out. All of us who knew him—and many of you who did not—had to be touched.

Richard was one of the great supporters of all Italian American organizations, with particular emphasis on ours. He kept insisting to me, even as he lay in serious care, that what we did in promoting our history was critical for the survival of our community, and we had to make sure it thrived. While he served as our treasurer, he did his best to promote exactly that, inventing always new ways to interest more of his friends and colleagues in the local clubs to join the WRC. He could be very persuasive—as I found out accompanying him to many of the local Festas, where he was more aggressive selling my books than I was. But he did it all with such obvious sincerity and good humor that people responded even to his occasional hectoring. The result was that under his watch, our WRC membership expanded to unprecedented levels. I could go on for a long time with memories of Richard, but I will defer to one of his closest friends, Dr. Teri Ann Bengiveno, a longtime WRC stalwart and our current Treasurer. Teri Ann wrote the following remembrance of Richard, and I think it says best what we all feel—that we won't soon see the likes of his bright spirit and electric presence for a long, long time.

MY DEAR FRIEND RICHARD VANNUCCI died yesterday. His death is a huge loss for the Bay Area Italian American community and for me personally. Despite the fact that we fought like siblings sometimes, he knew my heart and I knew his. In some ways we were direct opposites: he was a cat lover, me dogs; he was an A's fan, I bleed orange & black; he was very conservative, me not so much. Yet my friendship with him ran very deep. He was raised in North Beach and then moved to the East Bay. His family was relocated during WWII. He went into the Navy and was in Vietnam during the early years of the war. He was a voracious reader who was very proud of his background and tried to make Italian American organizations about more than food/social outings. He was a life-time member of the Italian American Studies Association and a long-time membership coordinator & treasurer for the Western Regional Chapter. He was a member of too many Italian American organizations to name. He was the impetus for the *Con le nostre mani* photographic exhibit. If you went to an Italian Festa in Oakland, San Jose, or Sacramento, you probably have seen him. If you were at the Italian Film Festival at Las Positas College or the conference on Italian Americans & Agriculture, you met him. If you went to any of the Michael Parenti readings, you met him. Events at the Museo or film screenings or panels on *Una Storia Segreta*, you heard him. I have so many fond memories of Richard but traveling with him to conferences were at the top of the list. He took me to some amazing clubs to hear jazz & the blues in Las Vegas & Chicago. He was going to educate me on all things jazz. Those were amazing musical experiences. He loved good food, drink, and good people. RIP my friend, and I hope you are smoking and drinking with Bix Beiderbecke...

Book Reviews

Murder in Matera: A True Story of Passion, Family, and Forgiveness in Southern Italy, by Helene Stapinski, HarperCollins: 2017.

Helene Stapinski is a reporter born in New Jersey who at some point decides to track down a family history that has haunted her for years—a rumored murder committed by her great-grandmother Vita Gallitelli in Basilicata before she emigrated to the U.S. Stapinski then begins the first of several trips she makes to the Italian village of Bernalda, to see if she really does have murder in her genes. Enlisting the help of several villagers, including some of the local teachers and historians, she finally finds the answers she seeks in newspaper and trial records. There was indeed a murder, but it was not Vita who committed it; rather, it was the man who was to become her husband, Francesco. Having stolen some pears, he and his cousin were confronted by a hired hand about to fire a shotgun at them. Before the shot could be fired, the cousins jumped him and beat him in a way that led to his death in a hospital. When Francesco was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to six years in prison, Vita had to make her peace with the local Signore, thus earning her other title, *puttana*.

Aside from the adventure of tracking down her family story, Stapinski gives us fascinating details about life in this long-neglected part of Italy, its *miseria*, and the grit of its inhabitants. My interest was also peaked by a list of those killed in the “*eccidio fascista*” of Jan. 31, 1923 in Bernalda, one of whom was named Maria Distasi (no relation). In the end, though I would have preferred a less ‘tough-guy’ style, Stapinski gives us a vivid example of the historical discoveries that can result when children of immigrants decide to track down family legends.

Flavor and Soul: Italian America at its African Edge, by John Gennari, University of Chicago Press: 2017.

Though I didn't really have time to read Gennari's fascinating book for this newsletter, I will surely review it in a coming one. For now, suffice it to say that the book has attracted a good deal of attention, especially given the accepted narrative of constant conflict between Blacks and Italian Americans. What Gennari does is demonstrate, without denying the conflict, that there is also a historical affinity—what Gennari calls an ‘Afro-Italian sensibility’—between the two cultures, especially along the lines of music and sound, film and media, sports, and foodways. This affinity is what Gennari calls “the edge” between cultures: a place where a true understanding of racial and ethnic dynamics can be found.

On Second Thought: Learned Women Reflect on Profession, Community, and Purpose, by Luisa Del Giudice, University of Utah Press: 2017.

Edited by Del Giudice, who contributes her own essay to the volume, these reflections by thirteen accomplished women reveal not only how they achieved what they did, but also how their journeys to integrate the various aspects of their lives led eventually to self-knowledge and even wisdom.

Lawrence DiStasi

WE VALUE YOUR SUPPORT.

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE IASA/WRC.....or..... a “FRIEND OF THE WRC” TODAY!

IASA Membership is now done online. To join online, go to www.italianamericanstudies.net and select the box for membership. Follow the prompts for the type of membership you wish. You may use a credit card.

Yearly national dues are:

Regular IASA National Membership: \$55.

WRC Chapter dues are an additional \$20.

Regular: \$20. Institutional: \$30.

Family (2 or more): \$20.

Send “Friend of the WRC” donation of \$20 to:

IASA/WRC Treasurer
7246 Dover Lane
Dublin, CA 94568

(name)

(street address)

(city, state)

(phone)

(email)

Members with items for the next newsletter should send them to:

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The Italian American Studies Association

Western Regional Chapter

P.O. Box 533

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50th Annual IASA National Conference

Nov. 2 – 4, 2017 -- Marriott Wardman Park, Washington DC

Faith, (Ir)reverence, and the Italian Diaspora:

Fifty Years of Italian American Studies