HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*



Italy's role in America's greatness


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Unsung Italian heroes (South)


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Charles Albert Tron



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HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*


Art


Sport


Mobility

250 USA YEARS

80 ITALY YEARS

We the Italians

TWO ANNIVERSARIES ONE HEART

OCTOBER 2026

2026 is a very special year for the United States and for Italy. In both cases, an important milestone anniversary will be celebrated: 250 years since 1776, the birth of the United States; and 80 years since 1946, the birth of the Italian Republic.

At We the Italians, we want to celebrate both in our own way – by telling the beautiful stories in which Italy played a leading role throughout the 250 years of the United States, and likewise the beautiful stories in which the United States has played a leading role in Italy's 80 years.

Our project is called ***Two Anniversaries, One Heart***, and as you may have guessed, it is divided into two parts.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA

Happy Birthday USA, which includes stories about Italy's positive contribution to 250 years of the United States of America, is itself divided into two sub-projects.

The first is called ***Italy's role in America's greatness.***

We have selected eighteen great Italians who played a fundamental role in the 250-year history of America. Eighteen prominent Italians of today will tell the stories of those eighteen very famous Italians of the past, also explaining the impact that these figures have had here in Italy within their respective fields of expertise.

The second is called ***Unsung Italian Heroes***.

In addition to the eighteen most famous Italians, we want to tell the story of the impact that many other Italians have had in individual American states. These are more local Italian and Italian American heroes who are not as widely known. And who better than our Ambassadors to know at least one such story connected to their own area? They will tell us about the unsung hero who did something important in the place where they live and where they represent us.

At the end of February, we will share the stories of the Unsung Heroes of New England; at the end of April, those from the New York area; at the end of June, those from the East; at the end of August, those from the South; and at the end of December, those from the West.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY

In this case, twelve stories written by prominent Italians of today will each be dedicated to America's positive contribution to Italy in a different thematic field.

We will tell twelve reasons why Italy has been, is, and will always be grateful to the United States – reasons that have generated positive effects in Italy and that have strengthened the solidity and the exceptional nature of the friendship and alliance between Italy and the United States.

All of this content will be distributed in several ways.

The articles will be published – all in Italian and English – on our website and across our social media channels.

The English versions will also be included in special bimonthly inserts of our magazine, to be released at the end of February, April, June, August, October, and December 2026.

At the end of the year, we will publish a book collecting all the content.

Happy Birthday USA and ***Happy Birthday Italy*** will also become two audio and video podcasts, likewise released every two months.

Finally, our Gala – which this year will take place on June 4 – will include a segment in which we will briefly present this project, along with a surprise that we are not yet ready to reveal.

Two Flags, One Heart – and this year as well,
Two Anniversaries, One Heart.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY
ITALY *from the US*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*

Art



Francesca Villanti

America and our 20th century. 80 years of art, discovery and gratitude

For a long time, Italian art was identified around the world primarily with the extraordinary legacy of its past. The Renaissance, Venetian painting, the Baroque, sculpture, and the great regional schools had created such a powerful image of artistic Italy that they almost naturally occupied the center of international attention.

The United States played a full part in this story. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, major American collectors and museums assembled collections of Italian art of exceptional importance, while traveling to Italy remained an essential part of the cultural education of generations of Americans. Giotto, Botticelli, Raphael, Titian, and Caravaggio became firmly established in the country's museums and cultural imagination.

Twentieth-century Italian art had a different fate. Not because Italy lacked artists, movements, or original experimentation. Futurism had possessed an international dimension since the 1910s, Giorgio de Chirico's Metaphysical painting had profoundly influenced European culture, and Italy between the two world wars had continued to produce a remarkably diverse range of artistic experiences. Yet, especially outside Europe, this landscape remained far less recognizable, almost overshadowed by the immense power of Italy's historic artistic heritage. Fascism and the war had also made exchanges, travel, and exhibitions more difficult.

After World War II, New York was increasingly establishing itself as a center of the international art world, a role it would maintain for decades. It was in this climate that several American institutions began to look with renewed attention at twentieth-century Italian art.

One of the first major signs of this change came in 1949, when the Museum of Modern Art in New York organized the exhibition Twentieth-Century Italian Art, curated by Alfred H. Barr Jr. and James Thrall Soby. The exhibition surveyed Italian art from Futurism through the most recent developments and accomplished something that, in an Italy only recently emerged from the war, was still difficult to achieve on the same scale: it approached twentieth-century Italian art as a coherent history, mature enough to be selected, organized, and presented to an international audience.

The 1948 Venice Biennale had already forcefully reopened the dialogue with European and American art, but Italy was still immersed in the process of reconstruction. The avant-garde movements, the artistic experiences of the interwar years, and the individual paths of Italian artists had not yet settled into a broadly shared interpretation.

Barr and Soby did something that was simple and, for precisely that reason, decisive: they selected, juxtaposed, and organized. They treated twentieth-century Italian art as something that already possessed a history of its own. The world was accustomed to doing this with the Renaissance. It was far less accustomed to doing so with contemporary Italy.

And the effects of that exhibition extended well beyond the months in which it was on view. In connection with the exhibition, the museum acquired works by Balla, de Chirico, Morandi, and Arturo Martini, as well as two Boccioni bronzes obtained from Benedetta Marinetti, including Unique Forms of Continuity



Francesca Villanti *is an art historian. Educated at Sapienza University of Rome and Sotheby's in New York, for more than twenty-five years she has worked as a curator and scholarly consultant, developing exhibitions devoted to major masters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from Van Gogh to Kandinsky, both in Italy and abroad. She has served as a consultant to the Italian Ministry of Culture. She holds a Ph.D. and is the author of monographs, exhibition catalogs, and scholarly essays.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY
ITALY *from the US*

Sport



Luciano Buonfiglio

Sport, a bridge between Italy and the United States

A country's identity is also shaped by its ability to embrace the traditions of those who possess outstanding expertise. Italy and the United States have always maintained a productive dialogue, integrating their respective skills while enhancing the distinctive qualities of each. Within this virtuous exchange, sport has played a crucial role, naturally serving as a unifying force and a universal language capable of overcoming differences and transforming diversity into opportunities for growth.

As we mark the 80th anniversary of the Italian Republic alongside the 250th anniversary of the United States, American influence on Italy's sporting system can be seen not only in the spread and development of sports that originated in the United States, but also in the introduction of innovative models, methods and approaches to understanding and organizing sport.

Italy and the United States are two great sporting nations, different in size, traditions and organizational models, yet united by a fundamental belief: sport is not merely competition. It is education, community, discipline, entertainment and inclusion. It is also a way for a country to represent itself and its values. Basketball is perhaps the clearest example of this encounter. Over the decades, American players and coaches competing in Italian leagues have contributed to the technical growth and gradual evolution of the game, creating an ongoing exchange between different sporting cultures and schools. That exchange has extended far beyond the basketball court, influencing athletic preparation, coaching methods, team management and even the way the sport itself is presented as entertainment.

The result was not simply the importation of an American model, but the creation of a great Italian basketball tradition. Italian clubs established themselves in European competition, the national team achieved prestigious results, and many Italian players subsequently traveled in the opposite direction, reaching the United States and competing at the highest professional level.

Volleyball offers another particularly significant example. Born in the United States at the end of the 19th century, the sport found extraordinarily fertile ground in Italy, eventually becoming an integral part of our sporting identity. It is a remarkable example of how an idea can cross the Atlantic, be embraced and gradually reinterpreted until it becomes something profoundly Italian.

Italy has developed one of the world's most respected volleyball movements, building its own technical school and an extraordinary tradition. The true value of this exchange lies not simply in transferring a sport from one country to another, but in the ability to transform an external influence into an excellence of one's own.

Baseball provides another meaningful example of this process. The American presence in Italy after World War II contributed to the spread of a sport that gradually established roots in our country, developing its own identity and tradition in several parts of Italy.

However, it would be limiting to measure American influence only through individual sports. The United States has also been an important reference point for Italy in the evolution of professional sports and in developing stronger connections among athletics, business, communications and entertainment.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*

Sport



The American model introduced early on the idea of sport as something capable of generating value not only through athletic competition, but also economically, socially and culturally. The central role of the athlete, the importance of spectators, relationships with sponsors, the strategic value of merchandising and the ability to transform a competition into a global event are all concepts that, over time, have also become increasingly important in Italy.

The exchange has extended to less visible but equally essential areas of modern sport – athletic preparation, sports medicine, performance analysis, major-event organization and new forms of communication.

In all these fields, the American example has provided an important point of comparison and encouraged innovation within the Italian sporting system. This is a legacy that Italy has not simply adopted, but has reinterpreted and adapted to its own culture. An encounter between different traditions does not necessarily produce uniformity. It can produce evolution.

American sports have also helped spread an innovative concept of the relationship among athletic competition, education and personal development. The U.S. university system, with its long tradition of combining academic education with competitive sports, has been a particularly interesting model. Here too, interaction with the United States has helped Italy increasingly recognize sport as a tool for personal development, well-being and the transmission of values extending far beyond results and the playing field.

There is also a cultural dimension that may be more difficult to measure but is equally important. The NBA phenomenon, in particular, has had an extraordinary ability to bring Italian audiences closer to American sports culture. Great games, arenas, champions and spectacular entertainment have introduced millions of young Italians not simply to a sport, but to an entire world.

The value of this relationship becomes even clearer when we consider how increasingly reciprocal the exchange has become. Italians who have reached the most important stages of American sports provide tangible evidence that this dialogue has produced results in both directions.

Cross-cultural influence does not mean losing one's identity. On the contrary, it means being willing to engage with what comes from elsewhere, understand its value, embrace what can be useful and ultimately enrich it through one's own experience.

As President of the Italian National Olympic Committee, I would like to recall one statistic that gives even greater meaning to the relationship between our two countries: Los Angeles 1984 remains the Olympic Games at which Italy won the highest number of gold medals in its history – 14. That record carries special significance today as we look ahead to the next Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 2028. Eighty years after the birth of the Italian Republic and 250 years after the birth of the United States of America, celebrating this relationship also means celebrating a history made of people, encounters and shared passions.

It is a history in which sport has played a special role because it has transformed differences into dialogue and competition into mutual understanding.
Two anniversaries, then, connected by a single thread – the ability of two countries to meet, learn from one another and grow together. Perhaps there is no better metaphor than sport to describe this continuous exchange.

Luciano Buonfiglio *has served as President of the Italian National Olympic Committee since June 2025. A former Italian national canoe athlete, he competed at the 1976 Montreal Olympics and five World Championships. An experienced sports executive, he led the Italian Canoe Kayak Federation from 2005. He is the first former Olympian ever elected President of CONI in the organization's history.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY ITALY *from the US*

Mobility



Andrea Giuricin

From aviation to rail: 80 years of exchange between Italy and the United States

Over the past 80 years, Italy's mobility sector has evolved through a continuous exchange with the United States – a relationship that has brought innovation, efficiency, and greater global integration. While Italy has always relied on its own engineering excellence and design tradition, American contributions have consistently accelerated modernization across many areas of transportation.

The impact of liberalization has been equally significant. The United States pioneered transportation deregulation, particularly with the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978. This approach influenced European reforms, contributing to the creation of a more open and competitive aviation market in the 1990s. Italy embraced these changes, which resulted in lower fares, more routes, and greater accessibility for travelers. The expansion of low-cost airlines transformed travel habits, allowing millions of Italians to fly more frequently and at lower prices.

Freight transportation and logistics provide another clear example of American influence. The introduction of containerization in the 1950s revolutionized global trade and transformed Italian ports such as Genoa, Trieste, and Gioia Tauro. Standardized containers dramatically reduced loading times and transportation costs while improving supply-chain efficiency. In recent years, digital logistics systems developed in the United States – including real-time tracking, automated warehouses, and data analytics – have further strengthened Italy's competitiveness in international markets.

Urban mobility has also been influenced by ideas originating in the United States. The spread of ride-hailing platforms, car-sharing services, and mobility-as-a-service models has changed the way people move around Italian cities. Services inspired by American models have been adopted and adapted in cities such as Milan, Rome, and Turin, contributing to a gradual reduction in dependence on privately owned cars. These solutions have increased flexibility, reduced congestion in some areas, and introduced a new way of thinking about transportation as an integrated service.

The arrival of robotaxis and autonomous driving is now changing mobility in American cities, while Italy has fallen behind in this area, particularly in the taxi sector. The United States provides an important example in ride-hailing, having accelerated significantly through the development of major global players.

When it comes to rail transportation, the United States has an excellent freight rail system but a passenger rail system that clearly suffers from insufficient development.

On the passenger side, there is a public operator, Amtrak, which operates services while also controlling much of the infrastructure it uses.

Italy can offer unique expertise to its American partner, thanks to the efficiency of its passenger rail operators, Trenitalia and Italo, and to a model that few other countries can replicate.

Italy's high-speed rail system could become an important reference point for the United States. American policymakers could benefit from examining the advantages of an approach similar to the Italian model. The U.S. government is also exploring organizational structures that share some similarities with the Italian holding model, with separate activities involving infrastructure, railway operations, and asset management.

This could represent a promising direction for Amtrak. At the same time, the United States is finally moving forward with new high-speed rail infrastructure in California through the California High-Speed Rail project between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The project has also attracted interest from private partners through

public-private partnerships, suggesting that the direction being pursued could open new opportunities.

Between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, meanwhile, the Brightline West project could further accelerate the development of American high-speed passenger rail through a combination of public funding and private-sector participation.

The United States has enormous potential that remains largely untapped in passenger rail transportation. The Northeast Corridor, connecting cities such as Boston, New York, and Washington, could in particular become the starting point for a new model based on greater competition and increased private investment.

The Italian experience offers valuable lessons. In 2012, with Italo entering the high-speed rail market, Italy became the first country in the world to have two operators competing directly in high-speed passenger rail services. Since then, Trenitalia and Italo have invested in new trains, increased frequencies, and improved the overall quality of service.

The numbers illustrate the scale of the transformation. Compared with 2011, average Italian high-speed rail fares have fallen by approximately 30%, while demand has more than doubled. This happened without a comparable expansion of the high-speed network itself. In other words, competition helped Italy make much more intensive use of infrastructure that, for the most part, was already in place.

Another significant effect has been the increase in service frequency. On the Milan–Rome route, one of Italy's most important rail corridors, peak periods have seen frequencies reaching one train every 8–10 minutes. The presence of two operators has also encouraged new investment and pushed the incumbent operator to innovate and improve its services.

A similar approach could potentially be tested in the United States, particularly along the Northeast Corridor. Today, Amtrak operates Acela services along a corridor that connects some of the country's most populous and economically important metropolitan areas. The potential passenger market is enormous, and the number of services could increase significantly.

The objective would not be to privatize the rail infrastructure, but rather to allow multiple companies to operate services on the same network under clear and equal rules. Amtrak could continue to play a central role in infrastructure management, while new private operators could invest in trains and compete for passengers.

The main lesson from the Italian experience is that investing billions of dollars in building and improving rail infrastructure is not enough. It is equally important to make the fullest possible use of the infrastructure already available. Greater competition could help the United States increase ridership, improve service, and attract additional private capital to the passenger rail sector.

In summary, the development of Italy's mobility system has been enriched by a long and productive relationship with the United States. From aviation to logistics, from deregulation to autonomous driving, American innovation has consistently supported growth and transformation. At the same time, Italy can undoubtedly contribute its expertise in passenger rail, where it has developed a highly successful high-speed system used by more than 2 million Americans every year.

Finally, there is one subject particularly close to my heart: academic and research collaboration. Partnerships between Italian universities and American institutions have strengthened innovation, education, and the exchange of knowledge in fields including engineering, logistics, and urban planning. These relationships have helped educate new generations of professionals capable of addressing the challenges of an increasingly complex mobility system.

Andrea Giuricin *is an internationally recognized economist specializing in transportation, infrastructure, and the U.S. railway industry. He advises international companies, governments, transport authorities, the European Union, World Bank, and United Nations. He teaches Transport Economics and Logistics at the University of Milano-Bicocca and Made in Italy at USC Annenberg. He has published several books and contributes to Italian and international newspapers.*



HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness

Unsung Italian heroes

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness



Enrico Fermi,

Beyond the atom. How Enrico Fermi changed American science

Enrico Fermi was one of the scientists whose discoveries in fundamental physics, beginning in Italy, contributed most significantly to the United States' emergence as the leading scientific and technological power of the 20th century. His impact on American history extended far beyond nuclear physics: Fermi strengthened national security, paved the way for civilian nuclear power, trained a new generation of researchers, and helped firmly establish the United States as the world's center of scientific research.

Born in Rome on September 29, 1901, Fermi studied at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa and became a professor at the University of Rome in 1927. There, he led the group known as the "Via Panisperna boys" and conducted fundamental research on artificial radioactivity and neutron behavior. In 1934, he realized that neutrons slowed by passing through hydrogen-rich materials, such as paraffin, could trigger nuclear reactions more effectively.

By the time he left Rome, Fermi had already developed the slow-neutron technique and acquired the experimental knowledge that would prove essential to building the first nuclear reactor in the United States. The chronology, however, requires clarification: he did not build the reactor in Italy, nor did he receive the Nobel Prize for its construction. In 1938, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for his research on radioactive elements produced through neutron irradiation and for nuclear reactions induced by slow neutrons.

After accepting the prize in Stockholm, Fermi traveled directly to the United States with his wife, Laura Capon, and their children. The decision was driven primarily by Italy's racial laws, which threatened Laura because of her Jewish background. Arriving in America in early 1939, he began working at Columbia University in New York.

The United States thus welcomed an already celebrated scientist, while also providing the universities, resources, collaborators, and freedom he needed to turn his insights into achievements that would change the world. Following the discovery of uranium fission, Fermi quickly recognized the possibility of producing a nuclear chain reaction. His exceptional ability to combine theory, calculations, and experiments made him indispensable to the American scientific program.

The decisive moment came on December 2, 1942. Beneath the stands of Stagg Field at the University of Chicago, Fermi's team brought Chicago Pile-1 into operation. For the first time in history, humanity achieved a controlled, self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction. Fermi did more than participate in the experiment: he was its scientific leader, the person capable of predicting, controlling, and interpreting the reactor's behavior.

That success gave the United States a formidable new technological capability. It demonstrated that the energy contained within the atomic nucleus could be controlled and put to use. Chicago Pile-1 became the starting point for the development of American reactors for research, the production of nuclear materials, and, in subsequent years, electricity generation.

During World War II, Fermi participated in the Manhattan Project and also worked at Los Alamos. Emilio Segrè, a member of his research group in Rome who would also receive a Nobel Prize, worked on the project as well. Fermi's knowledge of neutron properties and his demonstration of the feasibility and potential of chain reactions were crucial to solving problems that no one had ever addressed before. His contribution helped the United States achieve a decisive scientific and strategic advantage during the war and in the emerging international order that followed.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness

Fermi's American legacy is too often mistakenly reduced to its military dimension. The fundamental knowledge developed through his research contributed substantially to the emergence of the American nuclear industry, major national laboratories, and scientific programs bringing together universities, government, and industry. Applications of his discoveries were essential to advances in medicine, energy production, materials research, electronics, engineering, and space exploration.

Fermi also played a key role in building the American school of modern physics. At the University of Chicago, he taught young researchers a method grounded in simplicity, experimental verification, and the ability to identify the essential elements of any problem. After becoming an American citizen in 1944, he continued to contribute to the United States not only through his discoveries but also by developing expertise that would endure for generations.

He died in Chicago on November 28, 1954, at just 53. His name lives on in laboratories, institutes, power plants, scientific awards, and the chemical element fermium. Above all, however, Fermi left the United States a new way of understanding science as a national force supported by substantial investment and extensive international collaboration. He brought to America the scientific knowledge he had developed in Rome and found in the United States the conditions needed to transform it into a revolution. This is why Enrico Fermi was so consequential: he helped make the United States more secure, more advanced, and more scientifically influential, guiding it into the atomic age.

Fermi also maintained ties with Italy. In the year of his death, while lecturing on nuclear forces at the international school in Varenna, on Lake Como, he recommended investing in the development of powerful computers. The following year, the CEP project – the Calcolatrice Elettronica Pisana, or Pisa Electronic Computer – was launched in Italy.

Remembering Enrico Fermi, his scientific stature, and the profound impact of his research on our lives is always important, but especially as the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary. Fermi also chose American citizenship because he felt welcomed, scientifically recognized, and able to pursue his research and train new generations of scientists. His discoveries have inspired modern research and continue to do so, while his methods and approach to science remain exemplary.

Fermi rejected the idea that scientific knowledge could be erased or its advancement halted. For him, responsibility did not mean rejecting science. It meant recognizing that every scientific achievement, once it became part of history, required new forms of oversight, new political tools, and, above all, new moral choices.



***Angela Bracco**, earned her degree in Milan and a PhD in Physics in Canada. She is a full professor at the University of Milan and an experimental nuclear physics researcher. A former NuPECC chair with leadership roles at INFN, EPS, and APS, she belongs to Academia Europaea. She currently presides over the Italian Physical Society and the Enrico Fermi Research Center.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness



Amadeo Giannini, the Ligurian who changed banking in America

Amadeo Pietro Giannini is one of the great Italians who left a profound and positive mark on the history of the United States. He did not simply found a new bank – he transformed the relationship between the financial system and American society, opening access to credit to millions of people who had previously been excluded. Immigrants, workers, farmers, small business owners, and ordinary families finally found someone willing to judge them not only by the wealth they possessed, but also by their honesty, their willingness to work, and the strength of their plans.

His bank offered loans to people who, like Giannini himself at the beginning of his career, had little more than an idea, a plan, and the determination to work, build something, and pursue a dream. He understood that this was where true value could be found – something worth believing in and investing in.

Giannini was born on May 6, 1870, in San Jose, California, to Luigi Giannini and Virginia Demartini, Ligurian immigrants from Favale di Malvaro, a small town in the inland Tigullio area. His father had first traveled to California during the Gold Rush era before returning to Liguria, marrying, and leaving again for the United States with his wife. The family settled in the Santa Clara Valley, where they purchased land and established a farming business.

His Ligurian roots played a central role in shaping Amadeo's character. From his family he inherited frugality, a willingness to make sacrifices, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a strong belief in hard work. The violent death of his father, when Giannini was only seven years old, also forced him to confront life's hardships at a very young age. He left school as a teenager and began working in the produce business with his stepfather. Thanks to his energy and his ability to understand people, he quickly became a successful businessman.

After retiring from the produce business while still a young man, Giannini joined the board of a small financial institution in San Francisco. There he realized that traditional banks primarily served wealthy customers while largely ignoring immigrants and working people. When his fellow board members rejected his proposal to extend credit to ordinary people as well, he decided to create a bank based on his own principles.

On October 17, 1904, he opened the Bank of Italy in San Francisco. Its headquarters were located in a former saloon in North Beach, the heart of the city's Italian community. Giannini personally walked the neighborhood streets, speaking with merchants, craftsmen, and families and encouraging them to deposit their savings. He made relatively small loans and placed great importance on the personal reputation of those seeking credit.

The defining moment in Giannini's career came with the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fires. As much of the city was being destroyed, he managed to save the bank's money and records by moving them out of the devastated area. While other financial institutions remained closed, he temporarily reopened his business and began financing the reconstruction. He lent money to families and small business owners, sometimes on the strength of little more than a handshake. The trust he demonstrated during those weeks enabled many people to start over and made a tangible contribution to San Francisco's rebirth.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness



The Bank of Italy subsequently expanded throughout California and in 1930 took the name Bank of America, reflecting a mission that had by then become national in scope.

Giannini's bank contributed to the development of several sectors that would help define modern America – California agriculture, commerce, construction, and small business. It financed the motion picture industry when movies were still considered an excessively risky investment and supported productions that would make history, including Walt Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." During the Great Depression, his bank purchased bonds that helped make the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge possible. During World War II, it also financed major industrial activities essential to America's wartime production effort.

By the time Giannini died on June 3, 1949, he had helped create one of the largest financial institutions in the world. But his legacy extends far beyond the size of Bank of America. Amadeo Giannini changed the United States because he placed his trust in people who had rarely been given that opportunity, transforming banking into a service accessible to a much broader segment of society. A son of Liguria and a protagonist of the American story, he demonstrated that the values brought to America by Italian immigrants could contribute directly to the nation's growth and modernization.

Vision, courage, and a sense of social responsibility – I believe these are the words that best describe Giannini's extraordinary personal and entrepreneurial story. They were reflected, on the one hand, in his unique ability to see the possibility of rebirth even in the darkest and most difficult moments and, on the other, in his determination to put his talent at the service of individuals and the community.

I am convinced that Giannini's life carries a powerful message and that the values it embodies can serve as an example and an inspiration, especially today, at a complex historical moment marked by tensions. His story points to a model: investing in people's talent, abilities, and hard work – in their ambitions, their aspirations, and their desire to improve their lives – is one of the most effective ways to create growth and prosperity for everyone.

Believing in people, even when the obstacles appear insurmountable, is the path to overcoming challenges that seem impossible.

Looking back at Giannini's entrepreneurial story, I believe we can say that it was both profoundly Ligurian and profoundly American. First and foremost, Giannini was the son of people who came from our region, and he grew up in a Ligurian environment, even though it had been transplanted across the Atlantic. He was therefore immersed in the values typical of our land – hard work, commitment, sacrifice, and dedication. These are the same guiding principles that, over the centuries, enabled our people to create farmland by terracing miles of hillsides and to build a great maritime and commercial power from a rugged and challenging land.

Nor can we forget the great banking tradition of Genoa and Liguria. The Banco di San Giorgio was one of the earliest institutions of modern banking, capable not only of generating innovations that transformed the sector and later spread around the world, but also of serving as an engine of the greatness of the Republic of Genoa – a foundation upon which it built its maritime prosperity and commercial empire.

This is an important legacy that remains alive in the region today. Liguria has a strong entrepreneurial and banking tradition, and echoes of that heritage can undoubtedly be found in Giannini's life.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness

At the same time, it is clear that the qualities and genius of a man of Giannini's stature were able to flourish and produce extraordinary results because he operated in a place where he found the right conditions. This is the essence of America – a country where I lived and worked for many years and which remains an extraordinary source of inspiration for me.

Here, too, we can find an important lesson, one that can and should serve as a point of reference, particularly for those who hold public office. The only way to build a future of growth and prosperity is to create the conditions that allow the best energies within society to express their full potential. This requires simplification, less bureaucracy, and support for businesses. Above all, however, it requires every stakeholder in a community – institutions, associations, businesses, and the financial system – to embrace a shared vision and work in the same direction.

Following Giannini's example means recognizing and supporting people's hard work, talent, ideas, and strength, beginning with their concrete needs – the needs we can see before us, every single day, with our own eyes.



***Marco Bucci**, a native of Genoa with a degree in Chemistry and Pharmacy, is married and has two children. After a long international management career in Europe and the United States with 3M, Kodak, and Carestream Health, he led Liguria Digitale. Mayor of Genoa from 2017 to 2024, he oversaw major infrastructure projects. In October 2024, he was elected President of the Liguria Region.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness



Joe Petrosino,
the Italian American who defied the mafia

When people ask me to tell the story of my uncle, Giuseppe "Joe" Petrosino, I always smile a little bitterly. People expect a Hollywood story, the legend of an infallible detective, or the cold biography found in history books. But to me, Joe is not a character on a page. He is my own flesh and blood. I did not learn his story from books – I breathed it in at home, listening by the fireplace to my grandfather Michele, Joe's younger brother and a tailor in Brooklyn whose shop was across from the detective's home. Later, my mother Gilda became the guardian of those memories.

My grandfather told me about a real boy, born in Padula, near Salerno, on August 30, 1860. Giuseppe was 13 when he arrived in the United States with his family in 1873. They were part of the great story of Italian immigration – a story of sacrifice, hope, hard work, and dignity.

In New York, Joe quickly discovered what it meant to be Italian in an America where our people were often viewed with suspicion. He suffered when he saw our community – men and women working from dawn to dusk – discriminated against because of a small minority of criminals.

For him, fighting crime also meant defending the good name of Italian Americans.

On October 10, 1883, at 23, Joe joined the New York Police Department, becoming one of the first Italians on the city's police force. Nobody gave him special treatment. He was short, spoke with an immigrant's accent, and belonged to a community that enjoyed few privileges. Yet he made his way in a world where Italian police officers were extremely rare.

My grandfather always emphasized one thing: in America, Joe earned everything he achieved.

There were no databases, cell phones, surveillance cameras, or sophisticated investigative tools. Joe essentially had two weapons – an unwavering dedication to his work and a natural instinct that allowed him to read the streets, understand people, and anticipate criminals' moves. He spoke Italian and understood its dialects, but more importantly, he understood immigrants, their fears, and the wall of silence that often prevented victims from coming forward.

In 1895, he was promoted to detective sergeant. He became one of New York's best-known police officers and developed a relationship of mutual respect with Theodore Roosevelt, who had served as a New York City Police Commissioner before becoming President of the United States.

When the so-called "Black Hand" began terrorizing Italian communities through threatening letters, extortion, kidnappings, bombings, and murder, Joe realized conventional methods were not enough.

That realization led to the famous Italian Squad, a special unit largely composed of Italian and Italian American officers who could infiltrate criminal circles and earn the trust of victims. Petrosino took command of the squad in 1905, and in 1906 he was promoted to lieutenant – at the time, the highest rank achieved by an Italian American in a U.S. police force.

But the most painful memory my grandfather passed down to me concerned Joe's loneliness.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness

Joe spoke plainly and disliked compromise. He understood that arresting the man who planted a bomb or mailed an extortion letter was not enough. The entire network of fear, protection, and complicity that allowed criminals to prosper had to be broken.

He knew he was fighting more than one enemy – crime on one side, corruption and collusion on the other.

There is one image engraved in my heart. My grandfather Michele often repeated it with tears in his eyes: "Imagine Uncle Joe walking into a field where beautiful creatures were growing, pulling out the weeds so those creatures could grow healthy and strong. How is it possible that someone should have to lose his life just for pulling out the weeds?"

The weed was the Mafia.

The beautiful creatures were us Italians – decent people who simply wanted to work, raise families, become part of American society, and remain proud of their roots.

By 1909, Joe realized that arresting criminals in New York was not enough. Many had criminal records in Italy unknown to American authorities. Those records had to be obtained so criminals who had concealed their past could be deported. The investigations involved approximately 1,000 Italian criminals and former convicts.

Joe left for Italy. The mission was supposed to remain absolutely secret.

It did not.

The American press revealed its existence and published information that endangered his life. Joe continued anyway. He arrived in Sicily knowing that someone might already be waiting for him.

On the evening of March 12, 1909, in Piazza Marina in Palermo, four gunshots ended his life.

He was 48 years old. He became the first – and remains to this day the only – NYPD officer killed in the line of duty outside the United States.

Our family has never carried only the pain of a man murdered by the Mafia. There has also been the pain of knowing how alone Joe was during his final battle. A mission meant to remain secret had become public knowledge, exposing a man who had devoted his life to serving others.

When his body returned to New York, the city came to a standstill. On April 12, 1909, approximately 200,000–250,000 people gathered along the route of his funeral procession. Citizens, police officers, children, associations, and ordinary immigrants came to say goodbye.

For the son of immigrants from Padula who had arrived without privilege, that enormous crowd was perhaps the greatest possible response to those who had tried to reduce Italians in America to a stereotype of criminality.

Joe had fought so America could see the other Italians – the honest ones.

For more than fifty years, carrying forward the name of Giuseppe Petrosino has been more than preserving family history for me. It is an honor and a moral responsibility.

When I visit schools, I do not tell young people the story of a superhero. I tell them about an Italian immigrant who became an American without ever ceasing to love the land he came from. I tell them about a man who understood that defending the rule of law also meant defending the dignity of his community.

Joe never returned from his final mission. But he proved that being Italian in America did not mean lowering your head before the Mafia, fear, or prejudice. It meant having the courage to fight them.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Italy's role in America's greatness

The rule of law is not an abstract phrase to be repeated at conferences. It is a daily choice – deciding which side to stand on when remaining silent would be easier and refusing to look the other way when doing so would be more convenient.

That is what my grandfather Michele entrusted to me when he told me about his brother. That is what my mother Gilda preserved. And that is what I try to pass on today.

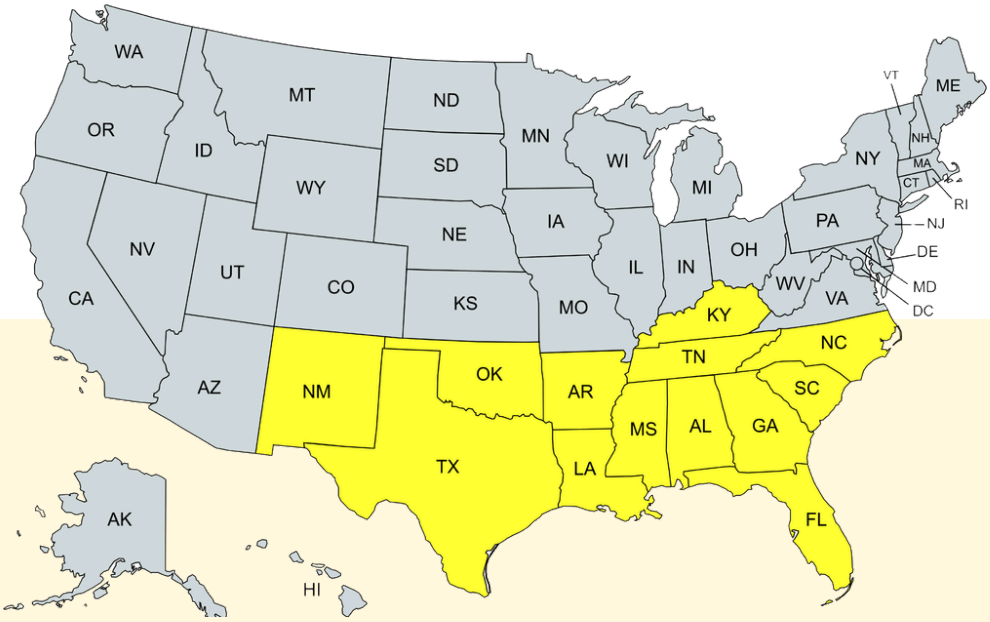
Because as long as we continue telling the story of Giuseppe "Joe" Petrosino, we will remember an Italian American who, by fighting the Mafia, defended the honor of millions of honest Italians. And Uncle Joe, through our voices, will continue pulling the weeds from that field.



Nino Melito Petrosino *is the grandnephew of Joe Petrosino, the legendary Italian American detective murdered by the Mafia in Palermo in 1909. For more than fifty years, he has preserved and shared his great-uncle's legacy, speaking to students and communities in Italy and the United States. Closely connected with the Joe Petrosino House Museum in Padula, he promotes justice, integrity, and civic responsibility.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Gli italiani locali meno conosciuti



South

End of October 2026



Alabama – Giuseppe Moretti
Arkansas – Pietro Bandini
Florida (Palm Beach County) – Toney Penna
Florida (Miami) – Dante Fascell
Florida (Orlando) – Neil Euliano
Florida (Tampa) – Lorenzo Panepinto
Georgia – Alfredo Barili
Kentucky – Frank P. Giacalone
Louisiana – Victor Hugo Schiro
Louisiana – Giuseppe Macheca
Louisiana – Nick La Rocca
Mississippi – Natale Piazza
New Mexico – Oreste Bachechi
New Mexico – Blandina Segale
North Carolina – Charles Albert Tron
Oklahoma – Rosa Giacomo
South Carolina – Giovanni Sottile
Tennessee – John Rebori Sr.
Texas (Dallas) – Pompeo Coppini
Texas (Houston) – Enrico Filiberto Cerracchio
Texas (San Antonio) – Giuseppe Cassini

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Alabama

Giuseppe Moretti,

Iron from Alabama, artistry from Italy.
The legacy of Giuseppe Moretti

Few artists have left a mark on Alabama as monumental – and as literally visible – as Giuseppe Moretti. Born in Siena, Italy, in 1857, Moretti brought the traditions of Italian sculpture to the United States and ultimately created an image that became inseparable from Birmingham: Vulcan, the colossal figure that still watches over the city from Red Mountain.

Moretti was trained in the rigorous Italian artistic tradition, studying sculpture in Florence before developing an international career. After arriving in the United States in the late 19th century, he worked on major public commissions in several states. But Alabama would become one of the places where his Italian talent produced its most enduring legacy.

His defining commission came when Birmingham prepared for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. The young industrial city wanted a spectacular symbol representing Alabama's iron and steel industry. Moretti designed Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and metalworking – an inspired connection between classical Italian culture and Birmingham's modern industrial identity.

The result was extraordinary. Standing 56 feet tall and weighing approximately 100,000 pounds, Vulcan was cast in Birmingham from local iron. Today it is recognized as the world's largest cast-iron statue and one of the largest statues ever created in the United States. After its appearance in St. Louis, Vulcan returned home and eventually took its permanent place atop Red Mountain.

More than 120 years later, the Italian-born figure remains Birmingham's best-known visual symbol. It represents the furnaces, mines, workers and industries that transformed the city into one of the great industrial centers of the American South. Yet behind this thoroughly Alabamian icon was the imagination and craftsmanship of an Italian immigrant.

Moretti's Alabama story extended beyond Birmingham.

While working in the state, the sculptor became fascinated by the exceptionally white marble found around Sylacauga. Italian craftsmen understood marble better than almost anyone, and Moretti immediately recognized its artistic and commercial potential. He became closely associated with efforts to develop the local marble industry, helping draw attention to a natural resource that would become internationally celebrated.

Moretti established a studio in the Sylacauga area and worked with its marble. His presence helped connect Alabama stone with the centuries-old Italian tradition of marble sculpture and encouraged its use as an artistic material rather than simply a geological resource.

That connection endured. Sylacauga became known as "The Marble City," and Alabama marble would eventually be used for sculpture, architecture and major public buildings. The industry became an important part of the area's economic and cultural identity.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes

Moretti therefore left Alabama two remarkable legacies. In Birmingham, he transformed iron into art and gave a growing American city an enduring symbol. In Sylacauga, he helped reveal the possibilities contained in Alabama marble and contributed to a tradition that continues to distinguish the community.

His story is also an Italian American story at its best. Moretti did not leave his Italian heritage behind when he crossed the Atlantic. He brought with him an artistic education rooted in Florence, a classical imagination and an Italian understanding of sculpture and stone. He then applied those gifts to the materials, ambitions and identity of his adopted country.

Giuseppe Moretti died in Italy in 1935, but in Alabama his work never really left. Iron and marble still tell his story – the story of an Italian artist who helped Alabama see the beauty and potential already present in its own land.



Michael Messina *Michael Messina is a third-generation Italian American of Sicilian descent living in Birmingham, Alabama. A University of Alabama communications graduate, he works as a client success manager for a multinational organization. He and his wife, Marena, are Italian American Future Leaders fellows. Active in Italian American organizations, he champions youth engagement and encourages generations to take pride in their heritage.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Arkansas

Pietro Bandini,

From malaria fields to the Ozarks. Pietro Bandini and the Italian dream that became Tontitown in Arkansas

The story of Pietro Bandini is more than the biography of an Italian priest. It is the story of how determination, community and an enduring attachment to Italian identity transformed a group of struggling immigrants into the founders of one of Arkansas's most distinctive towns.

Born in Forlì, Italy, on March 31, 1852, Father Bandini devoted much of his life in America to helping Italian immigrants. By 1897, that mission had taken him to Sunnyside Plantation in southeastern Arkansas, where Italian families recruited to work the land faced conditions dramatically different from what they had expected. Malaria, contaminated water, poor sanitation, floods and an unfamiliar climate made life extremely difficult. More than 125 people among the original 100 Italian families died of malaria.

Bandini understood that survival required a different future.

He had seen northwestern Arkansas and believed the Ozarks offered an environment more similar to the parts of northern and central Italy from which many settlers had come. In 1898, approximately 40 families followed him north. Near Springdale, they established a new community on rocky land that initially offered little more than abandoned buildings and enormous amounts of work.

Bandini called it Tontitown.

The first winter was difficult. Families survived partly on rabbit, pasta and polenta. Bandini divided the land into 10-acre parcels, distributed by drawing lots. The settlers planted vegetables, strawberries and orchards, but it was the vineyards that would become their signature. Grapes connected agricultural knowledge brought from Italy with the soil of Arkansas, eventually helping create an important regional industry. By 1905, Tontitown was being praised as a successful model of immigrant colonization.

Italian culture became part of the town's infrastructure rather than merely a memory of the old country. Bandini helped establish St. Joseph's Church and a school, organized a band and promoted the community nationally. Tontitown was incorporated in 1909, and Bandini became its first mayor. The harvest celebration begun by the settlers in 1898 evolved into the Tontitown Grape Festival – a tradition that continues today.

But Tontitown also allows Arkansas to celebrate another Unsung Italian Hero – one whose connection to the state predates the United States itself by 90 years.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Bandini deliberately named the settlement for Enrico Tonti, better known in America as Henri de Tonti. Born near Gaeta around 1649, Tonti became the trusted lieutenant of French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle. In 1686, Tonti established a trading post beside a Quapaw village on the Arkansas River. Known as Poste de Arkansea, it became Arkansas Post – the first permanent European settlement in what is now Arkansas and a crucial center of trade, government and military activity for generations.

There is something extraordinary about this connection. An Italian helped establish Arkansas Post in 1686. More than 200 years later, another Italian founded an Arkansas community and named it in his honor.

Bandini died in Little Rock on January 2, 1917, and was buried in Tontitown's St. Joseph Cemetery. But his greatest monument is not made of stone. It is the community itself.

Tontitown still exists, still celebrates its Italian heritage and still tells the story of families who transformed hardship into opportunity. Bandini gave those immigrants more than safer land – he helped give them ownership, dignity and a future while preserving the culture they had carried across the Atlantic.

In celebrating Pietro Bandini, Arkansas therefore celebrates two chapters of its Italian history: Enrico Tonti, present near the beginning of the state's European story, and Bandini, who more than two centuries later turned Italian perseverance into a living American community.

We the Italians
Editorial Staff

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Toney Penna,

The Italian name engraved in the history of Palm Beach golf

Palm Beach County is home to an astonishing 150 golf courses. Behind the area's passion for this quintessentially American game, there is also an Italian name: Toney Penna, a professional golfer, designer, and sporting equipment manufacturer. His full name is still engraved on the metal of prestigious golf clubs that remain highly sought after by collectors and enthusiasts. Born in Naples on January 15, 1908, Penna brought to South Florida a distinctive personal style that combined Italian craftsmanship, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit.

After emigrating to the United States as a child, he grew up in Harrison, New York, and entered the world of golf from the bottom, working as a caddie. From those humble beginnings, he made his way onto the professional circuit and recorded five tournament victories, four of which are now recognized by the PGA Tour. In 1938, he finished third at the U.S. Open, and in 1947 he placed eighth at the Masters Tournament. A young Italian immigrant had established himself in one of the most competitive environments in American sports.

Florida (Palm Beach County)

Penna also made his mark through his entrepreneurial and technical abilities. For more than 30 years, he worked with the MacGregor Golf Company, assisting some of the game's leading professionals and developing new solutions for golf clubs and accessories – many of which still bear his signature today. He held four patents related to golf club design. He studied weight, balance, shape, and the response of materials with the precision of an Italian craftsman. He also introduced innovative colors and aesthetic details, helping transform sporting equipment into something distinctive, elegant, and immediately recognizable.

Around 1946, Penna moved to Delray Beach. His home stood along the Intracoastal Waterway, across from that of celebrated Scottish golfer Tommy Armour. According to a local story that is still remembered today, the two champions enjoyed hitting golf balls from their respective properties, sending them across the waterway. Penna also frequented the Delray Beach Golf Club, contributing to the prestige and golfing culture of the area.

He later moved to Jupiter, where he founded his own company and manufactured golf clubs under his own name. His connection to Jupiter is still visible today in Toney Penna Drive, a street bearing his name where his factory once stood.

Penna lived in the quiet and exclusive Jupiter Colony neighborhood. Stacy Sacco, the daughter of one of his neighbors, still remembers the walks her father, Penna, and singer Perry Como used to take along the beach.

"They were a golfer, a pilot, and a singer... Toney would come to my dad's house and tap his golf club at the entrance to call him. He used the club as a walking stick. Then they would go behind his house and have fun hitting golf balls into the ocean while drinking a cocktail! I still have the clubs he gave me, signed by him, in my garage. He was straightforward, old-school, and a lot of fun.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes

Penna helped make Palm Beach County not only a destination for playing golf, but also a center of innovation, manufacturing, and sporting culture with an unmistakably Italian name. He died in 1995 in Palm Beach Gardens.

In 2018, The Palm Beach Post published a profile of him with the headline, “Who was Toney Penna, the last Italian-born golfer to win a PGA tournament?” The occasion was Francesco Molinari’s victory. At 35, Molinari became only the second Italian-born golfer to achieve such a victory after Penna, approximately 70 years later.

Toney Penna clubs are no longer manufactured, but they remain a tangible reminder of an authentic unsung Italian hero – a Neapolitan immigrant who, through craftsmanship, imagination, and entrepreneurial drive, left a lasting mark on the sporting culture of Palm Beach County.



*Originally from Venice, **Ilaria Serra** is a professor of Italian and Comparative Studies at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. She researches cinema, culture, and Italian emigration, and coordinates digital archives preserving Italian American memories. She organizes the Italy in Transit symposium and founded FAU’s summer study abroad program in Venice, connecting students with Italian language, history, and cultural heritage.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Dante Fascell,

Dante Fascell, the Italian American who saved Miami's sea

The rich and complex history of Italian immigration to the United States is often told through the lens of the great cities of the Northeast. Yet some of its most enduring and transformative legacies are found in unexpected places. In South Florida, one figure stands out for his extraordinary impact: Dante Fascell. The son of Italian immigrants, Fascell exemplifies the Italian American "unsung heroes" who profoundly and permanently shaped their communities, leaving behind a civic and institutional legacy that has endured far beyond their own lifetime.

Born in 1917 and raised in Miami, Fascell embraced the values of dedication, sacrifice, and hard work passed down through his family. Those principles guided him throughout an extraordinary public career, leading him to serve his community in the United States Congress for nearly four decades, from 1955 to 1993. His remarkable record demonstrates that Italian American excellence extended far beyond art, entrepreneurship, and craftsmanship, reaching the highest levels of public service and an unwavering commitment to the common good.

Florida (Miami)

Fascell's greatest contribution to the history of Miami and the State of Florida came through one of the most important environmental battles of the twentieth century. During the 1960s, an aggressive real estate and population boom threatened the fragile islands south of Miami. A powerful coalition of developers planned to dredge Biscayne Bay and replace large portions of its natural coastline with massive urban expansion. Had the project gone forward, it would have destroyed priceless coral reefs, mangrove forests, seagrass beds, and the delicate ecological balance of South Florida's coastal waters. Faced with this imminent threat, Fascell chose to stand firmly against powerful commercial interests, leading the political fight with exceptional determination and legislative skill.

His strategic work in Washington and his ability to build bipartisan support ultimately led to presidential approval in 1968, creating what is now known as Biscayne National Park. Without his vision and persistence, one of America's most valuable marine ecosystems might have disappeared beneath concrete and development. Today, more than 95% of the park is underwater, protecting critical habitats for countless marine species while preserving one of Miami's greatest natural treasures.

Dante Fascell was far more than a long-serving congressman – he was a visionary defender of America's natural heritage. His public service demonstrates how strong Italian roots can inspire an extraordinary sense of civic responsibility and stewardship. Today, the crystal-clear waters, vibrant coral reefs, and unspoiled coastline south of Miami stand as lasting evidence of his success. Fascell remains an essential figure in Florida's history and a source of pride for the Italian American community – a public servant whose legacy continues to protect one of the nation's most remarkable coastal landscapes for generations to come.



*Born in Galatina, Puglia, in 1971, **Paolo Mangia** moved to Miami at 24 and founded MP Freight Logistics in 2002. A U.S. citizen, he is president of Casa Italia Miami, Miami coordinator of MAIE, and a board member and Development Committee president of the ITALIC-US Foundation. He promotes Italian culture, business relationships, community initiatives, and connections between Florida and Italy.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Florida (Orlando)

Neil Euliano,

Memory, Culture, Future. Neil Euliano's Legacy in Orlando

Neil Euliano belongs to that group of Italian Americans who left a deep mark on their community without turning their presence into spectacle. His story speaks to Italian roots lived with seriousness, a strong sense of institutions, and a practical commitment to the common good. In his case, Italian identity does not appear as a simple symbolic reference, but as a set of values translated into action: the central importance of education, respect for memory, civic engagement, responsibility toward the community, and the desire to leave behind something that will endure over time.

That is precisely what makes his figure important to Orlando. Neil Euliano did not limit himself to supporting individual initiatives, but helped build permanent structures capable of continuing to have an impact even after his passing. This is where the quality of a public legacy is measured: not in a single gesture, but in the creation of institutions, spaces, and opportunities that remain available to the city.

The clearest sign of his bond with Italian culture is the support he gave to Italian Studies at the University of Central Florida. Through his philanthropic vision, Orlando was able to strengthen a lasting center devoted to the Italian language, civilization, and culture. This means far more than a simple academic contribution. It means offering generations of students, faculty, and citizens a place where Italy is not seen as a stereotype, but as history, thought, creativity, and a living cultural heritage. In an international and constantly growing city like Orlando, this kind of cultural infrastructure carries deep and lasting value.

Alongside his cultural impact, Neil Euliano also left a highly visible civic legacy. His role in supporting the Veterans Commemorative Site helped shape a public space of memory and recognition, permanently woven into the landscape of the university city. Here again, one sees a quality that reflects Italian sensibility in its highest sense: respect for collective memory and for the places that help a community recognize itself. Not only culture, then, but also the building of shared symbols.

His positive impact on Orlando should also be understood in broader terms. Neil Euliano contributed to the development of educational and training opportunities that strengthened the human capital of the metropolitan area. In a city often described primarily through tourism and entertainment, figures like his helped reinforce a different and deeper identity: that of a place willing to invest in education, institutional quality, and civic growth.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes

For this reason, his legacy endures. It does not depend on the fleeting memory of a single era, but on tangible elements that remain: university programs, commemorative spaces, opportunities for students, and cultural prestige for Orlando. This is how his Italian heritage expressed itself, in its most concrete and elevated form: not as self-celebration, but as the ability to give back to the community. Neil Euliano deserves to be remembered because he showed that Italian roots can become a quiet but decisive force in building a better city.



Antonietta (Antonella) Brancaccio-Balzano *founded Brancaccio & Associates. Born and raised in Naples, she earned a law degree magna cum laude and a master's in International and Comparative Law from the University of Miami. She serves on boards of the National Italian American Bar Association and Il Circolo in South Florida, and is the Italian Honorary Consul in Orlando.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes





Florida (Tampa)

Lorenzo Panepinto,

The man who brought Sicily's intellectual tradition to Tampa

Long before Ybor City became a historic district of Tampa filled with visitors and restored buildings, it was a living extension of small Sicilian hill towns. One of the figures who helped shape the spirit of that community was Lorenzo Panepinto.

Panepinto was born in Sicily, in the province of Agrigento, in a region that would later send thousands of emigrants to Tampa. He was not just a political thinker. He was an artist, a writer, and an educator who believed deeply in dignity, knowledge, and the power of ordinary people to improve their lives. In his hometown of Santo Stefano Quisquina, he worked to expand education and opportunity for working families. He encouraged literacy, critical thinking, and community organization at a time when many rural Sicilians had very little access to formal schooling.

His ideas traveled across the Atlantic with the emigrants who left southwestern Sicily for Florida. In Ybor City, where Sicilian cigar workers gathered in factories and social clubs, Panepinto became a symbol of intellectual pride and moral courage. His name was remembered not only for what he stood for in Sicily, but for what he represented in America: the belief that immigrants were not simply laborers, but thinkers, readers, and active participants in civic life.

In the cigar factories of Tampa, lectors read newspapers and literature aloud as workers rolled cigars. Clubs like L'Unione Italiana were filled with debate, theater, music, and conversation. This was not accidental. It reflected a culture that valued ideas. Panepinto embodied that culture. He represented the Sicilian tradition of questioning authority, pursuing education, and insisting that even the poorest communities deserved respect and opportunity.

For the Sicilian families who arrived from towns like Bivona, Alessandria della Rocca, and Cianciana, Panepinto's story felt personal. He came from the same landscape of mountain villages and tight knit communities. He understood their struggles. His life reminded them that their heritage included courage and intellectual strength, not only hardship.

Today, when we walk through Ybor City, it is easy to see the architecture and forget the ideas that once filled those streets. Remembering Lorenzo Panepinto helps restore that missing layer. He represents the cultural backbone of Tampa's Sicilian community, a reminder that immigration was not just a search for work, but a continuation of values rooted in education, solidarity, and community pride.

As we reflect on 250 years of American history, figures like Panepinto remind us that the American story has always been shaped by people who carried their convictions with them and quietly influenced the places they settled.



Lorenzo Agnoloni *founded Studio Legale Notarile Agnoloni, an international law and notary firm. Based in Tampa, Florida, he advises on international taxation, contracts, commercial transactions, arbitration, immigration, and civil, commercial, and administrative litigation. He is an accredited Florida notary public. His legal practice helps individuals and businesses navigate cross-border matters, combining international legal expertise with services in the United States.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Georgia

Alfredo Barili,

Alfredo Barili, the Florentine who taught Atlanta to listen to great music

When Alfredo Barili arrived in Atlanta in 1880, the city was still building its cultural identity in the aftermath of the Civil War. Born in Florence on August 2, 1854, Barili brought something to Georgia that was largely missing at the time – a lasting professional musical presence. The New Georgia Encyclopedia considers him the first professional musician to settle in Atlanta and one of the figures who laid the foundations for the city's future classical music culture.

His Italian heritage was deeply rooted in music. Barili came from a family immersed in opera: his father, Ettore, was a singer, while his aunt Adelina Patti would become one of the most celebrated sopranos of the 19th century. Born in Florence, Alfredo was only 4 months old when his family moved to New York. In 1865, at just 10 years old, he made his public debut as a pianist at Irving Hall. After studying in the United States, he continued his education at the Cologne Conservatory in Germany, where his teachers included composer and conductor Ferdinand Hiller.

But Georgia would become his home.

In Atlanta, Barili did much more than perform. He introduced audiences to European repertoire that helped dramatically broaden the musical horizons of the young city. Beethoven, Schumann, Liszt, Chopin and other great composers became regular features of the programs he performed or organized. In a sense, Barili built a cultural bridge between the European – and Italian – musical tradition and an Atlanta aspiring to become a major American city.

A pivotal moment came in 1883, when he organized the first Atlanta Music Festival. The program included a 300-member chorus accompanied by an orchestra from Philadelphia. Over a single weekend, Atlanta audiences heard major symphonic works by Schubert, Haydn and Beethoven, as well as overtures by Mendelssohn and Giuseppe Verdi. That same year, celebrated conductor Theodore Thomas arrived with his orchestra and, during a performance with Barili's Musical Union, symbolically handed Barili his baton so that he could conduct the ensemble.

Barili understood, however, that concerts alone could not create a true musical culture. New generations had to be educated.

In 1899, he opened his own music school in Atlanta. Students studied piano, voice, organ, music history and theory – as well as the Italian language. It was one of the first schools in the South to offer professional-level musical training. Enrollment probably never exceeded 50 students, but many of them later pursued musical careers.

Barili also left a tangible legacy as a composer. His "Menuet, Op. 20," for example, was published in Atlanta in 1881.

By the time he died in Atlanta in November 1935, Barili was regarded as one of the South's most respected musicians and teachers. He is buried at the city's Westview Cemetery.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes

His legacy can still be felt today. Barili certainly did not single-handedly create Atlanta's later musical tradition, but he helped prepare the ground on which it could flourish. The New Georgia Encyclopedia itself notes that the city's vibrant musical culture would be difficult to imagine without the professional work he began more than a century ago.

That is what makes Alfredo Barili a perfect Unsung Italian Hero of Georgia – a Florentine who did more than bring his talent to America. He brought education, discipline, repertoire, culture and a deeply European and Italian musical sensibility, helping transform Atlanta's musical life for generations to come.



Nicola Vidali *has lived in Atlanta, Georgia, since 1992. Since 1988, he has worked on major marketing and communications projects across three continents for national and international organizations. More recently, he has focused on educational, sports, social, and civic engagement initiatives. He brings entrepreneurial experience, creative vision, and organizational skills to connecting people and ideas across different fields and communities.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Kentucky

Frank P. Giacalone,

Frank P. Giacalone, making Kentucky more inclusive with an Italian heart

A community's growth cannot be measured solely by new businesses, infrastructure, and economic achievements. It can also be seen in its ability to include its most vulnerable members by providing them with education, employment, independence, and the opportunity to participate fully in community life. Frank P. Giacalone contributed to this form of progress in Kentucky, becoming one of the lesser-known leaders in the effort to support people with developmental disabilities.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1926, Frank was the son of Elisa and Joseph Giacalone. His Italian heritage was expressed primarily through family life and the skills his parents passed down to him. From his father, he learned the art of woodcarving and furniture making – crafts rooted in precision, patience, and respect for manual work. From his mother, he inherited a love of Italian cooking, understood as an expression of affection, hospitality, and togetherness. These influences helped shape a personality deeply committed to family, hard work, and responsibility toward others.

In 1953, Giacalone moved to Louisville, where he began a long career as a patent attorney with General Electric. His professional work coincided with an important period in the city's industrial development. As a patent attorney, he helped protect the company's inventions and innovations, fostering an environment in which technical knowledge, creativity, and manufacturing could be transformed into economic value.

Giacalone's most important contribution to Kentucky, however, took shape outside his profession. For many years, he volunteered his time, expertise, and energy to create better opportunities for children and adults with developmental disabilities. At a time when many of these individuals still faced social isolation and exclusion from the workplace, he supported a model based on inclusion, independence, and personal dignity.

His leadership played an important role in the development and operation of the Council on Developmental Disabilities, Custom Quality Service, Zoom Group, and Community Living. Through these organizations, he helped create educational, vocational, employment, recreational, and residential programs. He did more than advocate for broad principles – he helped build services capable of providing people with practical support throughout the different stages of their lives.

The impact of this work reached thousands of people with disabilities and their families throughout the Louisville area. The programs supported by Giacalone provided skills, employment opportunities, social relationships, and housing solutions. At the same time, they helped reduce responsibilities that, for many years, had fallen almost entirely on families.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes

Frank P. Giacalone died in 2014, leaving behind a quiet but enduring legacy. His contribution helped Louisville and Kentucky become more inclusive and socially aware communities. This combination of Italian culture, professional expertise, and volunteer service is precisely what makes him a true unsung Italian hero of Kentucky.



Roberto Giua *was born in the province of Brescia, Lombardy, and has worked for major Italian companies in telecommunications and defense. After relocating to California, he remained active in Rotary clubs in both Italy and the United States. He has authored more than 25 international publications and volumes addressing business organization, the fight against human trafficking, and mental health prevention.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Louisiana

Victor Hugo Schiro,

How an Italian American mayor changed New Orleans forever

Victor Hugo Schiro served as Mayor of New Orleans from 1961 to 1970, leaving a mark on the city that is still visible today. His famous words – "If it's good for New Orleans, I'm for it" – captured both his political philosophy and his deep personal connection to the community. That connection was rooted in his Italian heritage, which shaped his identity, his work ethic, and his commitment to public service in Louisiana.

Schiro was born into a Sicilian family in New Orleans, part of the vibrant Italian American community that had grown in the city since the late nineteenth century. Sicilian immigrants had transformed neighborhoods, built businesses, and contributed to the cultural fabric of Louisiana. Like many Italian American families, the Schiros valued hard work, faith, and civic responsibility. These values guided Victor Schiro throughout his career in law, business, and ultimately politics.

His success symbolized the full integration and leadership of Italian Americans in Southern public life at a time when ethnic minorities were still fighting for recognition.

During his nine years as mayor, Schiro pursued an ambitious vision for modernizing New Orleans. One of his most significant urban initiatives was the widening of Poydras Street. This project reshaped the downtown corridor, opening the door to major commercial development. The revitalized Poydras Street later became home to landmark projects of the 1960s, most notably the Caesars Superdome, originally known as the Louisiana Superdome. The stadium would go on to become an international symbol of the city – hosting Super Bowls, concerts, and historic events – and stands as a testament to Schiro's forward-thinking leadership.

Schiro's administration also secured a transformative achievement in professional sports. During his term, the National Football League granted New Orleans a franchise, leading to the creation of the New Orleans Saints in 1967. Bringing an NFL team to Louisiana elevated the state's national profile and strengthened civic pride. Football quickly became a unifying force across communities, reinforcing Schiro's belief that what benefited New Orleans would ultimately benefit the entire state.

Beyond infrastructure and sports, Schiro's tenure was marked by important social and economic milestones. In 1961, New Orleans public schools were peacefully integrated – a critical moment in the Civil Rights era. While tensions existed across the South, the city avoided the large-scale violence seen elsewhere, reflecting careful local leadership during a delicate transition.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes

In 1962, the Michoud Assembly Facility in eastern New Orleans was contracted to assemble components of the Apollo Moon Rocket, tying Louisiana to the nation's space program. This development strengthened the state's industrial base and connected New Orleans to America's technological future.

When Hurricane Betsy struck in 1965, Schiro demonstrated political skill and determination. He persuaded President Lyndon B. Johnson to visit New Orleans the day after the storm and successfully lobbied for federal financial assistance for victims. His advocacy brought critical relief funds to Louisiana and underscored his effectiveness on the national stage.

Schiro also helped redefine tourism and Mardi Gras in the 1960s. The formation of the "super Krewes" – Bacchus, Tucks, and Endymion – expanded Carnival celebrations, attracting larger crowds and greater national attention. In 1966, Walt Disney honored Schiro by naming him honorary mayor of Disneyland's New Orleans Square, a symbolic recognition of his role in promoting the city's unique culture.

Victor Hugo Schiro's legacy is therefore twofold: he was both a proud son of Italian immigrants and a transformative leader for Louisiana. His administration blended ethnic pride, civic vision, and practical achievement – qualities that continue to shape New Orleans today.



Charles Marsala *is a fourth-generation Sicilian American whose eight great-grandparents emigrated to New Orleans. He leads the American Italian Federation of the Southeast and serves as a divisional vice president of the Order Italian Sons and Daughters of America. He produces documentaries on Louisiana's Sicilian heritage and received a NIAF Russo Brothers Grant for a film about the 1891 lynching.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Giuseppe Macheca,

From triumph to prejudice. The legacy of Giuseppe Macheca in Louisiana

The figure of Giuseppe "Joseph" P. Macheca represents one of the most complex, tragic, and significant chapters in the history of Italian immigration to the United States. Born in New Orleans in 1842 to Sicilian parents, Macheca quickly distinguished himself as one of the first and most influential leaders of the Italian American community in Louisiana, embodying both the entrepreneurial spirit of the pioneers and the enormous difficulties faced by immigrants in the post–Civil War South.

From a young age, Macheca demonstrated extraordinary business acumen and a deep understanding of commercial dynamics. He was a true pioneer in maritime trade, realizing the strategic potential of the city's port as a hub for Latin America. He founded the Macheca Brothers firm and, even more importantly, established the Macheca Line. This was the first steamship line dedicated to the large-scale importation of fruit, particularly citrus and bananas, from Central America and Sicily. Thanks to his fleet, the fruit and vegetable trade in New Orleans grew exponentially.

Louisiana

In the 1880s, Macheca controlled the most profitable and strategic docks in the city, accumulating an estimated wealth of hundreds of thousands of dollars and generating riches that benefited a vast related workforce.

His economic success went hand in hand with his political and social influence. In a historical period when about 3,000 Sicilians a year landed in New Orleans to work on plantations, railroads, and docks, Macheca became an unavoidable point of reference. A father of 6 children and a prominent figure in the local Democratic Party, he repeatedly used his position to defend the interests of the growing and often marginalized Italian community. However, his control of the lucrative port traffic attracted the hostility of powerful rival business executives and dragged him into bitter disputes over the commercial monopoly.

The tragic epilogue of his life took place in one of the darkest moments of American history. On the evening of October 14, 1890, the New Orleans chief of police, David Hennessy, was assassinated. Despite the absence of evidence, anti–Italian sentiment – fueled by a local press that pointed to the immigrant community as responsible for almost 100% of organized crime – exploded uncontrollably. Authorities indiscriminately arrested dozens of Italians. Nineteen men, including Macheca, were indicted on conspiracy charges.

The trial ended in mid–March 1891 with the acquittal or mistrial for the first 9 defendants, including Macheca himself, due to the glaring inconsistency of the evidence. And yet, on the morning of March 14, 1891, an angry mob of over 5,000 people stormed the prison. Eleven men were brutally murdered in what remains, by number of victims, the largest mass lynching in United States history. Macheca lost his life inside the facility, shot to death with rifles.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



His death triggered a profound diplomatic crisis between Italy and the United States. In 1892, to attempt to mend relations and soothe the pain of Italian Americans, President Benjamin Harrison established Columbus Day.

Today, Macheca is remembered as a tireless builder of commercial networks and an illustrious victim of prejudice, whose story testifies to the fundamental and painful Italian contribution to American development.

We the Italians
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Unsung Italian heroes



Nick La Rocca,

Nick La Rocca, the son of a Sicilian shoemaker who recorded the first jazz record in history

On February 26, 1917, five musicians from New Orleans entered a recording studio in New York City and made a record that would change music history. Leading the group was Nick La Rocca, the son of a shoemaker who had emigrated from Sicily. Released by Victor Records, that recording is widely recognized as the first commercial jazz record in history. It marked a musical revolution whose roots also reached back to a small Sicilian town: Salaparuta, in the province of Trapani.

Nick, born in New Orleans in 1889, was the son of Girolamo La Rocca, a shoemaker from Salaparuta, and Vita De Nina. Girolamo had brought more than the tools of his trade to America. He had also brought a cornet, a reminder of his experience playing in Italian brass bands.

The family was part of the great wave of Sicilian immigration to Louisiana. In the late nineteenth century, a steamship reportedly sailed every week between Palermo and New Orleans, carrying immigrants and agricultural products. New Orleans was one of America's leading ports:

Louisiana

by 1850, it was already the second busiest in the United States and the fourth busiest in the world.

Louisiana, purchased from France in 1803, had attracted farmers, merchants, and workers from many different countries. New Orleans became an extraordinary crossroads of musical cultures. African Americans made decisive contributions through blues, ragtime, and improvisation, while Europeans brought other instrumental traditions. Sicilians were particularly familiar with the brass instruments played in their hometown bands. Jazz emerged from this multicultural environment.

Nick grew up surrounded by these sounds. His father would have preferred that he pursue a more secure profession, but the young man learned to play the cornet while initially working as an electrician.

In 1916, he helped form the Original Dixieland Jass Band. The following year, the group recorded Livery Stable Blues and Dixieland Jass Band One-Step. The first piece featured an unforgettable novelty: the instruments imitated the sounds of farm animals, an unusual effect that helped make the record popular.

The success was enormous. The recordings sold hundreds of thousands of copies, with some historical accounts estimating sales of more than one million. The band also conquered London in 1919, transforming music born on the streets of New Orleans into an international phenomenon.

For the city, La Rocca's legacy was particularly significant. His recording success helped establish a lasting association between New Orleans and jazz, bringing worldwide recognition to the city's musical identity. The recordings also influenced musicians who remained in Louisiana: some changed their bands' instrumentation after hearing them. Even Louis Armstrong acknowledged the importance of the band's early recordings.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



La Rocca also helped popularize Tiger Rag, which became one of the signature compositions of traditional jazz. After retiring from performing, he returned to New Orleans, strengthening his connection to the city. He died in 1961, but his contributions are still remembered through historical accounts and public tributes, including a plaque on the New Orleans Jazz Walk of Fame.

Nick La Rocca did not invent jazz, but he helped bring the music born in his hometown to the world. His story brings together the Sicilian brass band tradition, the entrepreneurial spirit of Italian immigrants, and the extraordinary multicultural creativity of America. From a shoemaker's workshop in Salaparuta to the earliest jazz recordings, his legacy continues to illustrate why New Orleans holds such a unique place in the history of music worldwide.

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Natale Piazza,

Natale Piazza and the Italian roots of modern Mississippi

When Natale Piazza arrived in Mississippi in 1853, just over 100 Italians lived in the state. The great wave of Italian immigration to the United States would not begin until several decades later. Piazza was therefore a true pioneer – one of the first Italians to build not only a new life in Mississippi but also an economic, cultural, and civic legacy that would endure for generations.

Born in Faenza, in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, on September 5, 1830, Piazza grew up in an area renowned for its agriculture, craftsmanship, and ceramics. Before leaving for America, he participated in the Italian independence uprisings of 1848–1849. He therefore brought to the United States a deeply rooted Italian identity shaped by the ideals of the Risorgimento, a strong work ethic, and the hope of seeing Italy become a united nation.

Piazza initially settled in Crystal Springs in Copiah County. There, he applied the agricultural knowledge he had acquired in his native country, growing tomatoes, grapes, fruit, and other produce. Piazza and his brothers were among the pioneers of commercial horticulture in the area and contributed to the development of Crystal Springs as an important agricultural center later known as the "Tomatopolis of the World." Their work demonstrated that Mississippi's rural economy could be diversified beyond its dominant traditional crops.

Mississippi

Natale Piazza also worked in the tanning industry during the Civil War. He later shifted his business interests to Vicksburg, where he developed a diverse network of commercial enterprises. He owned a saddlery, commercial properties, and the Vicksburg Opera House. After a fire destroyed the theater, he helped develop the Merchants National Bank Building. The Piazza family also invested in hotels, restaurants, agriculture, and retail businesses, becoming an integral part of Vicksburg's economic development.

Piazza's most distinctly Italian contribution, however, was his approximately 30 years of service as Italy's consul in Mississippi. At a time when Italian immigrants frequently faced discrimination, violence, and prejudice, Piazza became their leading institutional representative. He helped them communicate with local authorities, defended their interests, and represented the Italian government in a state where the Italian community was still small and lacked an established organizational structure.

His role became particularly important after five Italians were lynched in Tallulah, Louisiana, in 1899. Piazza assisted with the investigation requested by the Italian government, gathered information about the killings, and attempted to provide support and comfort to the victims' families. His actions represented a rare form of public advocacy for Italians in the American South during one of the most dangerous periods in their history.

Natale Piazza died in Vicksburg on February 28, 1914. His life connected 2 great national stories – the Italian Risorgimento and the development of modern Mississippi. As a farmer, entrepreneur, cultural leader, and consular representative, he brought Italian talent, perseverance, and dedication to community life into the heart of the American South. Long before Italian Americans became a widely recognized presence, Natale Piazza had already demonstrated how profoundly an Italian immigrant could contribute to Mississippi's growth.

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Unsung Italian heroes



Oreste Bachechi,

Oreste Bachechi, the father of the Albuquerque Italian community

Following the arrival of the transcontinental railroad in 1880, Albuquerque became a hub for a small but vibrant population of Italian immigrants who helped shape the city. Driven by the search for economic opportunities they came from various regions of Italy, the majority from the provinces of Tuscany.

Oreste Bachechi, born on July 29, 1860, close to Bagni di Lucca, arrived in the United Stated in 1885, promoting the Italians' setting in Albuquerque. As a motivated entrepreneur, he expanded a tent saloon near the railroad into a prosperous wholesale liquor and grocery store. More importantly, Bachechi was instrumental in the growth of New Mexico's Italian community, actively sponsoring incoming immigrants to settle in Albuquerque. His efforts offered them a lifeline away from grueling mine work, helping families and friends safely reunite through established chain migration networks.

New Mexico

Bachechi was also one of the prominent charter members of the Colombo Society, a historic Mutual Protection Association founded in 1892 to support the growing Italian community in Albuquerque.

At its peak, Italian-owned businesses lined eight-blocks on Central Avenue, the main throughfare that later became a section of the famed Route 66, establishing a flourishing "Little Italy." These Italian families and their businesses also served as a vital social "bridge" catering and integrating dominant Anglo and Hispano cultures that heavily shapes the city's foundational identity.

In 1925, Bachechi and his wife and Maria Bachechi decided to realize his long-held dream of constructing a large cinematic showplace. With the vision of a grand "picture palace," the building was designed by architect Carl Boller, who traveled through the Navajo Nation and the Pueblos. Named KiMo–"mountain lion" in the Tiwa language– the new theater was built as a tribute to honor the Indigenous peoples who warmly welcomed Bekhechi's family as part of the town.

The iconic and unique Pueblo Deco architectural style gathers authentic Native American motifs with the geometric forms of Art Deco. The interior includes plaster ceiling beams textured to look like pueblo logs and painted with dance and hunt scenes, the setting sun and darkening clouds, and myriad images of Navajo symbols, such as birds and swastikas, the Navajo symbol for life, freedom and happiness. Oreste Bachechi saw the opening program of his Theatre for the first show in 1927 before his passing in 1928.

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Unsung Italian heroes

Among a number of buildings, notable examples of this new architectural model are the Biltmore Hotel in Phoenix (Arizona), the McKinley County Courthouse in Gallup (New Mexico), the Will Rogers Memorial Center at Fort Worth (Texas), and the Cliff Dweller Apartments (New York City).

The Bachechi's family legacy frames the Italian immigrants' experience through the theatre and its current concerts and live performances, the Bachechi Open Space in the North Valley, which celebrates the family's agricultural heritage alongside walking trails, an arboretum, and a memorial rose garden. These historic landmarks and environmental initiatives actively preserve the rich Italian American heritage as a cornerstone that still distinguishes the multicultural history of Albuquerque.



Donatella Davanzo *is an Italian American anthropologist and photo ethnographer studying traditional communities in Italy and New Mexico. She holds a doctorate in American Studies from the University of New Mexico and leads the Albuquerque Italian Language and Culture Group. Publications include Tango a Venezia and International CultoMusica. Her Route 66 Connected project explores the highway's historical and sociocultural significance.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Charles Albert Tron,

Charles Albert Tron, the Piedmontese man who founded hope in North Carolina

The Reverend Charles Albert Tron belongs to that group of Italian unsung heroes who left their mark on the United States through their courage and ability to innovate in an initially hostile environment.

Born on September 9, 1850, in Massello, in Piedmont's Waldensian Valleys, Tron embodied the qualities of the men of character who emerged from the newly unified Italian nation – a spirit of sacrifice, discipline, faith, and solidarity, combined with perseverance and a sense of responsibility for the common good.

In 1893, because of overpopulation and economic hardship in the Waldensian Valleys, the reverend persuaded and personally led an initial group of Waldensian believers to the United States. He purchased land in Burke County, North Carolina, and founded the settlement of Valdese there. The settlers encountered difficult conditions, poor soil, and an often-hostile environment. Yet, thanks in large part to the leadership of Reverend Tron, this group of pioneers managed to put down roots and turn

North Carolina

an uncertain beginning into a permanent settlement, destined to become one of the state's most industrious and distinctive communities.

Valdese grew into a town with a strong identity, a solid civic structure, and a work ethic that would foster significant economic growth in the years that followed. The textile industry, community life, religious cohesion, and cultural continuity that came to define Valdese owed much to that early period of organization and leadership, during which Tron played a decisive role.

Reverend Charles Albert Tron brought to North Carolina the ideals of an emerging Italian identity – the sense of community typical of Italy's small Alpine villages, a serious commitment to work, respect for education, and the ability to preserve a distinct identity while remaining open to the New World. His contribution was therefore crucial both to the immigrants he led and to the state that welcomed them. Through him and his settlers, North Carolina gained a productive, disciplined, culturally vibrant community capable of contributing to local development.

For these reasons, Charles Albert Tron deserves to be remembered as a true Italian unsung hero of North Carolina. His hands built not only a settlement, but also the foundations of a lasting presence. In recognition of his pastoral work, organizational leadership, and social commitment, he was awarded the title of Commander of the Order of the Crown of Italy. His story shows that even little-known individuals can transform the character of a place. Above all, it demonstrates that Italian identity, when expressed through responsibility, vision, and hard work, can become a historic force capable of leaving a tangible and positive legacy for generations.



Daniela Cunico Dal Pra *is a professor of Italian language, culture, and film at UNC Charlotte, where she has taught for more than 20 years and serves as interim director of Film Studies. She organizes cultural events, lectures, and screenings, and has served as executive director of the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce of the Carolinas, promoting cultural exchange and sustainability.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Oklahoma

Rosa Giacomo,

The Italian woman who built Oklahoma's first community safety net

Long before Oklahoma developed public hospitals or organized social services, one Italian immigrant woman quietly created something just as essential: a place where newcomers found shelter, injured miners received care, families stayed connected, and an entire community learned to rely on one another. That woman was Rosa Giacomo, whose boarding house in Krebs and nearby McAlester became one of the hidden foundations of eastern Oklahoma's Italian settlements.

During the great wave of Italian immigration between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thousands of immigrants arrived in what was then Indian Territory to work in the coal mines of Pittsburg County. Unlike many Italian American communities, most of Oklahoma's early Italian immigrants came from northern Italy, joined by families from Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, and Sicily.

Together they established one of the largest Italian communities west of the Mississippi River, centered around Krebs and McAlester.

While historians often celebrate the miners who fueled Oklahoma's industrial growth, women like Rosa Giacomo made those mining camps livable. Her boarding house was far more than a place to rent a room. It became the community's unofficial welcome center, helping newly arrived immigrants find jobs, reconnect with relatives, translate letters, and adapt to life in America.

Its most important role, however, was providing social services before government institutions existed. Coal mining ranked among America's most dangerous occupations, and injured miners often had nowhere to recover except boarding houses managed by experienced Italian women. Rosa prepared meals, cared for the sick, monitored injuries, and offered a safe environment for workers until they regained their strength. Women gave birth there, elderly immigrants found support, and vulnerable families always knew there was someone ready to help.

Her home also functioned as an informal postal and communication center. Before widespread telephone service, letters arriving from Italy frequently passed through trusted boarding-house keepers. Rosa helped distribute mail, read correspondence for those unable to do so, write replies, and share news throughout the growing Italian community. In many respects, her boarding house became one of eastern Oklahoma's earliest social welfare centers, combining the roles of hospital, post office, employment agency, and community center under one roof.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



This achievement reflected values deeply rooted in Italian culture. Traditions of hospitality, mutual aid, and strong family networks had long characterized Italian communities, and Rosa successfully transplanted those customs to the Oklahoma frontier. Rather than preserving her heritage only within her household, she used it to solve practical challenges facing hundreds of immigrant families.

The stability created by women like Rosa helped Italians establish successful businesses throughout the region. As the mining economy expanded, Italian families opened grocery stores, restaurants, banks, and other enterprises that permanently shaped the economy and identity of Krebs and McAlester.

Today Krebs proudly celebrates its nickname as "Oklahoma's Little Italy," with its Italian restaurants, annual festivals, and enduring traditions attracting visitors from across the state. That remarkable legacy rests not only on miners and entrepreneurs but also on women like Rosa Giacomo, whose compassion and leadership created the social infrastructure that allowed immigrant communities to flourish.

Although her name rarely appears in history books, Rosa Giacomo left a lasting mark on Oklahoma. By transforming a simple boarding house into the community's first safety net, she demonstrated that the growth of a state depends not only on industry and politics but also on ordinary people willing to care for others.

We the Italians
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Unsung Italian heroes



South Carolina

Giovanni Sottile,

From Sicily to South Carolina in defense of Italian immigrants

Giovanni Sottile's story is one of the lesser-known chapters of the Italian experience in the American South. A Sicilian immigrant who built a successful life in Charleston, he could have devoted himself entirely to business and personal prosperity. Instead, he used his position, wealth, and influence to defend other Italian immigrants who had arrived in South Carolina with far fewer opportunities and protections.

Sottile came to the United States from Sicily in 1889. After arriving in New York, he traveled almost immediately to South Carolina, where he found work as an accountant for a phosphate company. That experience exposed him to the harsh conditions faced by immigrant laborers and would profoundly influence the direction of his life.

By the mid-1890s, Sottile had established himself in Charleston as a businessman.

He became involved in commerce and real estate and achieved considerable financial success. But his growing position in South Carolina society also gave him the ability to become a voice for a small Italian community that often lacked political influence, economic power, and even the English-language skills necessary to defend itself.

In 1899, Sottile was appointed Italian consular agent. His responsibilities extended beyond Charleston and included protecting and assisting Italians in both South Carolina and North Carolina.

That role soon became much more than ceremonial.

At the turn of the 20th century, some Italian immigrants in the South were being recruited with promises of jobs and good wages, only to find themselves trapped in systems of debt and forced labor. One particularly disturbing case involved Italian workers at the Pon Pon phosphate mine on the Edisto River outside Charleston. Workers reported being kept under armed guard, forced to labor even when sick, threatened with violence, and deliberately kept in debt.

Sottile intervened.

He appealed directly to South Carolina Governor Miles McSweeney, helped bring attention to the workers' treatment, participated in investigations, and became involved in efforts to prosecute exploitation. During his years as consular agent, he successfully helped bring two peonage cases involving Italian immigrants before the courts.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes

His contribution, however, went beyond fighting abuse. Sottile wanted Italians to have a genuine opportunity to build successful lives in South Carolina. He promoted business ties between Italy and the United States and sought better employment opportunities for immigrants. He even established a model farm near Ladson, hoping to demonstrate how Italian agricultural knowledge and labor could contribute to the state's development.

Sottile also helped give Charleston's Italian community greater visibility and standing. His home became the Italian consular headquarters and a meeting place for Italian dignitaries and South Carolina political figures. In 1909, the Kingdom of Italy made him a Knight of the Order of the Crown of Italy in recognition of his service.

He died unexpectedly in Charleston in 1913, only 46 years old.

More than a century later, his presence remains visible. His Charleston residence is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its association with his work and with the history of Italian immigration in South Carolina.

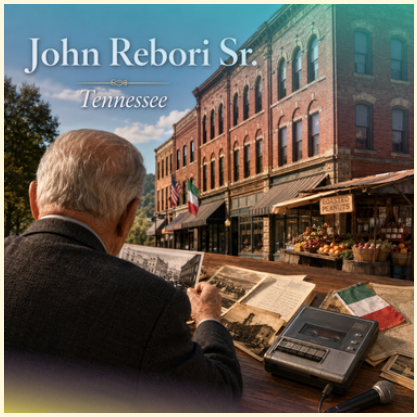
Giovanni Sottile succeeded in America, but his greatest achievement was what he chose to do with that success. In a place where Italian immigrants were few and sometimes vulnerable, this Sicilian immigrant used his influence to defend workers, fight exploitation, create opportunities, and strengthen the connection between his native Italy and his adopted South Carolina.



***John DeCecco**, a former instructor with the Laborers' International Union of North America in New England, retired to South Carolina. Since 2012, he has led the Italian American Club of Hilton Head Island, increasing membership, event attendance, and fundraising. In 2019, he helped coordinate a sister-city agreement between Hilton Head Island and Verona, strengthening ties between South Carolina and Italy.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Tennessee

John Rebori Sr.,

John Rebori Sr. and the forgotten story of Knoxville's first Italian Americans

When thinking about the history of Italian Americans in Tennessee, one family seems to stand out for preserving the story of Knoxville's earliest Italian immigrants - the Rebori family. At the head of this family stands John Nicholas Rebori Sr. (1912 – 2003) who is remembered for many reasons including: his distinguished military service, career with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and international humanitarian work. However, in my opinion, his most enduring contribution may be one that received far less public attention: preserving the history of Knoxville's first Italian American community. His recollections, which were recorded around 1990, became one of the foundational primary sources for historians studying Italian immigration in East Tennessee.

Unlike cities such as New York or Chicago, Knoxville has never had a large "Little Italy". In fact, to this day, the Italian community in East Tennessee remains relatively small. Historical records indicate that by 1900 only about a dozen Italian-born residents lived in the city, and only a handful of Italian families called East Tennessee home during the early twentieth century. Because the community was so small, much of its history was preserved not in official archives but through family memories and oral tradition.

Around 1990, John Rebori Sr., a third-generation Italian American and grandson of Fiorenzo Ernesto Rebori, presented an extensive oral history of Knoxville's Italian pioneers. Modern historians have described this interview as the most reliable surviving source on the city's earliest Italian community because so few written records exist. Through his recollections, Rebori documented the lives of pioneering families such as the Reboris, Riccardis, and Brichettos - families whose stories might otherwise have been forgotten.

John's family history began with his grandfather Fiorenzo Rebori, who unexpectedly settled in Knoxville after a snowstorm interrupted his journey to Memphis. It was this fateful snowstorm which changed Fiorenzo's destination in which he opted to stay in Knoxville and start a small sidewalk stand selling roasted peanuts, fruit, and confections. Fiorenzo became known locally as the "Peanut King" as he began to plant deep roots in East Tennessee.

In 1915, Fiorenzo purchased the former Lawson McGhee Library building on Gay Street, which sat next to his stand. This building became known as the Rebori Building! The family owned the landmark for more than eight decades, making it one of downtown Knoxville's longest-held family-owned commercial properties. Today, the Rebori Building is highlighted on the walking tour maps of downtown Knoxville and still stands at 128 South Gay Street as a lasting reminder of the entrepreneurial spirit of Knoxville's early Italian immigrants.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes

John Rebori Sr.'s contribution extended far beyond preserving his own family's history. His oral testimony documented how Italian immigrants established fruit markets, bakeries, ice cream businesses, theaters, and construction companies all which helped to shape downtown Knoxville. He also explained how these families became fully integrated into East Tennessee while retaining pride in their Italian heritage.

The insight shared by John Rebori Sr. is invaluable to the Italian American community in East Tennessee. Without his willingness to share the oral history, photographs, and memories, scholars would know very little about the Italians who first settled in and helped to build Knoxville.

More than a century after Fiorenzo Rebori first welcomed customers to his sidewalk fruit stand, the Rebori Building still stands on Gay Street, serving as a lasting reminder that one Italian American family's perseverance became part of Knoxville's architectural and cultural heritage.



Stephen Alfieri *is Italian American and a dual citizen of Italy and the United States. Dedicated to preserving and celebrating his heritage, he supports initiatives strengthening cultural pride, dialogue, and connections with Italian roots. He believes in honoring traditions while embracing contemporary ideas, encouraging future generations to appreciate their identity and keep Italian American culture thriving in America and beyond.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Texas (Dallas)

Pompeo Coppini,

The Italian artist who shaped Texas

Enrico “Henry” Coppini was an Italian American sculptor who left a deep mark on the cultural landscape of Texas and, indirectly, also on the Dallas area. Born in Tuscany in 1870, he arrived in Texas at the beginning of the twentieth century and chose the state as his new home, bringing with him the Italian artistic tradition and applying it to public monuments that still tell the story of Texas today.

Coppini created numerous monumental works celebrating key episodes in Texas identity. Among the most important are the Littlefield Fountain at the University of Texas at Austin and the large cenotaph dedicated to the fallen of the Alamo in San Antonio. At a time when Texas was seeking to define its modern image, his sculptures offered strong, recognizable symbols capable of uniting historical memory with a European artistic language.

Through bronze and stone, Coppini transformed squares and university campuses into places of civic education, inviting citizens to reflect on the sacrifices and values underlying the birth of the State.

into places of civic education, inviting citizens to reflect on the sacrifices and values underlying the birth of the State.

Coppini’s contribution is also significant for the Dallas area. His works and his reputation paved the way for an appreciation of monumental art throughout Texas, influencing patrons, architects, and artists working in major cities, including Dallas.

At Fair Park in Dallas, for example, there is a statue of Prospero Bernardi, an Italian who fought in the Battle of San Jacinto, serving as evidence of how the visual narrative built by Italian-Texan artists also found a place in the northern Texas metropolis.

Coppini’s activity fits into the broader context of Italian immigration to Texas, made up of farmers, artisans, entrepreneurs, and professionals who contributed to the state’s economic and cultural growth. In a territory often perceived as “new” and lacking monumental memory, his sculptures gave physical form to historical narratives, offering Texans - old and new alike - a tangible point of reference through which to recognize themselves as a community.

For those who live and work in the Dallas area today, Coppini’s figure is an example of how Italian talent can integrate into the local fabric and, through one’s craft, leave a lasting legacy. His story shows that the meeting of Italian roots and Texan land can generate works capable of speaking to different generations, building bridges between cultures and contributing to the quality of urban life.



Fabiana Pagani *was born and raised in Italy and lives in the Dallas–Fort Worth area of Texas. A licensed real estate agent, she helps families buy, sell, and relocate, particularly newcomers to the United States. She founded the ITALIANI A DALLAS Facebook community and serves on the Italian Club of Dallas board, supporting local businesses, cultural events, and Italian heritage.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA *from Italy*

Unsung Italian heroes



Texas (Houston)

Enrico Filiberto Cerracchio,

Sculpting a new homeland. The story of Enrico Filiberto Cerracchio in Houston

Millions of people have passed by the monumental figure of Sam Houston on horseback at the entrance to Hermann Park. It is one of the city's most recognizable images, and Houston itself considers it one of its most iconic works of public art. Yet many people probably do not know that this symbol of Texas was created by an Italian artist – Enrico Filiberto Cerracchio.

Cerracchio was born on March 14, 1880, in Castelvetere in Val Fortore, today in the province of Benevento. His artistic education began in Italy, where he studied academic subjects and sculpture at the Istituto di Avellino. After graduating in 1898, he continued his training under sculptor Raffaele Belliazzi. In 1900, he crossed the Atlantic and chose Houston as his new home. Five years later, he became an American citizen.

He brought with him something Italy had developed over centuries of public art – the ability to transform marble and bronze into collective memory. For approximately 40 years, Cerracchio created monuments and portraits, developing a classical, monumental style perfectly suited to a young Texas eager to commemorate the people who had shaped its history.

After World War I, he created two works dedicated to the American soldier. One was presented to Italian General Armando Diaz and accepted by the Italian government; the other was presented to General John J. Pershing by the city of Houston. These works already reflected a defining theme of Cerracchio's life – using his Italian artistic training to serve American memory while creating a symbolic bridge between the two countries.

His masterpiece came in the 1920s. Cerracchio was selected to create a monument to Sam Houston after a competition among several proposals. The enormous bronze equestrian statue, mounted above a granite arch, was dedicated on August 16, 1925, at the entrance to Hermann Park. Sam Houston is depicted riding his horse Saracen and pointing toward San Jacinto, the site of the decisive battle for Texas independence. The sculpture itself measures approximately 20 feet – more than 6 meters – in both height and width.

An Italian had transformed one of the founding figures of Texas into one of Houston's enduring images.

But Cerracchio's work went far beyond that monument. He created the marble bust of Miriam A. Ferguson, the first woman to serve as governor of Texas, now housed in the Texas State Capitol, as well as a bronze monument to General John A. Wharton. His subjects ranged widely, from Vice President John Nance Garner and Houston development leader Jesse H. Jones to Albert Einstein and Rudolph Valentino.

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His relationship with Houston lasted for decades. The city is also home to another important Cerracchio work – his 1943 statue of George H. Hermann, the philanthropist whose gift of land made Hermann Park possible.

Cerracchio died in New York on March 20, 1956, but in Houston his signature remains part of the urban landscape. A century after its dedication, his Sam Houston monument still welcomes generations of visitors entering Hermann Park.

It is difficult to imagine a more tangible Italian American legacy. Cerracchio arrived from southern Italy carrying an artistic education deeply rooted in the Italian tradition and used that talent to tell the stories of the heroes, history and identity of his adopted home.

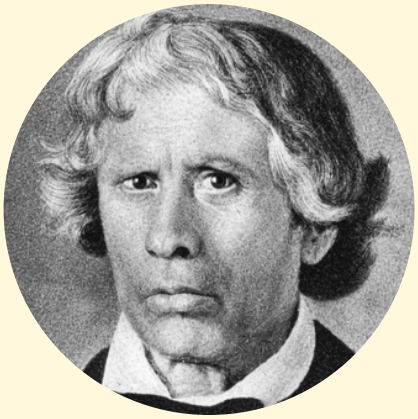
Houston gave Cerracchio a new homeland. In return, he gave Houston one of its most enduring symbols – cast in bronze by the hands of an Italian.



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Unsung Italian heroes



Texas (San Antonio)

Giuseppe Cassini,

From Sanremo to San Antonio, Giuseppe Cassini's decisive role in the Texas revolution

The story of Texas independence is dominated by legendary heroes and iconic battles, yet hidden within that epic struggle is the remarkable contribution of a pioneer from the Italian Riviera. Giuseppe Cassini, a businessman born in Sanremo, embodied the ingenuity, courage, and strategic vision that helped make the Republic of Texas possible. His life offers compelling evidence that the Italian influence on North America reached pivotal historical milestones long before the great waves of immigration of the late nineteenth century.

Born on the Ligurian coast, Cassini inherited his homeland's deep maritime tradition and entrepreneurial spirit. Driven by adventure, he crossed the Atlantic and eventually reached the rugged frontier of the American Southwest, arriving in the bustling settlement of San Antonio around 1820. At the time, Texas was a remote frontier province under Mexican rule. Displaying remarkable social intelligence and adaptability, Cassini chose to Hispanicize his name to José Cassiano. Rather than abandoning his Italian identity, this was a practical and strategic decision that allowed him to integrate fully into the region's economic and social life, overcoming the cultural barriers of the era.

Within a few years, his business acumen made him one of the wealthiest and most respected merchants in the region. His trading caravans crossed vast and dangerous territories, creating an extensive commercial network that linked San Antonio with central Mexico and Louisiana. Cassini amassed considerable wealth and political influence, but his greatest historical contribution emerged during Texas' darkest and most uncertain hour.

When the Texas Revolution erupted between 1835 and 1836, Cassini faced a defining choice. He could have remained neutral, protecting his wealth, his trade routes, and his personal safety while waiting for the conflict to end. Instead, he openly and wholeheartedly supported the Texan cause, risking both his commercial empire and his own life. His financial and logistical assistance proved essential to the survival of the Texan army. Cassini opened his warehouses and devoted his resources to the revolutionary effort, supplying food, weapons, equipment, and other critical materials to troops that often lacked even the most basic necessities.

His most valuable contribution, however, was also his most discreet. Drawing upon his extensive commercial network, Cassini became a vital source of intelligence. He gathered and transmitted crucial information to Texan leaders about Mexican troop movements, supply lines, and military plans. This improvised yet highly effective intelligence network provided the Texan forces with a significant tactical advantage during a conflict in which they were frequently outnumbered and outmatched.

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Giuseppe Cassini deserves recognition as one of the unsung heroes of Texas independence. Without his quiet but indispensable support, the outcome of the revolution might have been very different. His story stands as a proud and essential chapter in the history of the Italian contribution to the United States, demonstrating that the courage, resourcefulness, and determination of a son of Sanremo left a lasting mark on the heart of the Lone Star State.

We the Italians
Editorial Staff

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Unsung Italian heroes

New Mexico



Blandina Segale,

The fearless Italian sister of New Mexico

Long before Albuquerque became New Mexico's largest city, an Italian immigrant was helping build the institutions that would allow its communities to grow. Sister Blandina Segale left behind something far more substantial than the colorful stories that later earned her the nickname "the fastest nun in the West." She helped create schools, hospitals and social services, while defending people who had little power in the rough society of territorial New Mexico.

She was born Maria Rosa Segale in Cicagna, Liguria, on January 23, 1850. When she was four, her family emigrated to Cincinnati, where she grew up in an Italian immigrant household. At 16 she entered the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati and took the name Blandina. In 1872 she was sent west, first to Trinidad, Colorado. Five years later she reached Santa Fe, beginning the New Mexico chapter that would define her legacy.

Blandina arrived in a territory marked by poverty, violence and enormous distances, where Hispanic and Native American communities were often vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation. She taught children, cared for the sick, visited prisoners and challenged injustices regardless of whom they affected. Her surviving writings describe a woman unwilling to accept that poverty, ethnicity or a criminal past stripped someone of human dignity. She advocated for Hispanic families and Native Americans, assisted mistreated railroad workers and confronted authorities when she believed they were acting unjustly.

Her impact was also physical and measurable. Blandina helped establish educational and charitable institutions and participated in the development of hospitals in both Santa Fe and Albuquerque. After years of other work, she returned to Albuquerque in 1900 specifically to help establish St. Joseph Hospital. The mission associated with that institution survives today through CommonSpirit St. Joseph's Children, serving New Mexico families more than a century later.

Her encounters with Billy the Kid have made her famous, but they can obscure what truly made Blandina important to New Mexico. She was not merely a fearless nun who crossed paths with an outlaw. She was an institution builder. Where communities lacked schools, medical care or protection for their most vulnerable members, she worked to create them.

And she did this as an Italian-born woman on the American frontier.

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Her Italian origins were not a footnote. Blandina understood migration personally. She had crossed the Atlantic as a child and grown up in an immigrant family before traveling into a region where cultures, languages and peoples met. Her instinct was not to demand that everyone become alike, but to serve Native Americans, Hispanics, Anglos and immigrants alike. That made the girl from a small Ligurian town an unusually powerful figure in the multicultural history of New Mexico.

Albuquerque still remembers her. A convent bearing her name survives in Old Albuquerque, and in 2019 St. Pius X High School dedicated a memorial garden to her. Most significantly, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe opened her cause for beatification and canonization in 2014 – the first such cause opened in the 400-year history of the Catholic Church in New Mexico.

Blandina Segale died in 1941, but what she helped build did not disappear. Her legacy remains embedded in Albuquerque's history of health care, education and service to children and families.

An Italian immigrant arrived in New Mexico when much of it was still frontier. Instead of simply adapting to that world, she helped make it better.

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