



Italian Historical Society of America

Newsletter

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BY JANICE THERESE MANCUSO

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Tutto Italiano

Benvenuto a *Tutto Italiano*

During the third century, a priest in Rome ministered Christianity, married Christian couples, and assisted Christians being persecuted by Claudius II, the emperor of Rome. Around the same time, a bishop in Terni (region of Umbria) founded the Christian community as Rome was fortifying that recently conquered city. Both were named [San Valentino](#), but some claim they were the same person.

The history of St. Valentine's Day is obscured by several legends. Some connect the day to the [Feast of Lupercalia](#), a pagan festival that dates back to ancient Rome; and when Christianity replaced the pagan beliefs in Rome, Christian holidays replaced the pagan festivals. Others cite a belief, starting in the fourteenth century in England and France, that birds began to choose their mates on February 14th; and the works of English and French writers – including Chaucer and Shakespeare – further romanticized the day.

The priest in Rome was arrested, would not renounce his faith, and was executed. The bishop in Terni was invited to Rome to heal a child, crossed paths with Claudius II, refused to renounce his faith, and was executed. Both were beheaded on February 14th, but some records show different years.

It's noted that "Valentine cultivated a beautiful garden, and gave his roses to young members of his congregation;" and when he was imprisoned, he restored sight to the blind daughter of his jailor. Before his execution, he sent her a note, signed "from your Valentine."

[Valentine of Rome](#)

[St. Valentine of Terni](#)

[Key to Umbria: Terni \(St. Valentine\)](#)

[Terni and its Patron Saint](#)

[The Dark Origins of Valentine's Day](#) (NPR, February 13, 2011)

[The History of St Valentine's Day](#) (YouTube Video)

The "Italian Lover"

In 1913, a young immigrant from Italy arrived in New York City, worked his way through a series of assorted jobs – from waiter to gardener to dancer (learning the tango) – and eventually befriended an unhappily married heiress. When she filed for divorce, he testified on her behalf in court, gaining the wrath of her ex-husband who later used his political connections to have the young immigrant arrested. With weak evidence, the young immigrant was released after spending a few days in jail; but his time in confinement caused him difficulty in finding work.

The hostilities between the heiress and her ex-husband continued, and in a custody dispute, she shot and killed him. The high society scandal took precedence in the

news, and although the young immigrant was no longer involved with the heiress, fearful of the negative publicity, he decided it was best to leave New York.

He traveled with a theatrical troupe to Utah, and then headed to California, where he started taking bit parts in films, gained a following with his dancing, and met influential people in the film industry. He also selected his stage name, Rudolph Valentino. (He was born Rodolfo Alfonso Raffaello Pierre Filibert Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antonguella in Castellaneta, region of Puglia.)

Valentino's 1921 film, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, made him a megastar; and later that same year, his film *The Sheik* solidified his celebrity status and elevated his role as a sex symbol. Valentino died in 1925 from illnesses causing peritonitis. (Another Italian great, Enrico Caruso, died from the same disease.) Most sources note that over 100,000 people attended his funeral, paying their respects to "The Latin Lover" – an Italian who became an American heartthrob.

[Falcon Lair: Rudolph Valentino Online](#)

[Rudolph Valentino](#) (TCM Biography)

[Rudolph Valentino – The 'Latin Lover' who Became America's First Male Sex Symbol](#) (The Vantage News, November 27, 2018)

[Rudolph Valentino](#) (Tango Thread)

[Rudolph Valentino, Tango Dancing](#) (YouTube Video – Tango Scene from *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*)

[The Life, Death, Afterlife, and Curse of Rudolph Valentino](#) (13th Floor, July 11, 2016)

[Rudolph Valentino Funeral](#) (YouTube Video)

[Museo Rodolfo Valentino](#) (Museum Rudolph Valentino) [Click on American flag for English]

From the Italian American Press

The Italian American Press offers a great selection of books – children's, memoirs, art, history, food, the supernatural, the natural beauty of Italy, and more – for every interest. Help preserve Italian American heritage and history. Support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian American and Italian culture and let them know you found their books on the Italian American Press.

Featured Author

Joe C. Polacco, born in the Bensonhurst neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, captures all aspects of Italian American life in [Vina, A Brooklyn Memoir](#) – a tribute to his mother and his first full-length book. Joe was inspired to write by "a connection to the Italian-American culture of 1950s Brooklyn," and by the resilience and unselfishness of his mother who was "dealing with a recurrent cancer."

Through stories told by family and friends, Joe offers a look into the life of a woman who embodied the American dream, blending it with the traditions of her Italian ancestry; but as Joe notes, "The book is not just an ode to Mom, but to strong women in general."

Read the Book Review of [Vina, A Brooklyn Memoir on La Gazzetta Italiana](#).

Featured Books for February are [All About Love](#).

Italian American Heritage Project

A recent article in the Washington Post posed the question about the meaning of

words based on when they were written. To clarify – many words today have entirely different meanings than 20 or even 10 years ago. So, how does that affect the twenty-first century interpretations of documents written 500 years ago? It's something to ponder as more phrases in the translated letters are analyzed. Start here by reading the first in a series of articles about [“The Columbus Letters” posted on La Gazzetta Italiana](#).

Last month Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C, President of the University of Notre Dame, decided to cover the murals of Christopher Columbus painted (in 1892-1894) on the walls of the entrance to the Main Building by Luigi Gregori (1819-1896). He wrote, “In recent years I have heard from students, alumni, faculty, staff, representatives of the Native American community, and others on this complex topic.” Explaining, “The murals present us with several narratives not easily reconciled, and the tensions among them are especially perplexing for us because of Notre Dame’s distinctive history and Catholic mission.”

He continued “For the native peoples of this ‘new’ land, however, Columbus’s arrival was nothing short of a catastrophe. Whatever else Columbus’s arrival brought, for these peoples it led to exploitation, expropriation of land, repression of vibrant cultures, enslavement, and new diseases causing epidemics that killed millions.”

In keeping with Rev. Jenkins philosophy, should Roman and Egyptian art be covered because of the way people were depicted? Should we look at the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and other “religious’ catastrophes and start covering up churches and other institutions?

Once again, Columbus and fifteenth century history are on the defense; but a more positive backlash is emerging. The National Italian American Foundation sent a letter ([here](#)) to Rev. Jenkins, and Italian Americans and others are voicing strong opinions about this latest censure.

Rev. Jenkins writes, “The murals’ depiction of Columbus as beneficent explorer and friend of the native peoples hides from view the darker side of this story, a side we must acknowledge.” Another question for the Reverend, “If you want to acknowledge this darker side, why are you hiding the paintings?

[Artists in Residence: Working Drawings by Luigi Gregori \[1819-1896\]](#) (PDF The Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame)

[Letter \[from Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.\] To Campus Regarding Columbus Murals](#) (January 20, 2019)

[Notre Dame Is Covering up Columbus Murals Amid Criticism Over How They Depict Native Americans](#) (TIME, January 22, 2019)

[Observers to Notre Dame: Act Wisely with Columbus Murals](#) (Diverse Issues in Higher Education, February 1, 2019)

In another hit to Italian Americans, MTV now brings to the world, “Made in Staten Island,” a so-called reality show that depicts the lives of young adults on Staten Island and the trials and tribulations they face in circumventing the lives of mobsters. This show follows “Jersey Shore” and “Mob Wives” in portraying Italian Americans through negative stereotypes. (Would a show like this be made with any other ethnic group?) A “Mob Wives” star is an executive producer; she is also the daughter of Salvatore Gravano, one of John Gotti’s hit men. Her daughter stars in the show.

The good news is that the show may have been cancelled. A petition, [Cancel MTV's Made in Staten Island or Remove the Borough's Name from the Title](#), now has more than 9,300 signatures. What is sad, though, is there seems to be little objection to the negative Italian American image, and more concern about the image of Staten Island.

[Made in Staten Island,' an MTV Reality Show, Makes the Borough Look Bad, Critics Say](#) (The New York Times, January 13, 2019)

[MTV's controversial 'Made in Staten Island' vanishes from regular time slot, stirring cancellation speculation](#) (New York Daily News, February 5, 2019)

Italian American News

In 1992, Paul Sciria edited the first edition of [La Gazzetta Italiana](#), a newspaper published in Cleveland, Ohio that focuses on “Italian heritage, traditions and culture,” as well as “upcoming social events and local achievements.” Since then, the newspaper has more than doubled in size and attracts a worldwide audience.

In a recent interview, Copy Editor Jennifer Spitalieri provided some background information and interesting facts about the newspaper. She notes, “The publication is family-owned. In late 1999, PAS Publishing purchased the publication from the late Paul Sciria. Paul continued his role as Editor of La Gazzetta and his dedication to the paper from the beginning created the long-standing relationships we still maintain with subscribers and advertisers alike. In 2014, our current publisher, Angie Spitalieri, came on board to help take the paper to the next level. She and Paul worked closely together to develop our current club pages and the local section of the paper. They also took the paper digital and today we are still continuing to develop more original content, increase our readership footprint and invest more time in our online publication.”

Last year *La Gazzetta Italiana* moved its publishing operation to Italy. Jennifer explains “In 2018, PAS Publishing formed a partnership with PIU Communication, an Italian-American advertising agency located in Italy and the U.S. PIU specializes in integrating traditional and digital methods of work for a more powerful and effective cross-over communication. While we are partial to our newspaper print, we understand the need for a digital platform to reach more Italian-Americans and to expand our digital footprint to be able to offer our content to all Italian-Americans. PIU Communication is doing just that for us.”

The website offers a good mix between what's accessible to non-subscribers and the availability for subscribers to download the entire printed paper, with archives going back to 2012. Those who subscribe to the newspaper are treated to some exquisite photographs of Italy. Jennifer comments, “Many of the photographs you see in *La Gazzetta Italiana* are taken by our contributors. Marcello Mellino offers a fantastic photo exhibit each month which can be found in print and online. He has taken the photos himself during his many trips to Italy. A number of our other writers also offer their personal photography to accompany their articles. As every publication does, when a photo is needed, our PIU partners are pros at finding the perfect stock photo. But, if any photographers out there are willing to contribute their work, we are happy to print it!”

In addition to its online presence and its international readers – mainly in Italy, England, Scandinavia, and Austria – more than 3,000 printed newspapers each month are distributed locally and nationwide. (Readership is higher as more than one person usually reads a newspaper.)

From the website, “La Gazzetta Italiana focuses on the contributions of Italian Americans typically overlooked by major newspapers and magazines while providing a forum through which our proud culture can flourish from generation to generation.”

[La Gazzetta Italiana](#)

News about Italy

[France Recalls Ambassador to Italy, Revealing Strains at Europe's Core](#) (The New York Times, February 7, 2019)

