



Italian Historical Society of America

Newsletter

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Tutto Italiano **Benvenuto a *Tutto Italiano***

Beneath [Via Appia Antica](#) (the Appian Way), under land extending acres in all directions, a labyrinth of underground tunnels, rows, and shelves became the final resting place for Roman citizens. The Appian Way – construction beginning in 312 BC – was the earliest segment of the road built by the Romans, extending 125 miles south east to Capua, and later continuing south east to end at Brindisi, on the Adriatic Sea.

Burials were not allowed within Rome's city limits, and today remnants of mausoleums still dot the Appian Way, brandishing the names of the families that could afford their costs. Families who owned property and lived outside of the city could bury their relatives on their property, and a public cemetery – a necropolis – was available to people of all beliefs. For those who believed in pagan rituals, a funeral pyre would reduce a body to ashes.

By the second century CE a new religion was sweeping through Rome and [Christians](#) were conforming to a differing set of spiritual principals in every day life and in their funeral traditions. Seeking more land to bury the deceased and for protection in preserving funeral rituals, some time between the second and third century CE, Christians [began digging beneath existing burial sites](#). The new burial sites were located near quarries, where the soft volcanic tuff was easy to shovel. Some were highly decorated with frescos, others remained dark and dreary.

This practice was used by Jewish and Pagan communities, but not to the extent of the Christians' Roman Catacombs. It is noted that Jewish and Pagans bodies were interred with the Christians, most likely because chambers were reused, sometimes digging the underground tunnels opened into another burial chamber, or a distant family member had differing religious views.

As Christianity grew, the differences in their belief in one God – rather than numerous Roman Gods – and that they did not worship the emperor, were causing social and political concerns. [Persecution was common](#), with some emperors and regions of the Roman Empire more punishing than others. In 303, [Emperor Diocletian issued a proclamation](#) – the most punishing – against Christians: churches and sacred scriptures were destroyed, worship meetings banned, property confiscated, and worshipers and clergy were arrested and tortured, becoming martyrs.

In 313, the [Edict of Milan](#) was signed by Emperor Constantine, who ruled the West, and Emperor Licinius, ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire, to accept Christianity and end the religious persecutions. Although land was being bought and churches were being built, the catacombs continued to expand. By the end of the fifth century, the Roman Empire was in decline; but churches were amassing power and wealth. Policies on burying above ground and the removal of the martyrs' relics caused a decline in the use of the catacombs. Entrances were covered by new growth and the catacombs were largely forgotten ... until 1578, when an underground burial site was accidentally discovered.

In 1593, [Antonio Bosio](#) – a young scholar of Christian antiquities – started exploring areas around Rome, searching for other underground sites. Bosio studied the existing documents available in churches and other sources, and completed a manuscript based on his research. His book, *Roma Sotterranea*, was published in 1632, three years after his death.

Catacombs are still being discovered, and several catacombs in Rome are open to the public.

[Via Appia Antica](#) (In Italian)

[Exploring the Roman Catacombs: A Journey into Ancient Burial Practices](#)

[Murals in the Catacomb of Via Latina, Rome \(4th Century\)](#)

[The Catacombs of St. Callixtus](#)

[Catacombs of Domitilla](#) (Choose language on right.)

[The Catacombs of Priscilla](#)

[Catacombe San Sebastiano](#)

Italian American Press

The Italian American Press offers a great selection of books – culture, history, memoirs, art, family, 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

New on the Italian American Press

Author [John Benny Dolgetta](#) blends his Italian upbringing with American culture, offering three books spanning through different stages of life.

Americano follows the life of 11-year old Johnny who moves from the Bronx to Sarno, in the region of Naples, about 10 miles northwest of Pompeii. In Italy, Johnny learns about the culture of his parents' homeland, the importance of relationships, and becomes proficient in speaking Italian.

Bronx River North finds John learning about the culture of the northern suburbs of Westchester, New York, while attending an upscale Prep School. The years he spent in Italy have left an inherent impression and unite a group of boys with different backgrounds.

Leylah seeps into the heart of Professor Gianluca Morelli, a scholar of Italian literature who takes an early retirement in New York City to settle in Florida. He stops in Georgia and changes his plans. Adult content.

Italian American Heritage Project

Italian American Collective

In 2019, Italian Americans in Ohio Oral History Project was created by the Italian faculty of the Department of French, Italian, and Classical Studies at Miami University, Ohio. The mission was to “preserve the memory of the Italian American experience.” Initially, the project was designed for interviews – either audio or video – for Italian Americans in Ohio, one of the top ten states with the highest number of Italian American residents.

The interviews were so successful, a decision was made to expand the project nationwide, providing an online database of Italian American history, heritage, and culture. The project, now known as the Italian American Collective (IAC), offers the

opportunity to learn about the rich traditions handed down through generations, the familiarity of a shared culture, and the historic value Italian Americans have added to American society.

Italian Americans in any state can participate in this project, agreeing to an interview or contributing an article. I was recently interviewed for an article, [On Being Italian](#), and also wrote an article, [Josie's Story](#). Italian Americans need to make their stories known. Our history and culture are often overlooked, affecting a heritage that has been reduced to several very negative stereotypes.

From the IAC:

"We are looking for Italian Americans willing to share their experience with us to be interviewed, either in a video or audio format. We are also looking for volunteer interviewers and collaborators who are interested in posting articles, and suggesting news or topics to help this project grow. ... If you wish to collaborate with us on this project, or if you are simply interested in knowing more about the project please email Dr. Daniele Fioretti at fioretd@miamioh.edu."

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Keep your Italian heritage alive. An excellent source for learning about Italian American culture and heritage is a museum specifically established to focus on the Italian American experience. Many have virtual exhibits and tours available on their websites. [List of Italian American Museums](#).

Talk with your children (no matter what age), grandchildren, other family members, friends, and educators. Tell them about the significant contributions people of Italian heritage have made to America ... and the world. [List of more than 70 contributors on Thirty-One Days of Italians](#).

Learn about Columbus. It's difficult to correct over 30 years of misinformation, and the rapid spread through digital sources is disheartening. In 2018, the Italian American Heritage Project was established to provide educational resources about Italian American history, heritage, and culture. The website also addresses the Columbus Controversy by providing facts about Columbus, how the controversy started, and why it continues. Read [What is the Truth About Columbus?](#) To understand how Columbus became an important part of American history, read [Christopher Columbus: When Did the Hero Become a Villain?](#)

[Lesson plans developed from the letters Columbus wrote after his first voyage.](#)

The groups opposing Columbus Day have an organized agenda to eliminate it from America. The statements of truth and facts posted on Italian American websites are not working. Columbus Day has lost much of its relevance in American history. Indigenous People already have a designated day, and Native Americans have a day and a month to celebrate their culture.

Indigenous Peoples Day – August 9

Native American Month – November

Native American Heritage Day – Friday after Thanksgiving

Visit the [IAHP website](#) to read my articles, learn about the lesson plans, see the resources I've used, and support my work. Donate for a cause – preserving Italian heritage and Italian American history and culture through education. [All donations are tax-deductible.](#)

### **On Exhibit**

**Now to May 28, 2025**

**Michelangelo: The Genesis of the Sistine**

**[The Muscarelle Museum of Art, Williamsburg, VA](#)**

"Bringing 25 rarely-displayed masterpiece drawings by Michelangelo to the United

