IASA | Italian American Studies Association

WESTERN REGIONAL CHAPTER

A people without a past is a people without a future

Bolinas, California www.aiha-wrc.org Spring 2017

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Calorosi auguri a tutti e tutte! I hope that the first three rainy months of 2016 have given way to Spring and new growth, and that this more temperate season bodes well for us all. In this time of renewal, I would like to reiterate my hope, and that of my fellow WRC officers, that you our readers will take part in our chapter activities and show your support for them through your membership as "Friends of the WRC." As you may recall, we established this special category so that many of our long-standing and non-academic WRC members could continue to participate at the local level without the necessity of joining the National IASA. It should go without saying that only through your involvement will the work of our chapter flourish; yet it bears saying again: without you, our work becomes pointless. For decades, our unique mission has been to try to bridge the gap between academia and ordinary members of the community. Many of our programs throughout the years have evidenced the richness of this effort to bring these two sectors together—made all the more feasible by committed members and officers who understand the value of what we do and have done yeoman's work to help it happen.

In that regard, I would like to thank Rose Marie Cleese and The Institute for Historical Study for organizing and bringing to fruition the great history trip to California's Gold Country the weekend of September 23-25, 2016. All reports suggest that the weekend was both edifying and enjoyable, including the stirring material on the late San Francisco Mayor, Angelo Rossi, Cleese's grandfather, who was born in Volcano to parents who ran a pioneer grocery there.

Regarding this year, we are particularly looking forward to the *Museo Italo Americano*'s exhibit of Jerry Carniglia's paintings and the discussion of his work to follow; the walking tour of Martinez neighborhoods where edifices of Italian American history may still be glimpsed; and a discussion of a heretofore ignored bit of Nevada mining history uncovered by historian Silvio Manno.

Most of all, we look forward to seeing each of you at one or more of our upcoming events, and working with you to maintain this vital organization.

Distinti saluti e ci vediamo presto.

Adele Negro

UPCOMING

Jerry Carniglia. Recast, Entropy series, 2009

JERRY CARNIGLIA

a tribute

Place: *Museo Italo Americano*, Fort Mason, San Francisco CA

Date: Thursday, May 11 -- Opening Reception

Time: 5:30 to 7:30 PM

This exhibit, co-sponsored by the Museo and the IASA/WRC, will run from May 12 through August 13 of this year. It is a tribute to local artist Jerry Carniglia, who died in June of 2015. His works are to be found in several fine art museums in San Francisco and Berkeley.

A native of San Francisco, Carniglia earned a B.A. in English literature and drama from U. C. Berkeley in 1975. He then performed with San Francisco's celebrated Eureka Theater Company and designed sets for the avant-garde dance company, MAFISHCO. In 1985, inspired by wood-craft skills learned from his father, he created a line of custom-designed furniture which was shown in gallery exhibitions. After formal study in painting, he then turned to abstract expressionism.

The critic David Roth said this about his work: "Jerry Carniglia gives us bold abstract paintings that argue for the validity of actual, lived experience. His art fuses deep physical engagement with the belief that nature can be used as a metaphor to describe our desire to transform the reality we inherit into an idealized world – one we might actually create and inhabit if we had the power. His impulse, initially inspired by European Expressionism, is essentially romantic, and the results are paintings that are, if nothing else, emotive."

One might add that the influence of both theater and his fine woodworking can be felt in his work. The WRC is proud to be part of this public tribute to a Bay Area artist.

This is a two-artist show, also featuring the work of John DePaolo. Light refreshment will be served.

Una Storia Segreta

Storia Segreta on Air. After a successful eastern tour to promote his latest book on the WWII story, *Branded* (Bridgeport and New Haven CT, Worcester and Boston MA, New York NY), Lawrence DiStasi returned to find that the national interest in the WWII restrictions had grown due to measures restricting immigration from Middle Eastern countries. A reporter, Cari Spivack, from KALW-FM expressed interest in doing a story about what took place in the San Francisco area, so in January her research began. Spivack proposed a research trip to the detention center at Sharp Park (detainees were held there either for small infractions like curfew violations, or pending transfer to internment camps). This writer had never been there, or to the FBI interrogation center on Silver Avenue in SF, so he readily agreed. Both trips were haunting and filled in gaps that had been occupied only by hearsay or photos. The reality of a place like Sharp Park, where Italian Americans were held away from jobs and families for what they feared might be years, was sobering, even though not a trace of the camp was left. Interviews with Al Bronzini and Costanza Ilacqua filled out and animated the narrative, and the radio show, ready to air in early March, found a slot only on April 18, at 5 PM.

It was worth the wait. Reporter Spivack did an outstanding job of conveying the gist of the story, especially the emotional impact the restrictions had on those affected. To hear the podcast, go to www.KALW.org and look for "75 Years Later, Bay Area Italian Americans Remember Wartime Restrictions and Internment." One hopes that other media outlets will hear the story and decide to do one of their own.

Programs in Process

Walking Tour of Martinez. The WRC's planned walking tour of historic Martinez, based on the recent success in putting the city on the National Register of Historic Places, continues. Maria Protti has been spearheading the tour, which she plans to center on two to three blocks of vintage houses owned by pioneering Italian immigrants. We are hopeful that we can find a site for a gathering by this October. Stay tuned.

Silvio Manno talk. For our annual general membership meeting in September, we are planning to present a talk by historian Silvio Manno, based on his research and book (see Review below), *Charcoal and Blood: Italian Immigrants in Eureka, Nevada and the Fish Creek Massacre*. An email or newsletter will contain details regarding date, place, and time.

Carniglia Round Table. In conjunction with the above-noted tribute to Carniglia's work at the *Museo*, the WRC is putting together a panel to discuss the late artist's life and work, especially in light of his Italian background. Present plans include a target date of Thursday, July 13, at 7PM, at the *Museo*, where the work will still be exhibited. We are hoping that among the discussants will be those who knew Carniglia well, like Tony Taccone of the Berkeley Rep, or those like Anthony Pinata, a Bay Area painter who recently discovered his work. We anticipate a rich discussion of the artist's life as a Bay Area native, and how his life experiences may have played into the images he created. For more information about this event, RSVP to the *Museo* at (415) 673-2200.

Friends of the WRC

Recent changes in IASA's membership procedure have meant that participation in the WRC has dwindled. In order to reverse this trend, officers were able to arrange for us to offer a "Friends of the WRC" membership at a reduced rate to those not deeply interested in scholarship at the national level but who would still like to support the WRC's programs and initiatives in the West. We continue, therefore, to urge everyone who gets this newsletter to join our organization as a "Friend of the WRC" and thereby support our continuing efforts to study and publicize the history of Italian immigrants in the West. A form for this purpose appears at the end of this newsletter. **Please…join and support us…today**.

In Memoriam

It was with sadness that we learned of the death of Jeanette Mancini Mitchell of Santa Rosa on March 19. Jeanette was the soul and inspiration of the North Bay Italian Cultural Foundation, and a great supporter of the *Una Storia Segreta* project. She will be greatly missed, both by the NBICF and by those of us in the larger community who had the pleasure of working with her over the years.

Reviews

Charcoal and Blood: Italian Immigrants in Eureka, Nevada and the Fish Creek Massacre, by Silvio Manno, (U of Nevada Press: 2016).

The critical event described in Silvio Manno's new book is the killing of five charcoal burners in a dispute with silver smelter owners over the price paid for charcoal. In order to make this comprehensible, Manno writes this thorough history of the business at issue—smelting silver from the silver mines in Nevada near Eureka, which required the higher heat from charcoal to do the job. In order to get the charcoal, Italian immigrants worked for near-slave wages in traditional beehive-shaped kilns, where they turned the raw timber from nearby forests into charcoal. This charcoal-burning trade was traditional in Italy; in fact, charcoal burners called *Carbonari* were among the first to form revolutionary societies, especially in their 1820 and 1821 uprisings against King Ferdinand in Naples and beyond. Those who emigrated to the United States were attracted to the silver-mining areas of Nevada where they earned very low wages—25 cents a bushel—to burn the needed charcoal, which usually gave them about $1 a day. This was less than half the wage received by miners, and a pittance compared to the $4.60 per day received by the teamsters who delivered the charcoal to the smelters. Indeed, the fact that the teamsters rather than the burners had the contract with the smelters was at the crux of the problems: the burners felt they were often cheated by collusion between these teamsters and the smelter owners.

By 1879, conditions grew precarious for the 3,000 burners near Eureka. In response, they organized a Charcoal Burners Protective Association to bargain for a raise: up 5 cents to 30 cents a bushel. Of the two smelters, one at first agreed; the other refused. But many burners had already decided to block the charcoal shipments until they got their raise. It was over this blocking of shipments that the deadly incident occurred.

After the arrest and indictment of five burners in an action on July 23, the Italian burners began blocking more shipments in August. Then on Monday, August 18, the deadly killing of five Italians by a posse sent to arrest the burners blocking the charcoal shipments occurred at a charcoal camp near Fish Creek, about thirty miles from Eureka. Members of the posse insisted that the burners had fired first, after which the 8-man posse fired a fusillade that killed five and wounded another eight. A conflict ensued over whether the Italians were armed, whether their weapons were loaded, and whether they had fired first. After a preliminary hearing, the case ultimately got to a grand jury, which issued its report on September 25, 1879. All charges against the striking burners were dropped, a relief to the strikers. But also dropped were all murder charges filed against the sheriff's posse. In other words, the posse had killed five men and wounded several others, and gotten away with it. The grand jury clearly believed that the strikers were armed and dangerous conspirators (but if they were, why were no charges brought against them?) who had to be stopped.

As Manno points out, however, there was substantial evidence that the assault by the posse had taken down essentially unarmed men who were fighting to extract a living wage from their employers. A published letter from a resident who used the pen name *Veritas* (he was Louis Monaco, photographer and elder brother of famed San Francisco photographer J.B. Monaco), pointed out the suspicious fact that gunpowder burns in the chests of the victims clearly demonstrated "that the burners had been shot at close range." Manno's summary also points out that of the dozen or so weapons seized by the posse, most were empty of shells.

In sum, Manno makes the case that this was more like a lynching than an act of justice, one typical of other lynchings that took place against exploited Italian immigrants around the turn of the century in America. As such, it surely deserves to be better known, and Manno is to be congratulated for resuscitating this story from its place in the still little-known history of the West.

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Fire at Sea: A Documentary Film by Gianfranco Rosi, (21UNO films: 2017).

Though we do not usually review films, this Academy Award-nominated documentary about African refugees and their often-tragic attempt to cross the Mediterranean, surely deserves it. It is mostly shot on the island off Sicily where they usually end up, Lampedusa. At first, as one watches, one wonders when the grim scenes of capsizings and drownings and hostility from local residents will be shown. Though Rosi does give us some of these, his film is much subtler than that. For what he does is weave three stories into one: the rescue of migrants by the heroic Italian coast guard; the near-saintly labors of Dr. Pietro Bartolo, who screens the health of all migrants landing in Lampedusa; and the outwardly humdrum life of 12-year-old Samuele Pucillo and his family.

We see Samuele and his friend stalking small birds with a home-made sling shot. We see him slurping spaghetti with his family. We see him going to the doctor when he realizes his vision is somehow off—and the doctor makes him wear a patch over one eye to strengthen the lazy other one. As we wonder what this has to do with the terrible plight of migrants, we begin to see that being blind to what is happening is one of the film's metaphors—we are *all* blind to the effects our civilization has on the impoverished, and how that blindness leads to migration and its problems. When we see the migrants themselves, lined up, desperate for any hope in their now all-but-ruined lives, this need to see and empathize is reinforced.

Finally, we get the commentary from Dr. Bartolo (not in the film, but as a supplement) and understand that though we wear hazmat suits to keep us immune, we cannot avoid involvement in every tragedy that happens on Lampedusa, and beyond.

Lawrence DiStasi

WE VALUE YOUR SUPPORT.

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE IASA/WRC……**or…..** a "FRIEND OF THE WRC" TODAY!

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

Yearly national dues are:
Regular IASA National Membership: **$55**.

WRC Chapter dues are an **additional $20**.
Regular: $20. Institutional: $30.
Family (2 or more): $20.

Send "Friend of the WRC" donation of $20 to:

IASA/WRC Treasurer
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Members with items for the next newsletter should send them to:

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More Carniglia images:

Jerry Carniglia
Love me the way that I am, 2005
oil on paper
40 x 26 inches