

Italian Catholic Federation Heritage Newsletter

November 2010



A New Land, A New Home

When the immigrants first came to America, most came through New York. The first sight they saw was the Statute of Liberty and they were either accepted or rejected at Ellis Island. I want to tell you about Antonio de Freitas, a poor uneducated immigrant who came to America by San Francisco.

Antonio worked a farm [in the Azores] along with his sister and two brothers. The methods for farming were very primitive. Everyday he chopped wood for the fire and hauled water eight miles from a cistern that collected rainwater. He slept on the cold dirt floor of the house. They had no lights, and his mother cooked outside over an open fire.

In 1903, Antonio went to the pier of San Miguel in the Azores and waited for

You can find "A New Land, A New Home" in the Italian Catholic Federation publication *Our Italian American Heritage*.

For ordering information, please contact the ICF at 888/ICF-1924 (510/633-9058) or info@icf.org



A New Land, A New Home continued . . .

for the launch that would smuggle him and several other boys onto the White Star Steamer whose destination was the United States. All he had was a \$5.00 gold piece in his pocket and the clothes on his back. He had never been to school. He could not read or write nor could he speak or understand English. He was only 13 years old.

The trip to the United States was very unpleasant. He was ill and afraid of being caught as a stowaway. It took the ship two and half months to get to San Francisco. He still had the \$5.00 gold piece in his pocket.

Luck was with him when he jumped ship in San Francisco. A Portuguese fisherman gave him a job on the docks. Later, he heard money could be made in the gold mines, so he went to Sonora to work.

At the age of twenty-five, he went to work for a Portuguese farmer, farm work being what he loved most. He met a young lady named Isabel de Santos, a housekeeper. She, too, had stowed away on a ship at the age of thirteen, never to see her family or her homeland again. They married and raised nine children, all girls.

Antonio de Frietas' one dream in life was to become an American citizen. In 1965, at the age of 78, he realized that dream.

Even though everyone's first glimpse of America may not be the Statue of Liberty, it is the country – America – that is the true symbol of freedom, a hope for a new land and a new home.

Louise M. A. Vento is a member of Branch 391 (San Jose) of the Italian Catholic Federation. Those of non-Italian heritage are welcome to join the ICF.

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By Louise M. A. Vento



Rev. Bandini



Luigi Providenza

The Beginnings of the ICF : Our Founders

BACKGROUND

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, vast numbers of Italians left war torn Europe seeking a new life in Canada, North and South America, and elsewhere. Destinations were often chosen for the good reason that a father or older brother had already emigrated, and family members were following in their footsteps. More than a hundred thousand arrived on the East Coast of the United States; many stayed in eastern cities, and about 40,000 traveled west and settled in San Francisco. Most could not speak English, and were not well prepared for the culture shock, as not only was the language different, but also the customs, mores, and religious beliefs and observances were essentially foreign. The Italian immigrants experienced disorientation, prejudice, and hard economic realities.

In spite of hard-earned successes, many despaired, as they missed their homeland and an essential spirit they had always felt as Italians and as Catholics, a spirit not nurtured in the new land. Church attendance and Catholic observances slowly declined among the immigrants, as did their pride in being Italian. Many simply stopped going to Church or educating their children in the traditions and Faith of their fatherland.

Something happened that began to change that, in the form of a lay apostolate organization for people of Italian origin, founded by two remarkable men: Rev. Albert Bandini and Luigi Providenza.

(continued)

1924

First ICF branch

1925

Eight branches inaugurated

First Bollettino

First Convention (unofficial)

THE CO-FOUNDERS

Luigi Providenza, born in Genoa, was a radical idealist who rose to the position of Chairman of Italy's Popular Party. At 26, following three Communist attempts on his life, he emigrated to America and settled in San Francisco where he got a job with the weekly Italian paper, L'Unione. Calling upon Italian families, he was appalled to find that most of them had lost their Faith. He decided that something had to be done, and, after much prayer and soul-searching, he formulated a plan for a kind of fraternal/apostolate organization. But when he proposed it to influential Italians he knew through his union and publishing contacts, he was disappointed to receive little encouragement. So the resourceful and stubborn Providenza took his idea to local priests, and found the ears, the enthusiasm, and the evangelical spirit he sought. The concept took force, yet Luigi Providenza was visionary and a promoter, not a writer, businessman, or planner, and how to structure the organization he envisioned eluded him. He was to later say, "I had the idea of the ICF, but another man gave it form and a program which gave me something concrete around which I could organize people—plain, everyday people." That other man was Reverend Albert R. Bandini.

Reverend Albert R. Bandini, son of an influential Florentine family, was a scholar, a poet, and attorney. He came to California to help his beloved Italians at a time when American bishops were calling for the services of Italian speaking priests. Teaching in

New York, he came under the eye of Theology Professor Reverend Edward J. Hanna, later to become the Archbishop of San Francisco. Rev. Bandini followed the Professor to San Francisco in 1915 and began doing pastoral work. He too was chagrined at the spiritual state of many Italians he ministered to. Inevitably, Rev. Bandini's path crossed that of Luigi Providenza, and the two men, the practical Genovese and the intellectual Florentine, found themselves of a mind about founding an organization for local Italian-Americans.

They were remarkably well suited to succeed in such an undertaking, as Providenza was a vigorous populist, with an immediate connection with the mind of the immigrants, and Bandini's formal education, legal mind, literary skills would serve the Federation well.

The history of the Italian Catholic Federation can be found in the Federation's 75th anniversary book. Excerpts from which will be published in this newsletter regularly.

State of California Declares October Italian American Heritage Month

Assemblywoman Cathleen Galgiani, 17th Assembly District, and Anthony Portantino, 44th assembly district

ACR 89: Adopted on AUGUST 17, 2009

Relative to Italian American Heritage Month.

This measure would designate the month of October 2009, and every October thereafter, as Italian American Heritage Month. This measure would encourage public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of the role and contributions of Italian Americans to the culture and history of California and the United States in elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks.

WHEREAS, A study published in December 2004 of social science textbooks used in California schools and universities by Lawrence DiStasi and the Italian American Textbook Committee, titled *The Treatment of Italian Americans in California Textbooks*, found that Italian American contributions were largely absent from elementary, secondary, and postsecondary textbooks used in California; and

WHEREAS, Italian Americans are the sixth largest ethnic group in America numbering roughly 25 million people, with nearly 1.5 million residing in California. For much of the 20th century, Italian Americans were the largest immigrant group in the United States, yet they are not extended proper credit for their role in shaping American culture; and

WHEREAS, As one of the country's greatest success stories, Italian Americans made enormous contributions to our country and state. For example, Amedeo Pietro "A.P." Giannini, born of Italian immigrant parents in San Jose in 1870, established in the Italian neighborhoods across California the first branch banking system in the United States, known today as Bank of America. The philosophy that spurred the success of Bank of America was to invest in common people to stimulate rapid economic growth. Mr. Giannini's investments include the movie industry, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Walt Disney Company, and much of today's

agribusiness; and

WHEREAS, Italian immigrant Marco Fontana arrived in the United States in 1859 and started the California Packing Company under the Del Monte label. His cannery soon became the largest food processing company in the world. Domenico Ghirardelli settled in San Francisco during the Gold Rush and founded the Ghirardelli Chocolate empire. The movie industry, the fifth largest employer in Los Angeles County, owes much of its success to numerous Italian American artists, including Danny DeVito, John Travolta, Sylvester Stallone, Al Pacino, Vito Russo, Isabella Rossellini, Liza Minelli, and many others; and

WHEREAS, The wine industry in California owes much of its success to Italian Americans. Italian pioneers established the early wine industry in the California foothills of the Gold Country following the Gold Rush of 1848. In 1881, Italian immigrant Andrea Sbarboro founded the Italian Swiss Colony at Asti, a cooperative of Italian immigrants from the wine growing areas of Northern Italy. The colony quickly became the largest winery in the Napa and Sonoma Valleys. Later Italian winemakers like Robert Mondavi and the Sebastiani family established world-class status for California wines. Beginning in the 1940s, Ernest Gallo and Julio Gallo established the largest family owned winery in the United States in California's central valley. Zinfandel might have disappeared had it not been resurrected by the Robert Trinchero family winery, the first to introduce white Zinfandel from their Sutter Home Winery in the Napa Valley; and

WHEREAS, Italian Americans were among the earliest and largest groups to settle in California, and they played a dominant role in the creation of the state's agriculture, food processing, branch banking, fishing, and wine industries. Little-known facts regarding the experience and contributions of Italian Americans include the following: (1) Between 1880 and 1920, about 4 million Italians immigrated to the United States and nearly one-quarter of Ellis Island immigrants were Italian. Restrictive immigration laws at that time were directly aimed at Italian immigrants and based on anti-Italian attitudes; (2) Although Italians constituted the largest ethnic group in the American military during World War II, an estimated 600,000 Italian immigrants nationwide suffered wartime restrictions including internment and arrest, curfews, and travel restrictions. Some 10,000 Italian Americans were forced to relocate

from coastal areas of California; and (3) Italians played a large role in the development of agriculture in California. Their control and development of fruit and vegetable industries in the central valley, truck farming in major urban centers, and their influence on the development of wine and grape industries left a legacy shared by us all; and

WHEREAS, Italian American contributions to California and United States history can be easily incorporated in the current elementary and secondary curriculum content. Including the vital role of Italian Americans in shaping California into the state it is today will help pupils truly understand a significant part of our state's unique culture and will help them understand how the interdependence of people of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural differences makes our country truly great; and

WHEREAS, In 1996, the Legislature established the California Italian-American Task Force. The highest priority of the task force is the inclusion in the public school curriculum of Italian American history, achievements, and contributions; and

WHEREAS, Italian American heritage and the contributions made by individual Italian Americans deserve the state's commendation and the designation of a month in their honor for collective reflection and celebration; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature designates the month of October 2009, and every October thereafter, as Italian American Heritage Month; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of the role and contributions of Italian Americans to the culture and history of California and the United States in the elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author, members of the State Board of Education, the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, and to school districts for appropriate distribution.



Santa Rosalia Festival

1948

Future editions of this newsletter will contain stories and articles on Italian American and immigrant culture and history as well as the history of the Federation.

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ICF Website Features

Pictorial History

The Italian Catholic Federation's website now contains a pictorial history of the federation – from 1924 to the present.

These pictures represent the Italian Catholic Federation's involvement and activity throughout the country.

This pictorial history contains photographs from various festivals and parades the ICF has participated in over the years, including pictures of some of our past ICF queens. It also contains pictures of branch inaugurations

and federation conventions.

We have been blessed in the past to have Danny Thomas and Joseph Campanella attend our conventions to receive our prestigious Pope John XXIII Award. These special events are captured in the website's pictorial history.

Since its founding, the Federation has been active in cultural events, such as Italian American festivals, parades, and celebrations.

It also contributes to a variety of charities, including Cooley's Anemia Research and scholarships for college students.

Visit our website at www.icf.org.

Italian Catholic Federation

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