



# The Officers' Log

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## REDEEMING OUR HERITAGE

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, our Institute filed suit against Columbia University to restore the mission of *La Casa Italiana*. The suit was filed in New York State's Supreme Court by our attorney James DeCristofaro. We are joined in this suit by descendants of the families that built and donated La Casa in 1927.

"This sad action is the result of four years of stonewalling by the university," explained John Mancini, our Executive Director and co-founder. "It's about broken promises, ethnic cleansing, and elitist mentality."



## ARE THEY KIDDING?

We often hear that there is no honor among thieves. Well, you can apply the same old saying to artists and some Italian American groups.

There is a magnificent monument to Christopher Columbus at Manhattan's 59<sup>th</sup> St. and Central Park South. It seems a Japanese artist named Tatzu Nishi had an inspiration to enclose the Admiral of the Ocean Sea in a plywood living room four

The story begins in 1914 when Italian American students at Columbia launched an association to create an Italian library on campus. By 1925,

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### Among the many questions: Where are the endowments? Where are the Italian Americans?

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they had received commitments from prominent Italian American real estate developers for a book collection and a building to house it. On Columbus Day, 1927, Columbia University was presented with a 6-story Renaissance palazzo and a leather-bound collection

continued on p. 3

*La Casa* Task Force includes (seated l to r) IIA Chairman Rosario Iaconis, Exec. Director John Mancini; Tom Becker and Ashley Cantwell of our PR firm (Sitrick and Co.); (standing) Thom Weidlich of Sitrick and our attorney James DeCristofaro. (Not pictured is IIA attorney and governor George Ricci.)



stories above the sidewalk. The Great Navigator is to be surrounded by sofas, chairs, a TV set, and other trappings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This brainstorm was fully embraced by the elitist

continued on p. 3

In all his glory, Columbus stands atop an ancient symbol of Italic naval achievement. (see p. 4 "A Naval First")

# YOUR GENEROSITY

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## We Don't Have A Side Business

Heritage is too important to be left to social-charity organizations.

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### We are the Alternative!

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# IT'S OUR JOB



Pres. Bill Dal Cerro

It takes guts to stand up to a towering institution like Columbia University, literally a David-and-Goliath struggle for us. But the Italic Institute of America has always been about taking a stand. In 2004, we alerted the community to the exploitation of young minds in *Shark Tale*, the Dreamworks feature-length animation, confronting the Hollywood purveyors face-to-face at the Tribeca Film Festival. We have even taken the

major Italian American organizations to task for diverting valuable resources from our common mission: to preserve and grow our heritage.

We have now crossed the Rubicon. Taking academia head-on is no small feat. But the principle is important: universities must be held accountable to honor the original intent of donors. In this case, the first major Italian cultural center, a 100% Italian American accomplishment in 1927, has been converted into an ivory tower devoid of Italian Americans.

To those who always urge the positive rather than the negative, remember this: *La Casa Italiana* was the positive response to the poor image and injustice of the early 1900s. We, and only we, are defending that great sacrifice. Academia has erased much of the contributions of Italian Americans from schools and history books. It shouldn't marginalize our intellect too.

But guts is not enough. It takes a monetary commitment. We are prepared to fight the fight but eventually ammunition runs out. You, our members, are the home front. We appeal to you for help. The Italic Institute of America is a national tax-exempt 501c3 corporation. I write to you from Chicago, but it doesn't matter where the battle is, it's all the same heritage to the Italic Institute. *La Casa Italiana* in New York was supposed to be a national treasure. Its donors specifically stated in 1927 that it was to diffuse Italian culture throughout America. Inventor Guglielmo Marconi was there that day and stated categorically that *La Casa* was "to promote the educational and spiritual uplift of Italians in America." Today it uplifts only a few academics. All Italian Americans have lost something. We need to get it back.

Please consider giving any extra monies that you can.

If not for yourself, do it for future generations. They will be grateful that you did. *Avanti!*

-Bill Dal Cerro, President

## Are They Kidding?, from p. 1

Public Art Fund, which sold the idea to Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Just to forestall any opposition to the creative arts, the PAF contacted the Columbus Citizens Foundation, sponsors of the annual Columbus Day Parade up Fifth Avenue. They must have caught the CCF guys at a good time because the erstwhile defenders of their namesake saw no problem with the scheme.

“The Foundation is actually the charitable branch of a members-only dining club on 69<sup>th</sup> St.,” explains Institute governor Don Fiore. “Twenty years ago the city talked them into restoring the monument at a cost of \$400,000. They probably don’t want to do that again.”

So, the Public Art Fund will refurbish the statue in exchange for making Columbus a sideshow. As envisioned, visitors will have to climb six flights of stairs to sit with Columbus (he will be standing, of course). There will be no historical or biographical material handed out. It will be a transcendental experience as you and “Chris” commune 70 feet above Manhattan. Understandably, there will be no admission fee.

For the Italic Institute, as guardians of the Italian heritage, there are a number of things wrong with this picture. “First,” says Executive Director John Mancini, “this deal with the Columbus Club was done almost a year ago, as we recently found out. Why was it kept under wraps? Second, how is this contraption of an exhibit safe? It’s like climbing up a fire escape four stories to a flimsy room filled with flammable furnishings. Third, what kind of respect is this for the original artist, Gaetano Russo, or for the Italic people? The monument will be totally covered for Columbus Day.”

“Would Tatzu Nishi have dared to similarly scorn the late Emperor Hirohito in a cocoon of so-called Conceptual art?” asks Institute Chairman Rosario Iaconis. “I think not.”

According to our governors, this matter isn’t settled.

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### Redeeming Our Heritage, from p. 1

of 20,000 volumes from the Paterno and Campagna families and the Italian American community. Moreover, a Building Endowment and Book Endowment were given to Columbia to maintain *La Casa*. The donation parchment stated that the gift was “for the diffusion of Italian culture in America.” Inventor Guglielmo Marconi spoke at the ceremony adding that the gift was for “the educational and spiritual uplift of Italians in America.”

For the next sixty years *La Casa Italiana* functioned as an Italian American cultural center on campus. It was governed by Italian Americans and housed the Italian Language Dept.,

as well as the student Italian Club and Italian Teachers Association for the Metro NY area. In 1977, *La Casa* could boast that it produced more Ph.Ds in Italian studies than any university in the country.

By the late 1980s, the building reportedly needed renovations. What happened to the Building Endowment we do not know. Columbia sought a cash infusion and found the Italian government willing to buy the property for \$17.5 million and lease it back to Columbia. In 1990, the deal was sealed and a lease and charter were drawn up establishing the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies at *La Casa*. The future looked bright. Little did Italian Americans understand the ramifications of that charter.

“Imagine a grand cathedral of learning being converted into a cloistered abbey,” suggests Institute Chairman Rosario Iaconis. “Italian and Italian-American studies were shunted aside for European/Global topics. Italian Americans were swept away, as subsidized graduate students from other European and American universities descended on *La Casa* to study any extraneous subject—regardless of its relevance to Italic studies.”

According to Italian Academy Director David Freedberg, “We are a research center not a cultural center.” (*Columbia Spectator* 12/12/11)

Our attorney expects Columbia to submit a motion for dismissal shortly. In that event, the battle will be joined. “Whether our community rises up to this blatant misuse of its legacy will demonstrate how truly it values its ancestors and their sacrifice,” says Institute Vice President Anthony Vecchione. “I am proud that the Italic Institute and the Paterno Family are leading the struggle to redeem *La Casa Italiana*.”

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## CARDONE IS BACK!

Alfred Cardone is our Treasurer and head researcher. Like the rest of us he is an unpaid volunteer. Unfortunately, family matters required a leave of absence from the Institute for some months. But Alfred is now back.

Alfred was the first to visit *La Casa Italiana* in 2008 to assess its activities. After finding the building all but deserted and

an obscene photograph in the lobby, we began our historical research. (Note: the photo was removed after our written complaint.)



John Mancini, Alfred Cardone, Rosario Iaconis

# POSITIVE TV

For those of you wondering when there will be positive Italic roles on TV, wait no longer. The cable channel TNT has a string of shows with admirable Italic characters.

**Major Crimes** – Lt. Provenza, played by G.W. Bailey, is an old-style L.A. police detective who butts horns with his superiors and prefers trial convictions over low-cost plea-bargaining.

**Rizzoli & Isles** - Jane Rizzoli, played by Angie Harmon (pictured), is a Boston police detective who can cope with all the bad guys. She is backed up by her policeman brother and doting mom, played by Lorraine Bracco. Isles is her female medical examiner sidekick.



**Perception** – Kate Moretti, played by Rachael Leigh Cook, is an FBI agent working closely with neuroscience professor Daniel Pierce, played by Eric McCormack, to solve crimes.

Seems that Hollywood has always acknowledged some good Italian Americans in law enforcement (remember Capt. Furillo in *Hill Street Blues* and the *Lt. Columbo* series?) But someday the major networks need to discover them in the fictional military, government, corporations, and academia.

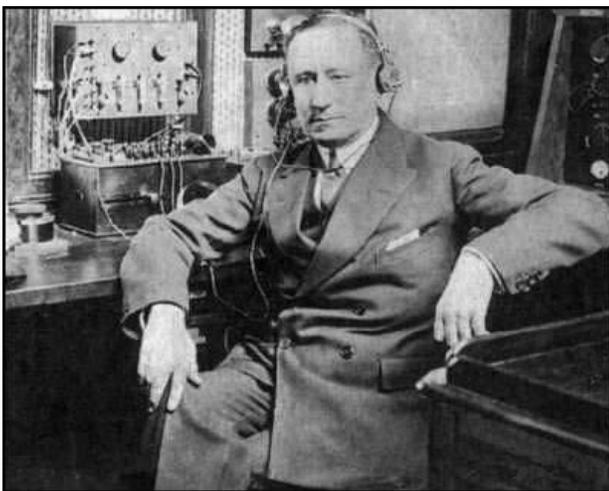
## THE REAL HERO

It's been 100 years since the Titanic tragedy. One person who never gets credit for saving lives is Guglielmo Marconi, inventor of wireless. In fact, the Titanic had a "Marconi Room" staffed by Marconi operators. Both the equipment and the trained technicians were products of the great Italian inventor. His British company, Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Co., was behind most of Britain's telecommunications for a century.

The survivors on that frigid April night could have drifted to their deaths had it not been for wireless telegraphy. They were rescued by ships responding to a Marconi SOS.

Let us, the Italic people, congratulate ourselves (and his Scottish mother) for producing such a genius.

Is it any wonder that Marconi represented the Italian government in 1927 at the opening of *La Casa Italiana* at Columbia University?



Nobel Prize winner and Italian Senator-for-life Guglielmo Marconi proved that wireless waves were not affected by the curvature of the Earth.

## A NAVAL FIRST

The Columbus monument was designed by Gaetano Russo and completed in 1892. It is not just a tribute to the first Admiral of the Ocean Sea but to an Italian maritime tradition. The column upon which Columbus stands was inspired by the *Columna Rostrata* in Rome (pictured), which commemorates Admiral Gaius Duilius's naval victory against Carthage off Milazzo, Sicily in 241 B.C. -- the deciding factor in ending the First Punic War. Sicily and Sardinia were won, and from that time remain parts of Italy.



Russo clearly wanted to link Columbus with the forebears who launched Italy's naval legacy.

And by the way, we get our word *rostrum* from this monument. It means prow or beak. Roman orators often spoke in front of this column.

