



# UPDATE

Italic Institute of America  
“Italian Pride on a Classical Foundation”  
April, 2024 [www.italic.org](http://www.italic.org)



## Challenged, But Always Proud

by John Mancini, Executive Director



Within the next four pages you will come to understand the mission and perspective of the Italic Institute. You will meet the living and the dead; go from ancient to modern with each news item. That’s what makes the Italian heritage a joy to experience, its sheer depth.

We lost a giant intellect this year in the person of Prof. Richard Gambino (p.2). His knowledge of our community made him the perfect choice for nomination to the Board of La Casa Italiana at Columbia University in 2012. Unfortunately, this capstone to his career was stymied by the quest for academic ‘diversity’ at the very House that Italian Americans had founded and built. There is no ‘Italian privilege!’

You may have seen the award-winning movie *Oppenheimer*, wherein physicist Enrico Fermi—the father of nuclear fission—is given a bit part. Although we can’t change that script, our officers set the record straight in newspaper letters and op-eds. The Italic Institute has the best success rate in getting published in the mainstream press of any other Italian American organization.

You will also find pride in some new films with positive stories of our heritage. You’ll read how one attorney is spearheading the fight for Columbus.

We end this issue with a story close to home, that of our Design Editor Andrew Ricci, who has been researching his great uncle Lt. Pasquale Aceto, a casualty of the Philippines campaign in 1944. His recently found letters to Andrew’s grandmother are quite moving. A reminder of our sacrifices.

## Verrazzano 500th

He gave France a claim to North America that eventually became Canada and the Louisiana Purchase. His reward was his name on a bridge.



Giovanni da Verrazzano followed in the wakes of Cristoforo Colombo and Giovanni Caboto. One gave Spain her empire, the other England’s. Anyone would be at a loss to imagine how one ethnic group could change world history and the globe in the space of 32 years (1492-1524). Italians did just that.

The year 2024 marks the 500th anniversary of Verrazzano’s voyage of discovery; the first European to enter New York Harbor and meet the locals. Are there any plans to celebrate, or will it be considered a dark day in Indigenous folklore?

At least the French Consulate could hold a pizza party.

## The Vesuvius Challenge

There are scores of ancient Roman books that are lost to history. Among them are Emperor Claudius’s Etruscan dictionary—that language still stumps scholars—and 107 books by Livy on Roman history.

Could these scrolls be among the 1,800 burnt papyri so far found in Herculaneum, buried by Vesuvius?

Scientists may have found a way to read the scrolls using MRI technology to virtually unroll the fragile books.

The technique is the result of a worldwide “Vesuvius Challenge” with prizes.

Could there be scrolls relating to Jesus or Saints Peter and Paul who lived in Italy only a decade before the eruption?



There are officially twelve Italian breeds; this isn’t one of them. Looks like a Venetian mutt.

## Remembering

**Richard Gambino**, 84, was an intellectual giant in our community. He ranks with Giovanni Schiavo, John La Corte and a handful of individuals who spent their

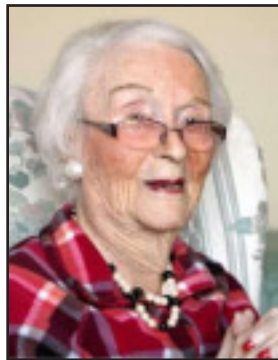


lives preserving our heritage here in America, often at their own expense. For Richard Gambino the quest was to understand the psyche of being Italic in America and to document the ultimate clash of cultures. His books, *Blood of My Blood* (1974) and *Vendetta* (1977), are must-reads for anyone who wants a truer understanding of our undervalued people.

*Vendetta*, an account of the mass lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891, was made into an HBO movie of the same name.

A Ph.D in sociology, Dr. Gambino lamented that “*Italian Americans still rely too much on nostalgia and not enough on scholarly-sound reading.*”

**Edith Ceccarelli**, 116, passed away two weeks after her birthday, at the Mendocino County care home where she lived.



When Edith Ceccarelli was born in February 1908, Theodore Roosevelt was president, Oklahoma had just become the nation’s 46th state and women did not yet have the right to vote.

At 116, Ms. Ceccarelli was the oldest known person in the United States and the second oldest on Earth. She lived through two World Wars, the advent of the Ford Model T — and the two deadliest pandemics in American history.



**Msgr. Sal Polizzi**, 92, died last April at a home in St. Louis, MO. Msgr. Sal devoted his life to restoring and preserving the Italian enclave known as The Hill, in St Louis.

One of eleven children, Polizzi was ordained and managed to earn a Masters in city planning in the 1950s. He applied that skill along with his priestly and political savvy to improve the lives of his *paesani* on The Hill.

## Media Attention

Our Institute is unique in having two gifted media communicators, Bill Dal Cerro (l) and Rosario Iaconis (r).



Since our last *Update*, these two have accessed major newspapers six times to defend our heritage or to inform the general public of our gifts to America.

(Bill)

Oct. 2, 2023 **Daily Herald** (IL): Praising Enrico Fermi.

Nov.10,2023 **Portland Press Herald** (ME): Condemning *The Godfather* fetish.

Dec. 4, 2023 **Chicago Sun-Times** (IL): Praising explorer Enrico Tonti.

Dec. 26, 2023 **Daily Herald** (IL): Explaining the Italian inspiration behind Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

(Rosario)

Oct. 9, 2023 **Daily News** (NY): Explaining why Columbus Day matters.

Mar. 9, 2024 **Daily News** (NY): Critique of the movie *Oppenheimer* for minimizing the role of Enrico Fermi.

## Thanksgiving Improv

Dr. Joseph Tromba, M.D., of Long Island is a long-time associate and benefactor of our Institute. We wanted to share his letter published in *Newsday*, the regional newspaper, recounting a college experience in Sicily.



### A base commander's generosity recalled

I admire how industrious Matt Walker was in adapting the local ingredients for an Italian Thanksgiving ["Making an old-time LI Thanksgiving in Italy," Opinion, Nov. 19].

As a medical student at the University of Catania, Sicily, in the 1980s, I faced the same situation. My solution was a bit different.

There is a Strategic Naval Air Force Base in Sigonella, Sicily. I wrote to the base commander, explaining the situation. He graciously contacted me and allowed me to use the commissary for one day with an official escort.

I was able to obtain all the necessary ingredients and hosted a dinner that impressed my Italian colleagues. Each year, I recall the commander's generosity.

It is difficult to imagine that this would be permitted in 2023.

— JOSEPH TROMBA, GARDEN CITY



## Ital-Flicks

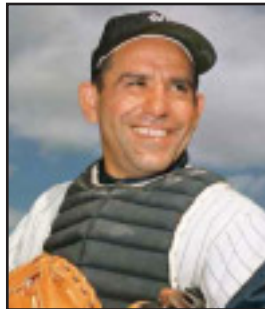
They may not be blockbusters like fictional Mob movies, but they are the real stories of the Italic people. These low budget films by independant studios may shock American audiences who are used to 100 years of negative Italian images. They may have heard the names before, but know little of how they became famous. These films are eye-openers.



**Mother Cabrini** was the first American saint. She overcame anti-Italian bigotry and the Irish Church heirarchy to build orphanages

and hospitals for the poor. In theaters.

**Yogi Berra** was more famous for his verbal redundancies than his professional skills or humanity. That has been corrected by his own granddaughter Lindsay who produced the documentary *It Ain't Over*. Now streaming.



Enzo Ferrari's worst enemy was **Ferruccio Lamborghini**, the man who built tractors. These two Italian giants now personify Italian excellence. Now streaming.

## “Mother” and Children Reunited

Christopher Columbus isn't the only Italian hero vulnerable to vandalism. The famous she-wolf of Rome was a victim in 2022, cut from its base in a Cincinnati park where it had stood for 90 years, leaving infants Romulus and Remus orphans once again.



It was a gift from the City of Rome during the Fascist Era.



Local Italian American groups in Cincinnati managed to locate the original plaster cast in Florence and restored 'mamma' to her hungry infants.

## The Woke Slayer

As the ultra-Left seeks to dismantle the pillars of Western Civilization to create their alternate history, our community relies on a few dedicated warriors to fend them off.

While the powerful Anglo establishment has successfully rebuffed the demonization of the Founding Fathers, the Left redoubles its efforts to dethrone Christopher Columbus in every form.



They have removed or destroyed his statues. They have replaced his holiday in cities and schools with Indigenous Peoples Day; and they aim to subvert the Federal holiday to complete their revisionist history. Columbus is everyone's scapegoat.

Attorney George Bochetto (above) has led the legal approach to stop the madness. He has successfully filed lawsuits against mayors who unilaterally, often without legislative authority, removed Columbus statues. To fight city hall, Bochetto has to research the statues' original donation paperwork; find co-plaintiffs who have “standing” to sue, and then force the mayors to comply with the court order to restore the statues—even judges are ignored. Bochetto often works at his own expense.

Bochetto is not alone. The Commission for Social Justice (OSDIA) and many local Italian American organizations and individuals are at the forefront of this struggle to save our amazing heritage.

## Don't Keep Us Secret!

Tell your friends and relatives the best kept secret in the Italian American community.

We have the only Italian American website with a Research Library, a Video Gallery, an Italian Jukebox, educational publications, and an interactive blog platform.

Italic Institute of America  
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Donations are Tax Deductible

## Mystery of a Fallen Warrior



You don't have far to look for the Greatest Generation among Italian Americans. Our own staffer Andrew Ricci (Design Editor) grew up with a vague family history from World War II. His maternal great uncle Pat (Pasquale) Aceto was killed somewhere in the

Pacific serving in the U.S. Army. That's all Andrew and his brother Greg had heard.

With the help of our family tree researcher Ellen Maresca and requests for Army records, we were able to piece together some of Pat's life. But an even bigger breakthrough came when Andrew's father George Ricci (our Financial Secy.) located some attic memorabilia, including photos of Pat and letters to his sister, Andrew's maternal grandmother.

Pat Aceto was a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry stationed in the Pacific. His unit fought in Guam and later in Leyte, Philippines. Unfortunately, millions of service records were destroyed in a 1973 fire in St. Louis, so we don't know Lt. Aceto's full story. Here is part of a letter he wrote to his sister Livia Aceto from Guam.

**Monday, 21-August 1944**

**Dearest sis –**

***I just came through the most harrowing experience in my life. I've seen life one minute and death the next. It was in the interim that I got to appreciate just how important life was – how absolutely real and valuable it was – how easy it was to find the strength & willingness – no matter how tired mentally or physically you were – to fight desperately for it.....All my dreams have taken a dive, Lee – but it's just momentary...***

***Guam, they tell me is a beautiful island. It hasn't stopped raining since we landed. If it does stop for short periods during the day, there's an amazing preponderance of flies and mosquitos to add to life's discomfort. The other day I had occasion to change my clothes and wash after 25 days. I actually buried my fatigues, they smelled that bad.***

***Where do we go from here – how long we stay – no one knows. I hope we get off this blamed rock soon & hit a nice spot or even a***

***good ship would do one some good – taking me back to the good old U.S.A. Gee, I wonder what good old N.Y.C. looks like now! Oh well, judging from the war news – it might not be too long before I see you on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the Victory Day Parade - & you know something, sis – tell Mom – I promise that I'll be there.***

***Your kid brother***

Tragically, Lt. Aceto could not keep that promise. He died of wounds on Leyte on 22 December 1944. We can only surmise how he was wounded, absent any official records.

His unit, Company G, 307th Regiment attacked a Japanese position on December 20th. Two hundred of the Japanese defenders counterattacked in an unsuccessful 'banzai' charge. They were annihilated, but Lt. Aceto may have been wounded during the action and died two days later at age 23. In hospital or in the field, we know not. His body was shipped home for internment in St. John's Cemetery in Queens, NY. Beside his family he left a wife that he had married only months before shipping out.

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## Our Placemat Still Gets Around

Our *Inventions of Italy* placemat is one of those educational aids that never become irrelevant.

Associate Frank Di Piero is always finding groups who quickly accept it.



Recently Frank distributed copies to the Italian Catholic Federation in Chicago. That's Frank in the middle.



In New York City, Italian teacher Alexandra Zavaglia introduced the Placemat to her diverse class on Staten Island. That's Alexandra, second from left.

