

THE DANTE CLUB REALIZATION: ITALIAN-AMERICAN MIGRATIONS INTO AND ABOUT SACRAMENTO

PART ONE:

DA VITELIU ALLA TERRA DELL'ORO FROM ITALY TO THE LAND OF GOLD

There yet exists a truly exceptional and a remarkable strip of land with an ancient central mountain range fractured at its tip, somewhat resembling a boot kicking a soccer ball, that boldly juts out into the Mediterranean Sea – a peninsula that the Ancient Oscan speaking people named “Víteliú”, which was long ago translated by sister Latin and Umbrian languages to mean “The Land of Young Cattle”. When Aeneas and his descendants sailed from Troy to found Rome, the name given to the greater landmass was “Italia”. Latin became the predominant language until about 700 years ago, when a descendent of Ancient Romans, a statesman, poet, and political theorist of the Late Middle Ages inspired a cultural-linguistic revolution. From his March 25th 1265 birth at Florence to his 1321 death at Ravenna, this poet laureate gave birth to the Renaissance by taking hold of the popular spoken language vernacular in the Tuscany region of “Italia”, and then boldly introducing his thus formed scripted verses into the eloquent literature of the time in the form of a new “ITALIAN LANGUAGE”. The Italian nation has since designated that day of his birth, March 25, as an annual memorial to his life-long pursuits and passionate accomplishments.

Dante Alighieri, the father of the Italian Language, is known as “Il Sommo Poeta”, the supreme poet of the “terza rima” or “three-line scheme”. He not only changed the language of “Italia” to what we use today, but also significantly influenced many literary elite composers of his time by political storm while setting a precedent for accomplished and venerated “Italian” writers to follow in Italy to this very day. Dante’s most famous work, an escorted historical tour through Heaven and Hell, was first, albeit incompletely, translated into American English by Thomas William Parsons in the mid-1800s. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the founder of the first “Dante Club” in America, accomplished the most notable American translation of Dante’s scripted verses. An Italian-American immigrant poet, John Cardi, was one of many more recent translators of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* into the

American English language during the 1960s. The Dante Club of Sacramento is honored and privileged to boast national and international heritages. The Dante Club likewise pays homage and respect to the realization of the passionate efforts and accomplishments of Italian-American migrations into and about the Sacramento environs from the time of the great American 49er gold rush.

Actually, North Carolina sponsored the first gold rush in American history. Over 30,000 miners set the stage for America to mint gold coins. Fifty years later on January 24, 1848, James W. Marshall, an employee of John Sutter's lumber-sawmill and settlement on the south fork of the American River found a gold nugget in a tributary -- Sutter's creek. The sawmill workers immediately quit their lower-paying jobs and placer-panned for gold. When his sawmill business failed, Sutter deeded his land to his son and left California fiscally almost a pauper; he died in Pennsylvania. The deeded land formed the basis of a new settlement, called "Sacramento". At that time there were less than 1000 United States Citizen settlers in California, but the words "gold discovery" spread like a national and international wildfire. The largest population percentage mass migration in US history was set to explode.

Comprising 90% of 300,000 western-bound prospectors, various immigrants, (90% male), seeking a fortune in that pan-mining environment rushed to the extended Sacramento area by various routes. Some perilously crossing the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, some sailing around Cape Horn, and others crossing mountain ranges from Central America to Canada. One-way passenger-sailed ships, abandoned en mass in San Francisco, provided a ready construction material market for homebuilders.

The accepted cultural mores of the American society were much different during that span of history: Indigenous Native Americans were subjected to mass public hanging executions. The largest single immigrant cohort group to experience a mass public execution lynching in the USA consisted of eleven Italian immigrants. Furthermore, the advent of WWII produced an "Inclusion Act" that forced 10,000 Italian-American families to abandon their homes and businesses in order to "relocate". Many were interned, restricted to live in fenced concentration camps. Nonetheless, and in spite of various additional turn of the century obstacles

arising from implicit feared fiscal prejudices and rising to overt hostilities, the immigrant Italian cohort communities retained and sustained a penultimate goal of friendship, fraternity, and collegiality. As expressed by Dante Alighieri, “Noi non potemo avere perfetta vita senza amici” – We cannot have a perfect life without friends.

Between 1880 and 1914 more than four million immigrants left that ancient land of “Víteliú” to venture a sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, desperately searching for a new land offering an opportunity to work, a chance to excel, and then hopefully pursue happiness and possibly success for themselves, their families, and their future generations to come. Indeed, they all discovered unique opportunities to strive to pursue happiness and success in that wondrous new world across the sea ----- the United States of America.

PART TWO: 19TH CENTURY ITALIAN MIGRATIONS

All about the Sacramento area in the 1850s, Gold nugget, flake, grain, dust, or “Placer Mining” soon depleted the local streams and then gave birth to a financially successful hard rock goldmine production industry. A readily available monetary gold barter trade supply ran through the mining community; financial disputes led to immigrant fiscal prejudices. California enacted a \$20 per month mining tax on non-citizens, which was eventually repealed. Most fiscal profits in the mining community eventually went to merchandise, food, and basic need suppliers or contractors rather than the miners. Future automobile manufacturer John Studebaker made his first fortune producing wheelbarrows for the miners. Levi Strauss first made denim jeans for the miners. From Rapallo, Italy by way of South America, Domenico Ghirardelli immigrated to California in 1849 to become an unsuccessful placer gold miner. Therefore, he opened a coffee house and merchandise market, and then found fiscal success in re-producing an old family recipe, a “sweet gold” chocolate for the miners.

Only 228 Italian immigrants lived in California in 1850; 41 resided in Sacramento in 1852. However, by 1860 the number of Italian immigrants in California boasted to be the largest cohort of Italian immigrants in the entire USA. They came from all parts of Italy. The first to arrive were mostly from northern Italy, then later came waves of immigrants from: Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicily. Aided

by the political activist efforts of Andrea Sgarallino from 1852 to 1859, immigrants sent monetary funds and gold nuggets back to Italy that helped finance Giuseppe Garibaldi's unification of the Italian peninsula. Having made more than adequate start-up fortunes in the Sacramento goldfields, many immigrants eventually became wealthy merchants, small landowners, and commercial fleet fishermen. 1887 saw Luigi Caffaro establishing an Italian Veteran's Association, "I Bersagliere". In 1878, organized Italian Fishermen picketed the canneries on Sacramento's delta commons to successfully negotiate a price increase for their catch. After the Placer Mining phase of the gold rush, more migrated from northern Italy to work as marble cutters, winemakers, and land-owning farmers.

Italians immigrated with their "old world" hard work ethic and honed labor skills as cobblers, singers, musicians, cooks, bakers, stonemasons, mechanics, woodcutters, ranchers, lodge keepers, barbers, and tailors. They also brought with them the music and customs-cultures of the various regions in Italy where they were raised. Their primary interest in life was to produce a stable family, live in a culturally accepted community that offered an opportunity to pursue a successful happy life, and celebrate with an endless number of family-community-organized festivals. For instance, Italo-Dalmatian Neapolitans celebrated the feast of San Gennaro, the Bishop of Benevento, on the 19th of September. Their first-generation sons and daughters perfected the business aspects of their immigrant skills and sought higher education to become priests, nuns, doctors, nurses, and teachers. Sons and daughters sought their essential Italian community support for various dynamic competitive business advantages as well as law enforcement and political office appointments.

Around that turn of the 19th Century, Italians composed the largest immigrant group in the USA, over three million by 1922, and they had been the largest immigrant group to search for fortune and work in the California gold mines. The western coast of California thusly became extremely attractive for opportunity-driven Italian immigrant pioneers during the "Great Migration" years from 1880 to 1922. Many would-be fishermen settled about the harbor of San Francisco and published a newspaper in the language of Dante – *L'Eco Della Patria*. From 1850 to 1870, the Embarcadero section of Sacramento was the most popular spot for Italian immigrant settlers, and boarding houses flourished -- such as the Garibaldi House at 120 L Street and Luigi Caffaro's Roma Hotel in 1886. About the same time, Fiore Gabrielle's "Italian Gardens" became a popular meeting spot, coffee stands

sprung up along Front Street, and David Bernardi opened a super grocery store. Real estate magnate Anthony Cordano ventured from Genoa to invested in 40 plot acreages along 14th Avenue. Italian immigrant prospectors and Railroad employees settled in the areas of Sutter Creek and Sacramento. Il Piemonte Reale society established itself in 1888. Immigrants also printed newspapers in that same common language of Dante from 1907 to 1942. Printed in Italian, "*Le Capitale*" brought contemporary American news of the day to the settlements of Italo-Americans. The original Italian immigrants about the Sacramento area organized farming, food processing, along with wine, olive oil, and truck crop industries that still exist today. Their economic success and social mobility integrated well within their new American culture. Yet, there were very unfortunate and prominent existing politically-derived fiscal limitations that would soon be overcome: According to Paola Sensi-Isolani, the appointed Italian Council, Salvatore Rocca, filed a complaint with the California Governor's Office demanding retribution for "official" government-issued statements that implied "Italians belonged ethnographically to a darker colored "Race".

PART THREE: EARLY 20TH CENTURY ITALIAN MIGRATIONS

In the year 1900, some pivotal events were taking place in the Sacramento community that would determine the evolution of future Italian-American migrations.....

Mary Ellen Bowden bought the Crocker Home at the corner 3rd and "O" streets which became St. Stephen's. St. Stephen's included a school, day care center and a mission. The people that served at St. Stephen's were mainly working-class members of ethnic communities other than Irish and German. At that time, Sacramento's main industry was canning fruits and vegetables, which employed many immigrant women during the canning season.

In 1904, Fr. Michael Gualco wrote his concern to Bishop Thomas Grace and to the Apostolic Delegate Diomede Falconio about spiritual care of Latin Catholics (primarily Italian and Portuguese) in the Sacramento Diocese.

In 1905. Bishop Grace and Fr Gualco traveled to the Holy See at Rome to recruit Italian priests to come and serve in the Sacramento Diocese. Later in August 1905,

two priest and one seminarian were selected: Fr. Temistocle Eugenio Melo D.D., Fr. Domenico Taverna and Mr. Benso Massimo. Fr. Mela became the founding Pastor of St. Mary's. Fr. Taverna served in various places including Sutter Creek and, later, became the pastor of St. Mary's.

Early in 1906, Franciscan sisters staffed a school that primarily educated children of the immigrant community. For a time, Bishop Grace preferred not to have a separate parish at St. Stephen's. Therefore, it was staffed by priests from the Blessed Sacrament Cathedral. However, there existed a strong desire from ethnic groups at St. Stephen's to form their own ethnic parishes. At that time, Fr. Mela began to form what was to become St. Mary's parish, while he searched for land and money to build a church. In July 1906, with financial backing from Luigi Caffaro, he purchased land at 818 "N" Street for the original St. Mary's Church. Converted into a formal church with various modifications over a few years, originally, the first structure resembled a wooden barn. By the first Sunday in November 1906, ST. Mary's Church offered Catholic mass to over 200 registered parishioners.

By 1909, the Portuguese community desired to have their own separate parish. The 1910 Catholic Directory lists two communities at the 8th and "N" location. St. Mary's (Italian) with Fr. Mela as pastor, and a Portuguese church with Fr. J Azevedo as pastor.

In 1910, Italian-Americans comprised the largest group of unskilled laborers; the Black Diamond Commons boasted an Italian school, a 1000 seat theater built by David Solari, and a branch of "The Bank of Italy in America" organized by Ruggiero Giorgi.

By 1912, the Portuguese community founded the St. Elizabeth's parish at 818 N Street, which was closer to the center of the Italian population than was the St. Mary's location. This walking distance hinderance inadvertently created financial problems as St. Mary's mass attendance suffered. Therefore, in 1916, Fr. Mela decided to move the Italian church closer to the neighborhood. Fr. Mela purchased property at 7th and T Street, which is where Our Lady of Guadalupe Church is now located. However, the parish lacked the necessary financing money to build a new structure at the 7th and T Street site. Therefore, Fr. Mela decided to section the original building, move it to the new location, reassemble a modified structure, construct a steeple, and hang the bells. St. Mary's reopened on Sunday August 23rd.

Mass attendance immediately increased, forcing Fr. Mela had to add new seating in the church. Masses were held in Dante's Italian Language by Italian priests. Sunday school attendance for young Italian-American children and teen-age kids, earnest to hear their ancestral musical language, increased 400% in just one week. Today, Saint Francis High School and Saint Mary's Elementary School in Sacramento still offer classes that teach that marvelous language of Dante to third and fourth generation descendants of Italian Immigrants.

Sadly, Fr. Mela had only four more years to serve at St. Mary's. He died during the H1N1 Spanish Influenza Pandemic on October 28, 1918. Fr. Domenico Taverna then became Pastor of St. Mary's from 1918 to 1931.

In 1923, Rev. Father Domenico Taverna started a men's organization at St. Mary's Catholic Church when it was located at 7th and "T" streets to provide immigrant aid and to help Italian-Americans transition to Sacramento. In 1925, "The Sons of Italy in America" opened a chapter in Sacramento. In 1926, the men's organization at St. Mary's Catholic Church branched out and became independent from St. Mary's Catholic Church. Pastor Domenico Taverna's original men's organization of capital city's "Italian church" soon became known as "The Dante Club of Sacramento". The club formed an active Woman's Auxiliary consisting of 36 original members, which has now grown to over 175 members. The Dante Club quickly became the acknowledged heart and soul for social and business activities within Sacramento's vast and growing Italian-American community.

PART FOUR: EARLY SACRAMENTO EXPERIENCES

Many Italian immigrant transitions to Sacramento were difficult and painful. Adapting to a new language, a new culture, and a new way of life was neither easy nor smooth. Some immigrants simply grew homesick, missing their relatives and friends in Italy. A primary purpose for establishing the Dante Club was to help Italian immigrants adapt to life in America, aided by former countrymen, who spoke their language and appreciated similar customs. Other purposes were to help new immigrants learn a new language, and to assist them with paperwork, finding living quarters, and locating jobs. Speaking Italian and preserving the essence of Italian culture in a foreign land were also important initial purposes.

At the beginning Dante Club existence, assisting with practical help for Italian immigrants to adapt to life in America as well as assisting with the new English language, helping with governmental paperwork, finding living quarters, locating jobs, and continuing to preserve the Italian language and culture fulfilled all of the club's wants, needs, and desires. A rapidly growing Dante Club membership significantly and expertly helped satisfy those vital accomplishments necessary for survival and success in America at the beginning of the 20th Century.

By the mid-20th Century, other Dante Club cultural purposes soon evolved -- to preserve the Italian language and culture, encouragement of music, drama, arts, literature, athletics, and social activities. Over the years, the club has philanthropically purchased hospital equipment for Mercy Clinic (now, Mercy Hospital) and Sutter Hospital, performed mailings for Christmas Seals, supported the opera, donated to the Sacramento Philharmonic, donated blood to the Sacramento Blood Bank, granted scholarships, and supported soccer and baseball teams. The club made donations to the Muscular Dystrophy Foundation, the American Cancer Society, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and public media such as station KVIE, Channel 6. During World War II, the American patriotic Woman's Auxiliary actively sold war bonds, prepared wrapped surgical bandages for acutely injured War Veterans, and assisted the local USO programs. Not long to follow were club meetings dedicated to the enhancement of business and political interests of the first-generation immigrant club members.

In 1926, "The Dante Club of Sacramento" branched out and purchased its own building, a residence at 1511 "P" street, which required extensive renovation. "Babbo Natale" or Santa Claus utilized the club to donate food and toys to children, and "Uovo di Pasqua" or Easter egg hunts also entertained children and their families. Festivals and social events were regularly marked on the calendars of so many families in the community. The club renewal project was completed and remained the home of the Dante Club for over 32 years. Two ball lanes at 1401 Q Street were regularly utilized by Dante Club members. In 1948, fundraising campaign projects helped the construction of a new Saint Mary's Church at 58th and M Streets.

During the 1930s and early 1940s, 48th Street between J Street and Folsom Boulevard became a popular Italian-American settlement. Everyone in this 24-square-block zone shopped at Louis DeFazio's Italian Market on the corner of

48th and J Streets, while an abundant number of small businesses found fertile soil along Folsom Boulevard. The local kids (now in their 90s) called themselves “The 48 Street Gang” and their most popular sport was playing Bocce Balls. From 5,200 BC in Egypt to 600 BC in Greece, a similar game of rolling large stones closest to a small stone had gradually developed popularity. However, hotly competing Roman soldiers shooting a “Raffa” directly at a “pallino” and calling the sport BOCCE had to wait until 264 BC at Carthage, during the Punic Wars of the Roman Empire. Not such a short time later, those many Italian-American 48h Street kids settled near East Portal Park, in “Little Italy”, where they established a Bocce Club that exists today with a total of 65 league teams.

PART FIVE: LATER 20TH CENTURY ACTIVITIES

During 1958, the general membership of the Dante Club of Sacramento decided that a new and larger club house with adequate parking grounds was absolutely necessary. During the 1960s, past presidents Nick Martinelli Sr. and Vic Martinelli provided the leadership and arranged the financing to complete that Dante Club move from “P” Street to the current location on 2330 Fair Oaks Boulevard. The club always boasted to be fiscally sound and abundantly successful; a mortgage on the new property was paid off in just 10 years. The club became known for sponsoring a Via Vino wine tasting festival, Vic Martinelli Golf tournaments, and culinary events such as the “Mangia Italiana” as well as separate dinner nights featuring a Cioppino menu or an endless crab delight. In the 1980s, huge catering events such as the Saints and Sinners roast for Rush Limbaugh packed all the rooms with an overflow of 800 guests at the “Dante Club” restaurant facilities.

Some interesting statistics of our time: Today, Italian is the fourth most spoken European language in the USA. A second and third immigrant generation Italian census finds over 16 million residing nationally in the USA and over 2 million living in the state of California. As a group, the Italian immigrant descendants rank above average in yearly income, accumulated wealth, and education. Their identity to their Italian roots may not be as strong as their ancestors, but they are yet eager to embrace their uniquely wonderful and special Italian and American histories. The Dante Club of Sacramento is dedicated to empowering these later generations of Italian-Americans, our present day Italian-American population in the greater

Sacramento area, to take hold of and revitalize their lives with their fantastic and especial Italian ethnic and cultural heritage.

The Dante Club is also anxious to fulfill their uniquely evolved necessary social, societal, business, and political wants and needs. The memory, prose, political proclivity, and persistence of Dante Alighieri yet exists in the club members' hearts, minds, and souls.

Most recently, the grounds, buildings, kitchen, bar, and dining halls of the renamed "Dante Event Center" have been renovated and restored. A 200 seat-capacity outdoor Gazebo has been added. The Dante Club organization looks forward to 2022 and beyond in anxious anticipation for an increasing membership and a variety of scheduled events as Sacramento's premiere event and meeting venue. As a group, today's Italian immigrant descendants rank above average in yearly income, accumulated wealth, and education. Their identity to their Italian roots may not be as strong as their ancestors, but they are yet eager to embrace their uniquely wonderful and special Italian and American histories. The Dante Club of Sacramento is dedicated to empowering these later generations of Italian-Americans, our present day Italian-American population in the greater Sacramento area, to take hold of and revitalize their lives with their fantastic and especial Italian ethnic and cultural heritage. The Dante Club is also anxious to fulfill their uniquely evolved necessary social, societal, business, and political wants and needs. The memory, prose, political proclivity, and persistence of Dante Alighieri yet exists in the club members' hearts, minds, and souls.

A typical Dante Club member today, in the beginning of the 21st Century, might unconsciously ask himself a very provoking but also pragmatic question – "Why do I bother to come here – how substantially does Dante Club membership and regular club meeting attendance aid or personally benefit me? Does eating, drinking, and socializing serve for or render any political, economic, or societal success, vital psychological stress relief, or satisfy some sort of essential primitive life function?"

Let's, once and for all, decisively answer that sincere and honest question.....

Primitive Man hunted all day then came to relax by a communal or tribal cave fire at night. Our earliest ancient cave dwelling ancestors then ate as a group, recounted, and related stories around that communal group fire, feeling safe and

secure in the shelter of their tribal cave. The experiences of the ancient elders were passed on to enhance the knowledge of more active young tribal hunters. Continual communal emotional senses of life purpose and accomplishment were simultaneously passed up and down to eliminate any generational gap and assure future successful expectations. Psychological compensation and relief through mutual collegial comradery thusly overcame the burdensome dire stress of daily primitive existence. Modern Man works at some job all day, and his psyche yearns for similar discourse on past, present, and future happenings with trusted others, safe and secure within his ethnic tribe. At the Dante Club, Modern Man can overcome societal alienation, then enthusiastically reminisce, next share both pleasant and disparaging personal struggles, while finally relaxing and thus relieving pent up hidden concerns by “recognition of self” in others with similar life experiences. Freed from external societal fears and barriers, shared personal principals and beliefs reflect aspirations for future generations through discourse aided by laughter, joking, eating, and drinking in Dante Club’s atmosphere of psychological trusted safety and security. Friendships form that never shall perish within a close circle of friends with mutually shared ethnic experiences and mutual respect for their outcomes, be they joys or sorrows. As an end-result outcome, feelings of psychological comfort and enhanced future expectations arise from a trusted collegial comradery, which thusly overcomes the burdensome struggle, stress, and ennui of daily modern existence.

This is all possible because of a deep-rooted cultural sense of “BEING ITALIAN”. That unique sense of closeness might be explained by examining a common cultural history of the aforesaid Italian-Americans, who comprise nearly 18 million of today’s USA census, and over 40,000 live in the Sacramento area. Italy was not recognized as a distinct nation until the somewhat magical “Risorgimento” efforts of Garibaldi mystically unified constantly conflicting fragmented landmass regions and waring city-states during the 1870s. Obviously, there always had existed and yet exists today a strange and wonderful common ethic commonality or invisible loving force that identifies and culturally unites all Italians. Perhaps that magnificent mystical force originates from a method of selectively identifying as “friend” people sharing a common interest, a strange sticky bonding starting with an intimate family structure. In “La Famiglia”, the paterfamilias was the acknowledged breadwinner, but the momma absolutely ruled the roost. The next bit of glue held together those in ear-shot or sight of the common church bell tower or “Campanilisimo”. Then, those from a similar-custom geographical region or

“Regionalisimo” found common ground, and finally, all Italians suddenly identified together in what Garibaldi discovered and uncovered to create a national unity. That overwhelming miraculous force was and is simply “Being Italian”, a sense of “Italianita”. From the cradle to the grave, Italians maintain a tenacity to chaotically value creativity. Well beyond “manga bene, ridi spesso, e ama molto” and “the brotherhood of the gape”, a resourcefully pushy innovative and entrepreneurial culture exudes a passion for music, art, and fashion that continually grows to exhibit a sense of unique loyalty, unity, and solidarity to the rest of the world. Among themselves, Italians take great pride in continually honoring their cuisine, culture, and chaotic commonality. The common language of Dante secured an ideological connection to memories and myths of a common ancient Roman heritage and allowed historic consistent economic warfare among the Italian city-states to be expressed in argument utilizing a common universal language -- that necessarily led to mercantile compromise and cooperation, while laying temporary rest to political competition between Gulphs and the Ghibellines that had gone on for centuries. The common people always knew in their nonpolitical hearts that they were all “Italians”. Societal and wealth mobility demanded a politico-economic system that obtained bestowed favors through perfecting an art of “personal connections” -- while yet boasting the uniqueness and quality of the individual city-state through competing art, engineered beauty, and fashion. Campanilismo and Regionalisimo interests yet took pride in the unique quality of their bread, wine, and cheese as a unique “Italian experience”. The conquest of Rome in 1870 finally put an end to dire political warfare-bickering by clearly separating church and state and allowed a powerful common Italian character to emerge where heated individual argument suddenly became one of the joyful pleasures of life.

Therefore, there was no unsolved mystery in understanding the amazing success of the “Risorgimento” in creating unity out of chaos, and there is no great mystery in various historically separate local cultural groupings of Italian-Americans bonding together to enjoy a common “Italian character” -- congregating together for psychological safety, security, and collegial friendship at Sacramento’s Dante Club.

PART SIX:

SACRAMENTO ITALIAN-AMERICAN ORAL FAMILY HISTORIES

In 1635, Pietro Cesare Alberti became the first Italian immigrant to settle in the USA. A huge surge of migration occurred in the 1800s, which greatly assisted the USA's budding then booming industrial development. Migrant Italian-American communities rejected absorbing attitudes of depressive victimization and denigration; they labored to socially elevate themselves and document a true history of accomplishment. Many now renowned Italian immigrants ventured to the Sacramento area during the time of the California gold rush, such as Angelo Noce, credited as the first to organize a Columbus Day celebration in the USA. In 1881 Andrea Sbarbaro established the Italian Swiss Colony winery at Asti. Antonio Cerruti founded the Del Monte packing company in 1889, and Amadeo Giannini originated the Bank of America in 1904. In 1910 there were 2,631 registered Italian immigrants in Sacramento. Comprising 80% of the fishing industry, by 1930, Italian-Americans became the largest immigrant group in California. Today, over 40,000 of their descendants live in the Sacramento area, and continually celebrate a common legacy of group pride.

Italian clubs or fraternal organizations have been established for various necessary and reasonable needs within immigrant/heritage communities. Founded in 1881 near the placer mining area of Sutter Creek, the very first Italian-American men's club, the Benevolent Society for impoverished Italian miners, today holds the title to the oldest and still active independent Italian club in the USA. In 1887, Luigi Caffaro founded The Sacramento Italians' Veterans Association, *I Bersagliere*, to support events in Italy, and in 1888 Il Piemonte Reale offered medical, compensational, and burial assistance to its members. In 1898, the Society of Italian Americans Club, organized in Des Moines, Iowa, offered a social atmosphere primarily to promote economic interests. A Sacramento branch of The Sons of Italy in America in 1925 promoted positive aspects of Italian ethnicity for social-political advancement. Shortly after the founding of the Romulus Italian Men Club in 1937, wives of the members held a fashion show at Eagles Hall to raise funds for various charities. The founding fathers of the Dante Club in 1923 reached out to support educational and cultural opportunities for the Italian-American community and was well known for rallying American Patriotism by supporting the U.S.O. Remember -- The women's auxiliary organized a surgical bandage wrapping program during WWII.

Some of the wonderful and glorious Dante Club member verbal history stories depicting individual family migrations to the Sacramento area must be told.....

The pure water of the Serchio River flowed from the Northern Tuscan hills to the picturesque foothills of rolling vineyards and olive groves north of Lucca, through the region of Piza and then into the Mediterranean Sea. Italian peasant immigrants from those regions, such as the Caselli family, began their American experience on the east coast in cities such as New York and Boston, but soon discovered greater opportunity existed across the continent at its western coast. The gold rush was on in 1849, but the trans-continental railroad was not completed, so San Francisco and the gold mines of Sonora had to be reached via circuitous routes, including through Central America. Vincenzo Caselli sailed through the Nicaragua straits in 1853, labored in the mines, and then as a gardener until he was eventually able to unleash his entrepreneurial spirit and purchase 60 acres of land just outside of Sacramento. His son, John, is currently the editor of *The Inferno* magazine

Also from Lucca, Angelo and Angelina Casali migrated to New York in 1901. The railroad brought a son, Giovanni, to California in 1934, and a grandson, Jim, settled on Second Street to become an accountant and building contractor in Sacramento.

By 1919, families migrating from the same region in Italy, such as the Novi family, had to pass through an immigration station at Ellis Island, migrate as far west as Michigan, then work as firemen or engineer-mechanics for the trans-continental railroad to reach the neighborhoods of Roseville and Sacramento. Many still faced incarceration during WWII in spite of their hard-laboring sons joining the Army of the USA. Second generation Italian-Americans, such as Dante Club vice president Tom Novi, were blessed by their forefathers' efforts with an educational leg up to attend colleges.

Most immigrants embarking from the port of Palermo in the 1880's, such as the Mezzanares family, first settled in New Orleans. Before they could afford to start up their own independent business trades, mother of necessity demanded that they find established job employment. The U.S. Railroad construction industry offered that opportunity, and Sacramento became a popular western end-point for debarkation. The immigrants settled in tenement apartment "flats", two or three-story edifices which offered up to three bedrooms per "flat". Their first settled area in Sacramento, known as "Alkali Flats", was bounded by the railroad station and tracks to the north, G Street to the south, 7th Street to the west, and 12th Street to the south. That growing population of Italian immigrants then ventured a few

blocks farther south into a newer neighborhood known as the “Mansion Flats.” Tom Mezzanares is our current Dante Club treasurer.

Many Italian Americans migrated from Sicily along with Albanese and Arberesh immigrants to work on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Needing the ability to walk to work, they usually settled in those locally known Alkali Flats. The Zuccaro family moved from San Jose to Sacramento’s Mansion Flats at 23rd and D Street in 1924 while employed by the Southern Pacific Railroad, and eventually produced a grandson, club member Richard Zuccaro.

Great grandfather, Agustino Orelli, in 1852 emigrated from Ticino, Switzerland Via New York to Georgetown. Then he participated in three migrations across the Isthmus of Panama to San Francisco during the time of the California Gold Rush. He worked as a rancher, shopkeeper, and mortician. Grandfather Orelli moved to southern California. His Long Beach born son, Christopher Orelli, migrated to settle in Placerville. Great grandson Pat is a retired member of the Dante Club board, having worked for many years as a CPA in Sacramento.

Paternal grandpa “Jimmy the Fish” emigrated from Sciacca, Sicily to arrive at Ellis Island and then catch a bus to New Jersey in 1909 accompanied by his wife Angelina from Agrigento in southern Sicily. Meanwhile, the Melise family had emigrated from Naples in the early 1900s and settled in the New England towns of Providence, Fall River, and Worcester, where they produced eight children. Grandpa Jimmy’s first-born son, Michael Dimino, married Melinda Melise. As was traditional, their first-born son was named after paternal grandfather Jimmy. After graduation from Seaton Hall and Oregon State, Jim traveled to Sacramento to fulfill a teaching and coaching assignment in 1957, where he met and married Kerstin Johansson, who had emigrated from Sweden to Sacramento. Their two sons, Mike and Matt, are members of the Dante Club and Jim is a board member.

At the turn of the 19th Century, Teresa DiGregorio abandoned her family’s Olive Oil business in Bari, Apulia, and married Mauro DiPinto. The couple, along with Teresa’s sister Lucille, immigrated to the USA in 1910 while holding one child in arms; nine more were to be born in the USA. After first settling in Worcester, Massachusetts and opening a grocery store, Mauro next ventured to Fresno California in 1938, to be followed by Teresa with their 10 children in 1939. Shortly thereafter in 1941, they moved to 1718 Capitol Avenue in Sacramento. A general

contractor son, James DiPinto, married Ann Lambetecchio and produced a son, Jim DiPinto, who ran an Italian restaurant from 2003 to 2008, "The Sofia", on the corner of H and 11th streets in downtown Sacramento. After returning from a visit to the "Old Country", one of Mauro's grandsons started up his maternal grandfather's Apulia olive oil processing business in Rio Linda, California. Also from Visalia, Apulia in 1911, Catherine Casoli sailed to New York to briefly visit with a cousin, John Casoli, the originator of the "Hero Sandwich" for sales in the USA. She had met Tony Lambetecchio in Apulia, and together they worked to gather enough funds to buy tickets, travel to California via the trans-continental railroad, and be immediately married at Saint Alfonse's church Fresno. After working in the fields, Tony saved enough to finance 25 acres of eventual grape vineyards which are still owned by their son Charlie Lambetecchio. The two families share a cousin, Giovanni Ricchiuti who is currently an archbishop in Bari.

Dante member Fred Pasquini's grandfather, per Italian tradition also named Fred Pasquini, left Lucca in 1890 to eventually settle in Sacramento by way of New York in the early 1900's. Maternal Grandfather Vito Sciffo parted Piana degli Albanesi and traveled first to New Orleans in the early 1900's, then to Chicago, and finally settled at a front street railroad flat in Sacramento, where he worked as a carpenter. Grandfather Pasquini established a bar on 3rd Street between J & K Streets. Father ("Nib") and Mother (Ann) meet in Sacramento and married in 1934. Nib worked at the SP Railroad and later at the Muzio Bakery. Ann taught elementary school. A sister (Marianne) also sought a career in teaching. Nib died at the early age of 43, leaving Ann to raise her two children as a single mom. Now retired Dante club member Fred Pasquini worked as a middle school teacher.

Brothers Antonio and Giuseppe Pane emigrated from Panettiere, Calabria to New York in 1905. Giuseppe went on to Joliet, Illinois; and Antonio went back to the old country to marry and then return to Joliet in 1913 with wife Maria Melania carrying a three-year-old child. A Railroad job brought Giuseppe to Sacramento in 1915 where he produced six sons and one daughter. One son, Julio, had two sons, Ronnie and Paul and a current grand-daughter who all found employment in Sacramento's criminal justice system. Ronnie is currently the president of the Dante Club. Antonio also worked for the railroad and followed his brother to Sacramento in 1918 with six daughters and one son. Son John Pane ran the Clover Club on Folsom, and daughter Elizabeth married Donald Waldron, a union which produced daughter Marie and son Johnny who established a barbershop business

in Sacramento. All the families, cousins, are still living between M and J on 58th Street and attempting to grow Calabria's world-famous licorice-flavored black anise seed.

Castro Arrate's 1923 Bask boarding house restaurant, sold to Joe Trueba and Joe Matinez in 1952, first opened in "Old Town" as the "Espanol" Italian restaurant and then moved to 57th and Folsom's "Little Italy" district. In 1965, Frank Luigi purchased the lease and his son and daughter, Paula and Perry, managed the Espanol restaurant until 2020, when the lease was sold to the former Chef June Chang from "Biba" Caggiano's Italian Restaurant. He renamed the "Espanol" the "Mattone Ristorante".

Ernie Tomassilli traces his family back 500 years to farm workers in Pratola Peligna L'Aquila, Abruzzo, Italy. Parents Sebastiano Tomassilli and Luigia Bice Liberatore married in 1930. Sebastiano traveled back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean to eventually settle in Steubenville Ohio in 1936 and call for his wife and two siblings. They worked in the steel mills and joined a patriotic club, the "Pratolana Mutual Benefit Society", that traveled to picnic spots and attended baseball games about the Northeast of America. Born in Steubenville in 1944, Ernie moved to San Jose after serving in the U.S. Army. An education at Chico State prepared him for a career in medical sales that lasted for 30 years. Ernie, now retired and an active board member, moved to Sacramento in 1988.

Oh.... By the way.... Italian-American migration to the Sacramento environs has never really ended. I know quite well of one Italian immigrant born at the paese of Sant'Appolinare near Cassino, Italy, who migrated to Providence, Rhode Island in 1906 as an infant, and whose son migrated to Sacramento just a short century later, in 2006 -- Raffaello Giovanni DiLibero.