



Italian Historical Society of America

Newsletter

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BY JANICE THERESE MANCUSO

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Tutto Italiano **Benvenuto a *Tutto Italiano***

The historical importance of European exploration in America is highlighted by several [explorers of Italian heritage](#): most notably Colombo, Caboto, Vespucci, and Verrazzano, along with de Tonti (traveled with La Salle to explore the Mississippi River during the late 1600s) and Beltrami (explored the upper Mississippi River in the early 1820s).

Centuries before the earliest European explorers headed west, [land and sea routes had been established to the east](#). During the Roman Empire, countries to the east supplied silk and linen fabrics, spices, papyrus, porcelain, and other luxurious products to the emperor and other nobles. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the major Italian city-states of Florence, Milan, and Venice expanded trade partnerships; and in the late eleventh century, the [Crusades brought more travelers and more interest](#) in eastern goods. The explorations of Marco Polo (see “Italy in the News” below) further increased the desire for new products, but in the mid-1400s, journey by land had become perilous. Portugal and Spain – the European seafaring leaders at the time – invested in seeking other routes for trade, and Spain chose a sea journey west. The voyages of Colombo (1492 to 1502), Caboto (1497 to 1498), and Vespucci (1497 to 1504) encouraged others.

Giovanni da Verrazzano, born in the Chianti region of Tuscany, had moved to France by his early twenties. His education and interest in navigation gained him a position in the French Navy; and France also wanted to increase its trade and its territories by finding a sea passage west. Under the rule of King Francis I of France and with backing from French and Italian investors, Verrazzano headed west in 1524. Several months later, he reached the coast of North Carolina near what is now Cape Fear. [Verrazzano traveled up the coast of North America](#), into what is now New York Harbor, then along the southern coast of Long Island and east back to France. [Verrazzano's letter to King Francis I describes his discoveries](#).

April 17th marks the 500th anniversary of Verrazzano's discovery of the harbor; and his name has been memorialized in the naming of the bridge that connects two boroughs of New York City – Brooklyn and Staten Island. It's through the diligent work of John N. LaCorte that the bridge is named after Verrazzano. The bridge went through several name changes, and – after President Kennedy died – was considered for another rename, but LaCorte persisted in his mission to name the bridge after Verrazzano, and he succeeded. His mission was completed in 2018, when the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge officially became the [Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge](#).

In Italy, the Verrazzano estate went through several Florentine families before it was [acquired by the Cappellini family in 1958](#). The villa – containing Verrazzano family artifacts – and the vineyards were restored. Guided tours and wine tastings offer historical and cultural connections to Italy, and estate wines and accommodations are available.

[The Impact of the Crusades](#)

[The Ages of Exploration: Giovanni da Verrazzano](#)

[Giovanni da Verrazzano, Explorer of North America](#)

[Major Global Trade Routes, 1400-1800](#)

[Verrazzano Castle Wine Tour](#) (YouTube Video; Italian, with English Subtitles)

[Wine Tour and Tasting on the Chianti Classico Road](#)

[The Naming of the Verrazzano Bridge](#)

[Countdown to 500: Lower Manhattan History](#) (YouTube Video)

For more about Giovanni da Verrazzano and the naming of the bridge, see the April issue of [La Gazzetta Italiana](#).
(*Thank you, John.*)

Italian American Press

The Italian American Press offers a great selection of books – culture, history, memoirs, art, family, food, the supernatural, the natural beauty of Italy, and more – for every interest. Help preserve Italian American heritage and history. Support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian American and Italian culture and let them know you found their books on the Italian American Press. (NOTE: The IAP has been updated and is online. Several technical glitches and the transfer to a new web host had caused major delays in website accessibility, as well as in listing new books. The new book posting from the January/February issue of *Tutto Italiano* is below, and the schedule of books to post in the months ahead has been modified.)

New on the Italian American Press

[Double Murder at the Grand Hotel Miramare](#) by Elena and Michela Martignoni
Deputy Assistant Chief of Police Luigi Berté, transferred from Milan to the Italian Riviera town of Lungariva, has been assigned to investigate a *Double Murder at the Grand Hotel Miramare*. Berté has a large list of suspects, and – as the story unfolds – his observations about the murderer and his own inner thoughts as he proceeds through the investigation reveal his reasoning for both the murder and Berté's own actions. His analytical skills are the basis for a series of more than a dozen books written by sisters Elena and Michela Martignoni under the pen name Emilio Martini. *Double Murder at the Grand Hotel Miramare* is the first English translation of the popular Italian detective series now available through [Kazabo Publishing](#).

The fictional coastal town of Lungariva substitutes for the real town of Santa Margherita Ligure, but the [Grand Hotel Miramare](#) is an historic resort providing luxury accommodations since 1903. With exquisite garden and sea views, elegant interiors, and superior service, the Grand Hotel Miramare is an unlikely place for murder. Yet, the Martignoni sisters weave a story of suspense, intrigue, and animosity with Italian history, culture, and food, adding touches of humor and human emotions to create an enticing murder mystery.

[Read my review on La Gazzetta Italiana](#).

On the IAP in the months ahead ...

A detailed history of the Italian immigrant experience in America by Ralph G. Giordano.

A tribute to Bensonhurst, New York by Joseph C. Polacco.

The life of an Italian brigand and folk hero by Dan Possumato.

NOTE

Plans are being made for an updated print version of [Con Amore](#). It should be available later this year. A limited number of print copies are available through book resellers, and the eBook, with full-color photographs, can be purchased on [Smashwords](#) and through other eBook sellers.

Italian American Heritage Project

Should schools be closed on Columbus Day or should the day be used for teachers to properly educate students about Columbus's life and voyages and Spain's involvement in his expeditions?

Earlier this year, the [Stamford \(Connecticut\) Public School Board voted to remove Columbus Day and Veterans Day from the school holiday calendar and keep the school open](#). Regardless of the reasons members of the Board provided and that the Veterans Day school holiday was also cancelled, it seems the main reason for the decision may well be another ploy to remove Columbus Day from school calendars.

Claiming the school calendar includes too many days off, and that other local schools hold classes on Columbus Day and Veterans Day, the Board chose to keep Eid al-Fitr and the second day of Rosh Hashanah as school holidays.

In its [2022-2023 Annual Report](#), Stamford – the fifth largest school district in Connecticut – had a student enrollment of 16,202, with a demographic composition of 6 percent Asian, 12 percent Black/African American, 26 percent White, and 51 percent Hispanic/Latino of any race. The remaining 5 percent is comprised of several other races. Those who celebrate Eid al-Fitr were not specifically identified. A [Pew Research demographic portrait of Muslim Americans notes](#) “A plurality (41%) are white, a category that includes those who describe their race as Arab, Middle Eastern, Persian/Iranian or in a variety of other ways ... About three-in-ten are Asian (28%), including those from South Asia, and one-fifth are black (20%). Fewer are Hispanic (8%).” The Stamford Annual Report does not include the number of Muslim Americans or the number of Italian Americans in the district.

From [Stamford Advocate](#) (February 20, 2024): “The State of Connecticut requires school districts that remain open on federal holidays to develop educational programming about those holidays. Like most federal holidays, Veterans Day and Columbus Day are inexorably linked to the history of the United States. Given Stamford's economic, cultural, and social diversity, our schools are uniquely positioned to help all students — especially those who otherwise would have no exposure to the history of these holidays — engage in active learning about Veterans Day and Columbus Day. As school board members, we believe that Stamford's students will develop a more meaningful connection to these holidays by remaining in school to learn about the historical and cultural relevance of these holidays from our highly qualified educators. ... To underscore our commitment to these holidays, the District Curriculum Advisory Committee will begin meeting in March to develop Veterans Day and Columbus Day in-school educational programming. ... Led by Chief Academic Officer Amy Beldotti, the Curriculum Advisory Committee was created as part of the district's 3-year plan to implement new, gold-star curriculum in all subject areas in grades K-12. SPS social studies teachers will guide the committee's work to ensure Veterans Day and Columbus Day programming meets educational standards and integrates with the district's social studies curriculum.”

Putting a positive spin on the decision, “a spokesperson for Stamford Public Schools said in a statement: ‘Stamford Public Schools already hosts many events in recognition of our local veterans, and we look forward to continuing that tradition on Veterans' Day in 2024 and 2025.’”

As for Columbus, “Board member Versha Munshi-South said she observed a class lesson titled ‘Columbus: Hero or Villian?’ at Dolan Middle School which made her rethink the holiday. ‘The students were using primary sources to investigate the true history of Columbus and I can tell you that based on primary source research, no, they did not conclude that Columbus was a hero,’ Munshi-South said, according to the Advocate. ‘I don't think it makes sense to teach students one thing in class and then have Columbus Day off. It's a mixed message for students,’ she said.”

If it's the school board's intention to teach “the historical and cultural relevance of

these holidays,” what are the primary sources Ms. Munshi-South claims the children were using that would cause negative thoughts about Columbus?

As noted above, ““The State of Connecticut requires school districts that remain open on federal holidays to develop educational programming about those holidays.” From [State Holiday Guide](#) (Understanding Federal Holidays for Schools): “Federal holidays significantly influence the structuring of the school calendar. Their integration requires strategic planning from educators to accommodate both curriculum needs and scheduled holiday breaks. ... Federal holidays in the United States represent key cultural, historical, and societal moments. Schools use these holidays as memorable pedagogical opportunities while appreciating their significance. ... More than just dates on the calendar, federal holidays in schools shape the rhythm of the academic year, act as conduits for imparting historical and cultural knowledge, and provide platforms that spark conversation. They are indeed an instrumental part of the American educational landscape.”

Regulations regarding school curriculum for federal holidays vary with each state; however, Columbus Day is a federal holiday and should be respected – as any other federal holiday. The controversy surrounding Columbus is beyond scope on a national level, and the foundation of the damage is the educational system.

This could be an opportunity for the nationwide Italian American community to reverse almost 40 years of damage caused by the teachings of misrepresentations about Columbus from the controversial *A People's History of the United States* written by Howard Zinn. Numerous Italian American websites have the facts about Columbus posted, but they are – apparently – overlooked as the degradation of Columbus continues.

How can Italian American organizations achieve the goal of providing a proper education about Columbus? Initiating contact with educational institutions, offering lesson plans based on the facts posted on their websites, following through for feedback, and monitoring the results.

Throughout America, Italian American leaders are lamenting the loss of younger generations who have little knowledge of their Italian heritage. The younger generations do not recognize the importance of Italian American history because they were not taught about Italian American history. For younger generations, learning about their Italian roots is an essential element of their heritage. Just as important – learning about their Italian American roots, and Christopher Columbus is the starting point of Italian American history.

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Keep your Italian heritage alive. An excellent source for learning about Italian American culture and heritage is a museum specifically established to focus on the Italian American experience. Many have virtual exhibits and tours available on their websites. [List of Italian American Museums](#).

Talk with your children (no matter what age), grandchildren, other family members, friends, and educators. Tell them about the significant contributions people of Italian heritage have made to America ... and the world. [List of more than 70 contributors on Thirty-One Days of Italians](#).

Learn about Columbus. It's difficult to correct over 30 years of misinformation, and the rapid spread through digital sources is disheartening. In 2018, the Italian American Heritage Project was established to provide educational resources about Italian American history, heritage, and culture. The website also addresses the Columbus Controversy by providing facts about Columbus, how the controversy started, and why it continues. Read [What is the Truth About Columbus?](#) To understand how Columbus became an important part of American history, read [Christopher Columbus: When Did the Hero Become a Villain?](#) (Some links are no longer active.)

[Lesson plans developed from the letters Columbus wrote after his first voyage.](#)

The groups opposing Columbus Day have an organized agenda to eliminate it from America. The statements of truth and facts posted on Italian American websites are not working. Columbus Day has lost much of its relevance in American history. Indigenous People already have a designated day, and Native Americans have a day and a month to celebrate their culture.

Indigenous Peoples Day – August 9

Native American Month – November

Native American Heritage Day – Friday after Thanksgiving

### **Historic Alliance Launched**

[Italian Americans and Native Americans Forge Historic Milestone](#) (einnews.com; February 15, 2024)

Visit the [IAHP website](#) to read my articles, learn about the lesson plans, see the resources I've used, and support my work. Donate for a cause – preserving Italian heritage and Italian American history and culture through education. [All donations are tax-deductible.](#)

### **Italian American News**

Some recent articles from the Italic Institute of America that highlight the importance of Italian heritage and Italian American culture and history.

[The Real Father of the Nuclear Age](#) (March 11, 2024)

[Ford vs. Capra](#) (italic.org; March 9, 2024)

[A Man to Remember](#) (italic.org; March 3, 2024)

[The Genovese Sorcerer](#) (italic.org February 26, 2024)

[Prejudice in Plain Sight](#) (italic.org February 20, 2024)

[When Ethnicity Enters Political Rhetoric](#) (italic.org; January 30, 2024)

[An Image Too Far](#) (italic.org; January 14, 2024)

### ***Mother Cabrini***

[Interview with Director Alejandro Monteverde](#) (YouTube Video; February 15, 2024)

[Cabrini Movie Review](#) (YouTube Video; February 7, 2024)

[Catholics Honor Mother Cabrini Amid Controversy](#) (YouTube Video, October 6, 2019)

### ***Ennio Morricone***

[Moma to Host Expansive Morricone Retrospective](#) (franoi.com; January 18, 2024)

[Movie Maestro: Celebrating the Untouchable Ennio Morricone](#) (moma.org; November 28, 2023)

### **Italy in the News**

[The Manly Art of Crime](#) (italic.org; February 18, 2024)

[Happy Birthday Vatican City!](#) (italic.org; February 11, 2024)

[Microplastics do not Contaminate Mineral Water, say Italian Industries](#) (italianfood.net; February 1, 2024)

[AP PHOTOS: As Carnival Opens, Venice Honors Native Son Marco Polo on 700th Anniversary of His Death](#) (apnews.com; January 30, 2024)

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