ITALO-AMERICANS IN PENNSYLVANIA
IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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The story of the Italians who came to America during the eighteenth century is gradually being told, especially with reference to those who took an active part in the public life of the period. We owe to the diligent and painstaking labors of scholars and students the information that has come to light on the roles played by such men as Mazzei, Vigo, Father Chino, Beltrami, and Busti. Doubtless, further researches will illustrate more fully the parts these and other Italians played in American life.

However, little or nothing is known concerning a larger number of Italians who settled in America in the eighteenth century, who in various ways also contributed to the life of the community in which they settled. The information on this group of Italians is so scarce that the following notes will, it is hoped, prove of general interest. It must be remembered, however, that in the eighteenth century, the number of Italians who crossed the Atlantic was very small. For example, in 1790, in New York and Philadelphia, which were the largest cities of America with a population of 33,131 and 28,522 inhabitants respectively, there were only about twenty Italians in the former and not more than eight in the latter city listed in the directories of the period.

An Italian traveller who left a two-volume record of his voyage in the United States immediately after the Revolution was Count Luigi Castiglioni, a Milanese patrician, Chevalier of the Order of St. Stephen, and a member of the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia. In his work Count Castiglioni devotes a whole chapter to his visit to Pennsylvania, discussing his trip from Philadelphia to Bethlehem, the location, early settlements, and the

1 Luigi Castiglioni (1757-1832). Viaggio negli Stati Uniti dell'America settentrionale fatto negli anni 1785, 1786, e 1787. Con alcune osservazioni sui vegetabili più utili di quel paese (Milan, Giuseppe Marelli, 1790, 2 vols.).
new constitution of Pennsylvania, the city of Philadelphia, and finally the inhabitants of the Quaker State and their commerce. As a renowned naturalist, Count Castiglioni was intensely interested in the plant and animal life of the states visited, so that a good portion of the second volume is devoted to his observations on the most useful plants of the United States.

Count Paolo Andreani, a physicist and naturalist, who attracted wide publicity in 1784 for having been the first to ascend a balloon in his garden in Milan, came to America in 1790. It was Count Andreani who presented to President Washington a copy of Alfieri's "Ode to America." Philip Mazzei, the life-long friend of Jefferson, introduced Andreani to James Madison. In 1792, Count Andreani was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society. 2

Dr. Scandella, another Italian traveller, visited the United States in 1797. The only information available concerning him is that contained in the Journal of Mr. H. B. Latrobe, the architect of the United States Capitol, wherein Dr. Scandella is described as a "Venetian gentleman of the most amiable, fascinating manner, and of the best information upon almost every scientific subject, who speaks English perfectly and who has now travelled through all the country between the St. Lawrence and the James River." About two decades later Dr. Scandella was also made a member of the American Philosophical Society. 3

During the summer of 1765, Joseph Batacchi, who had recently arrived in Philadelphia, inserted an advertisement in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 4 which he addressed "to the public," stating that he was "an Italian surgeon, regularly bred to surgery in the best hospitals of Italy," and that he had practiced that "noble and useful art in different parts of Europe with great success." A desire to see the American world, according to his own statement, led him to Philadelphia, where he hoped to have frequent opportunities "of relieving those whom sickness or accident hath rendered objects of distress." Besides the usual branches of surgery, "in which long practice and experience hath confirmed his studies," he pro-

3 G. Schiavo, Italians in America, p. 136.
4 Pennsylvania Gazette, August 29, 1765.
posed to practice physic in its various branches. Dr. Batacchi also announced that he “removed” the scurvy, and all malignant humours from the gums so destructive to the teeth, “and the real cause of the tooth-ache.” He stated also that he cleaned and polished “the most foul” teeth, “so as to render them white and fair.” Dr. Batacchi, who offered his services gratis to the poor, held consultations at his lodgings, at Mr. Steel’s, in Southwalk, “the second door below Dr. Clarkson’s,” and if necessary he volunteered to wait “on gentlemen or others at their houses.”

Several Italian musicians played in concerts in Philadelphia. In 1757, John Palma gave what is thought to be the first concert in that city, and about a decade later Francis Alberti appeared in concerts. At about the same time Signor Tioli enjoyed considerable reputation in Philadelphia for his ability to play dance pieces on the tambourin.⁵

Signor Gaetano Franceschini, an orchestral conductor of considerable reputation, and director of concerts in Philadelphia and Charleston, S. C., from 1774 to 1783, played the harpsichord, the violin and the “viol d’amour.” At the close of the season of the year 1783, he was honored with a concert held at Loosley’s Brooklyn Hall, New York.⁶ Filippo Traetta, the son of the famous composer Tommaso (1727-1779), came to America in 1799. He lived in Boston and in several southern cities through which he travelled as manager of several theatrical companies. Finally, he settled in Philadelphia where he founded an American Conservatorio, which is credited to be the first conservatory of music in America. Among his works were Washington’s Death March; Rudiments of the Art of Singing; An Introduction to the Art and Science of Music; Jerusalem in Affliction; and Daughter of Zion. He also composed the opera The Venetian Maskers and contributed to the Solfeggio Americano.⁷

Though no record of his appearance in Pennsylvania is available, a concert by Filippo Trisobio was held in Baltimore in 1796. An advertisement in a local paper addressed “To the lovers of music” announced that Signor Trisobio, an Italian professor of vocal music, who had had the honor to be employed for three years in the Royal Chapel by the Queen of Portugal,

⁵G. Schiavo, Italians in America, pp. 231, 232.
⁷G. Schiavo, Italians in America, 234.
and who had also sung in London during the preceding winter before all the royal family, being then in that town where he was staying but for a few days, had determined to give a concert of vocal and instrumental music on Saturday, July 9. Therefore, he respectfully informed all the ladies and gentlemen of Baltimore that he planned to execute several serious and comical Italian songs, composed by himself, and other pieces of the most celebrated Italian authors. He also proposed to sing some serious and comical French and English songs. Between the songs, according to the announcement, selected pieces of instrumental music were executed by the best performers of Baltimore. Signor Trisobio was also the author of a book on singing which was entitled *Scuola del Canto*, which he hoped would have the same reception in America as it had received in London and Italy.⁸

Perhaps the greatest Italian artist to come to America in the eighteenth century was Giuseppe Ceracchi.⁹ Born in 1751 in Rome where he studied under Canova, he emigrated, in 1773, to London and to Paris, where he became involved in the French Revolution. The Emmet Collection of the New York Public Library contains an unpublished letter of Ceracchi, dated Vienna, August 25, 1792, addressed to the Honorable George Clinton, Governor of New York, in which the writer asked for a copy of Clinton's bust in clay so that he could introduce it in *basso-rilievo* in the National Monument. In his letter Ceracchi invited the governor to use his influence to further the project. Shortly afterward he came to America and lived in Philadelphia, where he continued his efforts to carry out his plans for the monument.¹⁰

The following heretofore unpublished letter, addressed to Rufus King,¹¹ shows how persistent his efforts were:

Philadelphia, February 9, 1795.

Sir

I take the Liberty to send you a Description of a Monument, proposed to be erected in Marble in honor of the American Revolution, of which I shall be happy to be the Instrument.

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⁸ *Federal Gazette*, July 7, 1796.
¹⁰ Emmet Collection, No. 14405.
¹¹ Rufus King (1755-1827). Federalist statesman and minister to Great Britain. United States senator (1789-1795). Appointed Minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain (1796-1803).
I have been advised by friends to the plan, to try the effect of a voluntary subscription, towards procuring the necessary funds and for this purpose to endeavour to obtain the patronage of respectable individuals friends to the fine Arts, whose recommendation (sic) would be likely to favour its progress in the several states.

May I hope that you will do me the honor to afford your Countenance to the Plan, and that you will for this purpose be present at a Meeting on Saturday the 14th Instant at Twelve O'Clock in the forenoon at my house in Second Street between Pine and Cedar Streets No. 213.

With great respect I have the honor to be Sir
Your Most obed. Servant
(Signed) Jos: Ceracchi

For
Mr. Rufus King¹²

However, his ambitious design for a monument to Liberty, although also backed by President Washington, failed to materialize, because of a lack of a sufficient number of public subscribers. Ceracchi, therefore, devoted himself to the making of busts of distinguished Americans of the period: Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Paul Jones, John Clay, Clinton, and others. In 1801, he returned to France where he was beheaded for plotting against Napoleon.

In education James Latta seems to have achieved success.¹³ In 1775, he opened a school in Philadelphia in the neighborhood of Chestnut Level for the teaching of the Latin and Greek languages "in as expeditious a manner as is consistent with the greatest accuracy." Special attention was given to the pronunciation of "our own language with grace and propriety." Arithmetic and geography were also taught. In his advertisement, Signor Latta stressed the fact that "the situation is remarkably healthy, amidst a sober, industrious people." Parents and guardians were assured that strict attention was paid to the morals of the children sent there, "and everything done that may merit the approbation and encouragement of the public." Students were boarded at the rate

¹² MS. in New York Historical Society.
¹³ Previous to this time, Latta, according to an unpublished manuscript in the New York Historical Society, probably operated a general store.
of ten pounds per annum, in addition to the “usual rate” of tuition.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1774, Pietro Sodi, who was described in an advertisement published in the \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette},\textsuperscript{15} as the first dancing master of the Opera in Paris and London, gave a grand concert and ball in Philadelphia. After the concert, according to the advertisement, Signor Sodi danced a louvre and a minuet with Signorina Sodi; which was followed by a new Philadelphia cotillion composed by Signorina Sodi.

Signor Sodi must have met with instant success, for in an advertisement published three weeks later he informed the ladies and gentlemen of Philadelphia that he had opened his dancing school in Lodge Alley, where he attended every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in the morning upon young gentlemen; and in the afternoons upon young ladies. Signor Sodi stated that he had intended to open the school in September, but that he had been obliged “at the desire of a number of ladies and gentlemen” to open it immediately.\textsuperscript{16}

Italians in Philadelphia were engaged in the brewing, liquor and wine business. In 1768, John Gualdo, a resident of Philadelphia, who described himself as a wine merchant from Italy but lately from London, informed the public in general, “and his friends in particular,” through the public press, that he had begun to brew spruce and sassafras beer in the house of the late Mr. Evan Morgan in Water Street. Signor Gualdo intended to sell it “very cheap” for ready money, or short credit, viz., at thirty shillings per barrel, three shillings per dozen, and fourpence per bottle, barrels and bottles excluded. In his advertisement he also announced that “very soon” he expected to begin to brew six-penny and Bristol beer, the former at twenty-eight shillings per barrel, the latter at twelve shillings per dozen. He “engaged” that his beer would keep longer than any brewed “in this town.” He also distilled all kinds of cordials which he sold “very reasonable.” A versatile man, Signor Gualdo also adapted and composed music for all kinds of instruments, had music transcribed, and taught the violin, German flute, guitar, and mandolin.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette}, March 15, 1775.
\textsuperscript{15} June 15, 1774.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette}, July 6, 1774.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette}, May 5, 1768.
Vincent M. Pelosi, owner of the Pennsylvania Coffee House, sold wholesale and retail a variety of liquors at his wine cellar under the Coffee House. He established the vogue of holding concerts *al fresco*, as was the custom in European cities.

An Italian was engaged in importing dry-goods from Europe. After the Revolution, Giuseppe Mussi, merchant of Philadelphia, imported from Amsterdam and sold a large assortment of "fine and coarse cloths" by the package or piece. His store was located in Chestnut, near Third Street, opposite the Bank. According to Count Castiglioni, Signor Mussi was a young Milanese of pleasant manners, who had been engaged in business in Philadelphia for several years prior to his arrival there. Signor Mussi accompanied Count Castiglioni in July 1786 on his trip to certain cities in Pennsylvania.

In 1772, Anthony Vitalli, sausage maker, who stated that he had recently arrived from Italy, sold at his shop in Fourth Street, between Walnut and Spruce Streets, Philadelphia, and at his stall on every market day, opposite the sign of the Indian King, all sorts of sausages, as they were made at Milan, Venice, Bologna, and Naples, "and all over Italy, fit to eat raw, broiled, fried and boiled, and others to make rich sauces." In his advertisement, Signor Vitalli stated that as he was a stranger in the city, he would be much obliged to the gentlemen and ladies who would please favor him with their custom, and that he would use "his utmost endeavours to please them, having served his time to this trade, in which he had obtained a sufficient proficiency." By 1778, Signor Vitalli had anglicized his name to Vitaly, and had moved his business from Market Street, to the east side of Third Street, a few doors above Walnut Street, where he also sold sugars, Baccaba snuff, etc. from Martinique. He expressed the hope that his "former obliging customers" would continue their favors as in the past.

An account of the cultivation and uses of Indian corn in Italy

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18 The 1791 Philadelphia Directory listed Mr. Pelosi as a merchant with business at the Exchange Coffee House, No. 1 No. Water Street.
19 Pennsylvania Packet and General Advertiser, June 16, 1787.
23 Ibid., July 14, 18, 30, 1778.
by "a respectable physician of that country now [July 1798] in this city [Philadelphia]" was published in the *Weekly Magazine*.

The physician, described as "a native of the provinces of the late state of Venice," discussed the best type of soils for the cultivation of Indian corn. He stated that in Italy after the rye was "cut down," the ground was plowed and Indian corn cultivated, so that the ground yielded two crops a year. This fact was stressed because the physician thought that the same practice could be followed in many parts of the United States with considerable advantage. The writer explained that Indian corn was used as fodder and for making polenta which, he claimed, was preferred to bread.

The Directory of Philadelphia for 1791 lists the following Italian residents of the city:

- Alberti, George, doctor of physic, 59 Mulberry Street
- Allibone, Thomas, flour merchant, 101 Pine Street
- Allibone, William, captain, chief warden of the port, 21 Pine Street
- Bantelo, George, butcher, Spring Garden
- Benno, William, laborer, 95 Story Street
- Ceronio, Stephen, merchant, 1 Penn Street
- Croto, John, laborer, 5 No. Seventh Street
- Ganno, George, cordwainer, 412 Second Street

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that though the number of Italians in Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century was small, it included distinguished travellers, scientists, physicians, musicians, artists, and business men.