

Italian history tour makes stop in Lake Village

Submitted by
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An Italian American tour sponsored by Anniversary Books began the month of October with Paolo Battaglia, author of the research project "Finding LaMerica" who developed the concept.

Battaglia, traveling with Daniela Garutti, historian, social media reporter and filmmaker, and Giulia Frigieri, photographer, anthropologist and journalist, began their trip from Italy to Ellis Island to find Italy in small town USA. They picked some of the small towns and a few large ones with strong Italians

roots from "California to the New York Island, from the Redwood Forest to the Gulf Stream Waters" and will go wandering from one to the other trying to understand some of the reasons why so many of their countrymen, once landed on American shores in Ellis Island, decided to travel farther west (or north, or south) from their homeland, on the trail of those possibilities and opportunities the U.S.A. offered them.

During the trip of 6000 miles and 15 or more small towns as planned found them arriving October 13th during

that week's storm at the home of Tony and Libby Borgognoni and continued on the 14th to Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church and Italian Museum in Lake Village ending back at the Borgognoni home.

The Borgognonis called in some of the descendants (who could get away from the storm) of the 540 Italians who arrived in 1895 to farm cotton for Austin Corbin on Sunnyside Plantation with contracts in hand for the purchase of 12 and ½ acre plots which they would own outright after 20 years of working the crops and paying their

debts. Hundreds more came in subsequent years. The contracts were not honored, they were held in a state of peonage, suffered many trials and hardships and lost countless lives from malaria and yellow fever. Many left in 1898 for Tontitown, AR, Rosati and Jamestown, MO, Shelby, MS, and many other places across the United States to start new lives as they could leave. Others bought part of Sunnyside Plantation when the Italians left and the plantation became insolvent. These Italians have prospered in the farming of cotton as well as

other crops and in finding other professional careers. They have maintained and hold to traditions handed down by their forebears.

Those gathered shared their memories with the travelers. Through this dialogue, through the words, food, photographs, family and town traditions, the Italian reporters would like to see how much of Italy there is left in those communities.

The tour will generate a multimedia travel blog with pictures and footage reporting each stop and an archive of video interviews, digitized documents and pictures, articles, photographs and footage documenting every town touched by the tour.

Their goal as Italian writers, photographers and videographers is to try and reconnect with such an important part Italy: those who emigrated to the U.S. A. and their descendants. These people have been forgotten for too long in the homeland of their ancestors and by sharing experiences and memories, they hope to show today's Italians what it feels and means to be today's

Italian Americans.

In 2015, the production of a documentary, an exhibition and a publication will bring the story back to the same places where it originated.

Italian descendants who were participants in Lake Village were: Tony and Libby Borgognoni, Catherine Grassi Haverkamp, Mary Pieroni McIntosh, Vincent and Randy Pieroni, Jerry Mazzanti, Gloria Mazzanti Morara, Virginia Aureli Reginelli, Frank Casali, Santo Olivi, Regina DeAngeli Moyer, Lena Floriani Sampaolesi, Penny Catalani Winsett, Tim Sampaolesi, Sandra Mazzanti, Steve Ferri, Butch Sabbatini and Mike Jr. Pesaresi.

The tour group was treated to an Italian dinner that Monday night made by Regina's Pasta shop and Libby Borgognoni.

Paolo, Daniela and Giulia exclaimed that they had never witnessed nor were they used to the weather they encountered (a tornado at Vicksburg, torrential rain and hail) causing them to stop several places on their way from New Orleans to Lake Village.



Giulia Frigieri, Daniela Garutti and Paolo Battaglia stop in Lake Village during an Italian American history tour.