



La Notizia Italiana

POINTers in Person

Chapter #15, Northern New Jersey: Lou Costello Chapter

August 2006



Lou Costello

aka: Louis Francis Cristillo

Born: March 6, 1906
Paterson, New Jersey

Died: March 3, 1959
East Los Angeles, California

Paterson's Favorite Son



Chapter #15 Re-Named

Northern New Jersey Chapter #15 is now

THE LOU COSTELLO CHAPTER

POINTers in Person Chapter #15, Northern New Jersey, will now be known as "The Lou Costello Chapter."

At the May meeting, the members decided to honor the late comedian on the occasion of what would have been his 100th birthday, by naming their chapter after Paterson's Favorite Son.

Lou Costello, the man who would ask the eternal question, "Who's on First?", was born as Louis Francis Cristillo on March 6, 1906. He grew up in his hometown of Paterson, New Jersey, which he *(continued on p.2)*



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mentioned in virtually every movie and television episode that he appeared in. After high school, he had been bitten by the entertainer bug, and worked as a carpenter at both MGM and Warner Brothers movie studios in an attempt to break into show business. He appeared as an extra in several films from 1926 through 1928, most noticeably in Laurel and Hardy's "Battle of the Century" - the most celebrated 'pie fight' movie ever filmed. After several years of no success, Lou left Hollywood, and began working the vaudeville circuit on his way back home to Paterson, New Jersey.

However, the desire to entertain grew stronger, and Lou started working in vaudeville, gaining valuable experience over the years, learning comedic timing, character, pacing, and how to present a clean show in the bawdy venues. As did most comedians of the time, he typically worked with a straight man - someone who would set up the jokes, and work to rein in the comedian when he was going too far, or starting to lose the audience. According to Lou, one night in 1931 his normal straight man had taken ill -- he asked the theater manager, who also worked as a straight man, to fill in. Bud Abbott agreed, creating the birth of one of the greatest comedy teams of all time.

Abbott & Costello mastered the straightman/clown relationship, creating a magical chemistry that would take them

from the burlesque stage to radio, to Broadway, to film...and finally, to television.



Their official teaming was in 1936. Although they soon became a popular booking commodity on the burlesque wheel, it wasn't until they appeared on the KATE SMITH RADIO HOUR - performing what would soon become known as their classic signature skit, "Who's On First" - that Bud Abbott & Lou Costello were hurled to stardom, and to Hollywood.

Signed to Universal in 1939, Abbott & Costello reigned as the new "Kings Of Comedy," producing a solid decade of box office hits including "Buck Privates," "In The Navy," "Hold That Ghost," "Naughty Nineties," "Time Of Their Lives," and their 1948 monster classic "Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein." Today, that film remains a favorite among fans, as well as an international cult masterpiece.

Bud and Lou's style and brand of comedy helped lift the morale of the American public during World War II. Eager to lend their time to the war effort, the boys funded (out of pocket) a cross-country tour to help raise much-needed funds on behalf of the War Bond Drive. Everywhere they appeared there were sellout audiences. They were honored on the steps of New York's City Hall by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia for raising a record-breaking \$89 million in just three days

As the country eased into the



1950's, Abbott & Costello tackled a new medium: television. Comedy historians have glossed over their contribution, but in fact, Bud and Lou became early television pioneers along with the likes of Phil Silvers, Milton Berle, Jack Benny, and Lucille Ball & Desi Arnaz. THE ABBOTT & COSTELLO SHOW debuted in 1952, running for two seasons on CBS. Today, the show is seeing a revival with the 1993 and 1994 episode video releases from Shanachie Entertainment and in a 1994 Columbia House infomercial.



was further heightened when, unbeknownst to both men, Steve Allen announced the induction of Abbott & Costello and their Gold Record of “Who’s On First” into the world-famous BASEBALL HALL OF FAME in Cooperstown, New York. (Many are not aware that Abbott & Costello are the first non-baseball-playing celebrities ever to be inducted into the Hall of Fame!)

Lou Costello passed away in 1959, and Bud Abbott in 1974 - but today, their comedy continues to generate new legions of fans around the world. Their clean style of comedy, born on the burlesque stage over 50 years ago, continues to find a ready and accepting audience in today’s marketplace.



team by enlisting them as part of their “Comedy Legends” commemorative stamp booklet.

In 1991, the United States Postal Service paid homage to the

To further display their burlesque wares on the live stage, which was always home to the boys, NBC welcomed Abbott & Costello to its new hour-long live variety show THE COLGATE COMEDY HOUR as guest hosts. Debuting on January 7, 1951, Bud and Lou boosted the show’s ratings with their presentations of the Abbott & Costello staple routines, including “Who’s On First.”

In 1956, one year before the release of their last film together, “Dance With Me Henry,” and their official (and amicable) split, Bud and Lou were brought together on THE STEVE ALLEN SHOW before a live nationwide viewing audience. The emotion



POINTers Visit Museum

by ALBERT MAROTTA (#1018)

A small group from the Northern New Jersey Chapter of POINTers In Person made an excursion on Saturday, April 1, 2006 to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in Manhattan. Those in attendance were Maryanne Graham (#3654), Lucille Kent (#3038), Al Marotta (#1018) and his wife, Michele, Carolyn McNamara (#4772) and her husband Jack, Phil Oddo (#774), his wife and brother, and Vivian Spae. Four guided tours were offered and we each went on a tour or combination of tours which interested us.

One tour, "Getting By: Immigrants Weathering Hard Times", featured two re-created apartments. A dark, steep and narrow staircase led to these apartments. A German-Jewish family called a small, spare and dark apartment home in 1874. Meanwhile, across the hall was the much brighter, and more daintily decorated apartment of the Sicilian-Catholic Baldizzi family from 1935. This apartment seemed more comfortable, with lacy curtains, built-in shelving, etc. Unlike their German neighbors sixty years before (who had to use an outside bathroom), this Italian family had cold, running water in their apartment and a toilet in the hall which they shared with other tenants. The Baldizzi family apartment was recreated to appear as it might have during the last days of their stay, when the family was packing up to leave the building after receiving an eviction notice. Apparently, the landlord was



closing the building rather than making legally mandated improvements. Their stories were fascinating. This family lived in nearby "Little Italy" before moving to the Lower East Side around 1928. The Bonofiglios and the Raspizzios, also lived in this tenement. After their eviction, these families moved to another tenement in the Lower East Side and finally to Brooklyn. Visitors were reminded that social networks of support were crucial for these poor tenants.

Another tour, "Piecing it Together: Immigrants in the Garment Industry", featured two re-created apartments. A Polish family had lived in an apartment which doubled as a garment shop in 1897. A Lithuanian family lived in a nearby apartment in 1918. This tour emphasized the labor of those immigrants who worked in and helped reform the garment industry in the 20th century.

"The Confino Family Apartment" was an interactive tour of a re-created apartment

which had belonged to the Sephardic Jewish Confino family in 1916. A visitor who takes this tour plays the role of a newly arrived immigrant and discusses life on the Lower East Side with an actress portraying 14-year old Victoria Confino.

There is also a walking tour of the Lower East Side and "Kitchen Conversations", a post-tour program where visitors and staff discuss immigration-related issues raised by the museum.

The Visitor's Center is located across the street from the museum. This is the place to purchase tour tickets, and gift items, which include an extensive book collection about the history of the area, and to watch a video on immigration to the Lower East Side.

As we walked, passing through "Little Italy", Chinatown, and the Bowery and up Grand Street to the Lower East Side, we could still experience vibrant immigrant communities. This can especially be experienced on Sun-

days, when the Jewish population and outdoor markets greatly enliven the area. After our tours, a few of us decided to eat at a restaurant in nearby “Little Italy”.

On our way home, my wife and I walked at a more leisurely pace through “Little Italy”, down Mulberry Street. We saw St. Patrick’s Old Cathedral, which was established in 1809 as New York’s first Roman Catholic Cathedral. Anthony Trapani, a wealthy merchant from Meta, Italy, was a generous contributor to its construction. He was also the first person to obtain citizenship through the naturalization process as prescribed in the U.S. Constitution. We also toured the Church of St. Anthony of Padua, which was established in 1858 as New York’s oldest Italian national parish. This Franciscan-run parish is on Sullivan Street, near Washington Square. Finally, around the corner, we visited the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii. This beautiful church was organized in 1892 by the Scalabrini Fathers (Missionaries of St. Charles), who a few years before established the St. Raphael Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants. Mother Cabrini worshipped here.

There were 1,400 Italians living in New York City in 1860 and by 1920, there were nearly 400,000. They began to settle in what became known as “Little Italy”. There were at least five Little Italys in Manhattan. The earliest was located between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges (presently Chinatown) and the present “Little Italy”. The largest was in East Harlem. However, although bor-



dering the area, Italians never comprised more than 10% of the population of the Lower East Side. Grand Street was the first place my paternal grandfather lived, after he left the Province of Salerno in 1903. This street runs through both neighborhoods. In the 1930s, Mayor F. La Guardia had hundreds of tenements in the area demolished in order to clear the slums. This sharply reduced new immigration and the neighborhood failed to repopulate itself. Also, buildings were destroyed to make entrances to the Williamsburg Bridge.

The Lower East Side is still known as an area constantly changing and for its unpredictability. A portion of the Lower East Side was placed on the NY State and National Registers of Historic Places in 2000. Yet, the historic First Roumanian –American Synagogue was recently demolished after a fire in 2005 caused a partial roof collapse. Now New York’s oldest Orthodox-German-Jewish Congregation is no more. The Tenement Museum desires to create a new city-designated historic district on the streets around the museum, but this is strongly op-

posed by those seeking new development. Will the poor be able to afford to live here anymore?

The Tenement Museum Founders Circle Celebration held an event which took place in February 2006 and focused on Italy. Members of the Baldizzi and Bonofiglio families and their descendants were present. This reminded everyone about their roots in the U.S. The neighborhood is changing fast. New luxury condominium developments have begun to arrive. A new 16-story luxury hotel and a 23-story residential tower are being built. Also a 16-story trapezoidal tower is near completion.

If anyone who visits New York City wants to experience how our immigrant ancestors truly lived, I highly recommend this authentic museum. Find more information about the Tenement Museum at www.tenement.org.



POINTers in Person



The POINTers In Person program, was founded in 1992. Our group, Chapter 15, was organized in September 1996. The 21 nationwide chapters of POINTers In Person provide genealogical researchers an opportunity to meet socially, and learn and share information pertinent to Italian research. Each chapter is independent and sets forth its own procedures and schedules of events.

Calendar

November, 2006

Chapter 15 Meeting:
Elmwood Park Municipal Building

February, 2007

Chapter 15 Meeting:
Elmwood Park Municipal Building

POINT National Conference:

October 6-8 2006
Hacienda Hotel, El Segundo, CA

Italian-American Museum

www.italianamericanmuseum.org

Painting Up the Town:

The Art of Armondo Dellasanta

July 18 - September 22, 2006
28 East 44th Street, NYC
17th Floor

Summer Hours:

Monday - Thursday: 10AM - 5PM
(closed Fridays July & August)

We cordially invite Italian genealogical researchers to attend our quarterly meetings. Membership is open to all. In addition to regular meetings our group takes occasional field trips to genealogical research sites in the New Jersey/New York area.

Membership in our parent organization, POINT, is not a prerequisite to joining our group; however, it is highly recommended. There are many advantages to joining POINT. As a member you will receive POINTers, a quarterly Italian genealogy magazine containing articles about Italian research and personal accounts of other researchers' successes and family stories. In addition, your surnames of interest will be included in an annually published world-wide directory of over 25,000 surnames.

POINT

National Conference -2006

POINT (Pursuing Our Italian Names Together) -THE American Network of Italian Genealogy will hold its National Conference - 2006 at the Hacienda Hotel in El Segundo, California, October 6 - 8, 2006.

Friday afternoon and evening (October 6) will be registration and a get acquainted social gathering with appetizers and beverages.

Saturday (October 7) and Sunday (October 8) will be two intensive days of lectures on Italian genealogy (both for **beginners** and for those **more advanced** in their search for their **Italian family roots**) and other topics of interest to the Italian community. There will be a final session where all the speakers will be present and to whom questions can be addressed.

The registration fee is \$185 and includes the costs of all workshops and lectures, the registration/get-

acquainted social gathering, the gala dinner, the luncheon, snacks during the day, and a syllabus with conference speaker notes and other items of interest. It does not include the cost of lodging and other meals.

To request a **Registration Form**, to participate in the conference as an **exhibitor** or a **vendor**, or for answers to **questions about the conference**, write to:

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La Notizia Italiana

Volume 5, Number 3

The Lou Costello Chapter

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