Six Letters:
Translating the Luigi & Caterina Prestini Letters of 1919

Part One of Two.

A Group Project
by Wally Lee Parker, Paul Erickson, John & Angela Barbieri, and Christina Percoco

For some time the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society has had in its possession six letters exchanged between Clayton’s Caterina and Luigi Prestini shortly before Luigi’s death in early 1919. Following is the story of the letters’ donation to our group, of their translation from cursive Italian into English, and what they have to tell us about the parents of Battista and Leno Prestini.

... the family ...

On the 19th of May, 1906, Luigi Prestini, formerly of the town of Besano in the extreme north of Italy, arrived in New York aboard the steamship La Savoie — homeport, Havre, France. He’d left his wife, Caterina, and two young sons, Battista, not yet two, and Lino (Leno), age three months, back in Italy. It’s believed he came at the behest of friends and family, one of whom, his brother Ferdinando, had been living in Spokane since 1899 — as indicated by the 1900 Federal Census. Luigi’s intended destination was entered in the La Savoie’s “ships list” as the town of Barre — located in an area of the State of Vermont renowned for the quality of its architectural granite. His contact at Barre
was identified as Andreo Celti, a brother-in-law. And it’s believed that soon after setting in, he began working in the local stonecutting industry.

Born in Besano on September 17th, 1880, Luigi was just 26 years old when he landed in America. Reportedly over half the men immigrating from Italy in those years intended to eventually return to the old country. Their reason for coming to the United States was economic — to earn money for the families still in Italy, or to save enough to start a business or buy land and returning home. If that were ever Luigi’s plan, it appears to have changed by the 2nd of May, 1908. On that date the S. S. La Providence arrived in New York’s harbor with Caterina and the two boys on board.

A memoir written in later life by Luigi’s son, Battista, states that the family left Barre in 1911, and, crossing the United States by train, relocated to a rural settlement of largely Italian families just west of the town of Buckeye in the northern part of Washington State’s Spokane County — where Luigi’s brother, Ferdinando, had a small farm. Luigi purchased 10 acres of land from his brother — reportedly with the intent of clearing it for farming. But within a year or two Luigi obtained work at the Washington, Brick, Lime & Sewer Pipe Company’s terracotta plant at Clayton. He then moved whatever the family owned onto a wagon, and drove the team north to the — at that time — growing town.

At first they lived in company housing. Then purchased an old house on the town’s east side. And that’s where they were living when, very early in 1919, Luigi became critically ill.

...the illness...

According to Battista’s memoir — the original of which can be found in the Stevens County Historical Society’s archive at Colville — his father was suffering from “a displaced stomach, so doctors tried a rest home cure. But result no good.”

Battista’s rough notes then add, “So doctor decided on an operation. Operation success, but father placed in ward with patients with broken legs and arms and nine days later died of pneumonia.”

The term “displaced stomach” identifies a very real and often critical condition known in the literature as gastroptosis.

One of the simpler explanations of this condition comes from the August, 1919, issue of The Workmen’s Compensation Law Journal, which recorded as part of a “petition to reopen” a previously closed case, a gentleman identified as Doctor Witherrill testified that upon examining the claimant in question he discovered the “condition of gastroptosis, or an enlargement and downward displacement of the stomach.”

The details suggesting such a diagnosis were explained by Doctor A. M. Calloway in an article appearing in the January 15, 1916, issue of The Therapeutic Gazette. The doctor stated, in regards to an external examination of a patient with gastroptosis, “Inspection will reveal a more or less diffused bulging; the thinner the individual, the more marked the bulging. In marked gastroptosis a groove may be seen extending from the navel to the ribs, which represents the lower curvature.”

Regarding tests to confirm the diagnosis, Doctor Calloway continued, “The most valuable of all methods in determining the position of the stomach is by the use of the x-rays. Having had the patient swallow a pint of milk containing an ounce of bismuth subcarbonate (a radiopaque contrast medium) he is subjected to an examination with the fluoroscope or a radiograph is made.”

It was noted in most of the early literature that thinner people — in 1919 that group being composed primarily of women — were more likely to show the harsher symptoms of the disorder. It was stated that in severe cases the displacement often arose from an injury to the visceral elements that provided suspension to the stomach. As for what might cause such injury, pregnancy was often cited, and, for
both men and women, heavy lifting was mentioned.

Italian men of that period were often both smaller in stature and thinner in mass than the average. And Luigi’s work in the stone quarries of Vermont, as well as Clayton’s terracotta works, would have clearly involved quite a bit of heavy lifting.

The January 26, 1901, edition of the Philadelphia Medical Journal states that “pain, indigestion and vomiting, with chlorosis (also known as “green sickness”) — chlorosis being an obsolete term currently identified with hypochromic anemia), headache, palpitation, nervousness, etc., form the common group of symptoms.”

As for treatment, the Philadelphia Medical Journal states “rest in bed, with massage and proper diet, will relieve many of these patients of their distressing symptoms. If the dilation is great, lavage (stomach pumping) and even reefing may be required.” The noted “reefing” is a surgical procedure which reduces the size of the stomach.

As for what to do if none of the above works, the medical journal suggested gastropexy, which it defines as a surgical procedure that involves “fixation of a displaced stomach in its normal position. This is usually accomplished by the coaptation (fitting together) and fixation of a considerable area of the stomach wall to the anterior parietes (indicating the walls of a cavity or hollow organ). In some cases it may be possible to reef (fold over and suture to reduce the size) the lesser omentum (the membrane covering the abdominal organs). It is usually necessary to fix the colon and other displaced organs at the same time.”

Sanatorium, Sanitarium, or Sanitorium?

At the time of Luigi’s death, the preferred term for a private facility intended for the treatment of and recovery from accident or disease was sanatorium — with sanitarium primarily used to indicate what would now be termed a health resort. Occasionally a third term, sanitaria, was used — but not favored. Nowadays, the word sanitarium is in general used for all. In this article, all quotes use whatever term was originally used in the source material. Otherwise we’ll use the word sanitarium, but in the modern sense.

The above seems to suggest that this, with its vast array of potential complications, would not be an easy surgery even by today’s standards. And that’s likely why the doctors began with the least invasive treatments — among them the “rest home cure” noted in Battista’s memoir.

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An ad (note spelling of sanitarium) found in The Genesee News (Genesee, Idaho), January 23, 1920.

In Search of Luigi Prestini’s Surgeon.

Besides her letter, the envelope posted by Caterina on February 21st, 1919, also contained the two scraps of paper reproduced above. There’s no evidence that these scraps were otherwise related to this particular letter, or were even original to this envelope. One of these scraps is a 4¼x 6 inch prescription form apparently signed by the physician listed at the top of the form — R. J. Kearns. Printing on the back of the form indicates that the prescription form itself originated at “Murtgroyd’s, Riverside Ave. and Post St., Spokane.” A drug store with that name existed at 731 West Riverside from 1905 until 1925. The other note was scribbled on the back of the upper part of a check deposit slip from Spokane’s Traders National Bank. Organized in 1885, this bank merged with the Spokane & Eastern Trust Company in 1914, assuming the latter’s name. The slip is 3½ inches wide, and the length remaining after the bottom was torn away is just over 4 inches.

Regarding the prescription form — translated from the cursive, it appears to read “3/17 — 1915, Rec’d from Mr. Louis (Luigi) Prestini the sum of $50.00 on acct.” The assumed writer, Doctor Robert J. Kearns, arrived in Spokane in 1904. A 1903 graduate of the Northwestern University Medical School of Chicago, Doctor Kearns appears to have spent his entire career in Spokane, passing in 1949. Regarding the note written by an unknown hand, it states “Dr. A. A. Matthews (spelling corrected), 7th floor, Paulson Bldg., Spokane.” The named doctor appears to be A. Aldridge Matthews, a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Baltimore. He arrived in Spokane in 1903 to intern at St. Luke’s Hospital, and remained for the rest of his career. The doctor published a number of medical papers, including at least several detailing surgeries of the stomach and abdomen. He died in 1940.

While it appears that Luigi may have been under Doctor Kearns’ care in the years prior to his surgery, we can’t state for certain whether Dr. Kearns — or Dr. Matthews for that matter — did in fact perform Luigi’s surgery. All the above remains coincidental and only speculative as regards the events of 1919.
1882. The first note of her so far located was the following from the October 21st, 1916, issue of the Colville Examiner.

“Miss Ella Meyerhoff, former matron of the Colville Sanitarium, is building a hospital at Kellogg, Idaho, where she had been a nurse for a number of years. The hospital is to be modern in every way, with Turkish baths and all equipment found in up-to-date hospitals.”

The above states that Miss Meyerhoff was a nurse, as well as a sanitarium “Matron.” While we might assume this meant she was a well trained, credentialed professional in the medical arts, we can’t state such with certainty since the standards of the time weren’t necessarily what we’re accustomed to.

Sources state that the Colville sanitarium was founded in 1905 by Doctor Lee B. Harvey. The facility was not an insignificant addition to the city, as Dr. Harvey’s obituary — copied from the January, 1917, issue of Northwest Medicine: Journal of the State Medical Associations of Oregon, Washing, Idaho, and Utah — suggests.

“Dr. L. B. Harvey, of Colville, Wash., died December 17, 1916, from acute nephritis. This was said to have been induced by exposure to cold weather in visiting a patient in an inaccessible part of the country. He was born in Montgomery Ala., in 1868. He graduated from Marion Simms Medical College, St. Louis, in 1890, and immediately began practice at Colville. Ten years ago he built the Colville Sanatorium, the first hospital north of Spokane. In years of practice he was the oldest physician in that part of the country.”

We do know that the Colville sanitarium continued on for at least a year after both Doctor Harvey and Miss Meyerhoff were gone.

What’s in a Name?

The Prestini family was part of America’s third great wave of European immigration. Beginning in 1890, this influx primarily consisted of newcomers from eastern and southern Europe. As in prior influxes, certain members of this wave were met with varying degrees of ethnic resentment by those who had come before.

One of the things that made Italians particularly vulnerable to such was that so many had come here primarily to earn money that they could then send to their impoverished families back in Italy. Though that wasn’t in itself particularly unusual, many of those doing so didn’t intend to stay in America. Since they didn’t intend to stay, they had little reason to learn English or otherwise attempt to integrate into American life. And this tended to make things more difficult for those hoping to melt in the new country. In fact, it’s estimated that between 30 to 50 percent of all Italians immigrating during this period eventually returned to Italy.

Apparently as part of their Americanization, Luigi Prestini became known as Louis/Lewis to his American acquaintances (the spelling varying from source to source; for example, the yearly Clayton school census forms show both spellings depending on year). And likewise, Luigi’s brother, Ferdinando, became Fred.

That said, it should be noted that the Prestini family maintained close written contact with friends and family left behind both in Italy and Barre, Vermont. And that, as borne out by the letters and postcards they received in reply, those responding continued to use the Italian versions of the family’s given names.

It should also be noted that Luigi’s last known signature — that at the end of his March 9, 1919, letter to Caterina — was in fact “Luigi.” Learning to read, write, and speak a new language is far more complex than simple word substitution. On the envelopes above, Caterina appears to be trying to spell “Louis,” but not quite managing. Then you realize that just below her attempts at “Louis” is the same sounding “Lewis,” correctly spelled. This suggests she may have been copying the sanitarium’s address from some other source where that source correctly spelled (“sanatorium” being an acceptable variant). But then, not being accustomed to spelling either version of her husband’s “new” name, she may have been attempting to spell such phonetically.

The former Lewis & Clark Sanatorium, West 2404 2nd Avenue, Spokane. Now an apartment building, this site is part of Spokane’s “Historic Browne’s Addition.”

Photo by Bowen Lee Parker.
gone. As for whether Miss Meyerhoff was successful in establishing a sanitarium at Kellogg, Idaho, we’ve no evidence. However, we do have evidence that Spokane’s Lewis & Clark Sanatorium was in operation at least as early as April of 1918. And we have reason to believe that Miss Meyerhoff did have an “interest” in that institution at that time — meaning that she was functioning as the manager. And we believe she continued in that role till the end of 1921 — at which time the long term lease the sanitarium held on its building expired, and the institution, at least under the Lewis & Clark name, appears to have dissolved.

By that time Ella B. Meyerhoff had had a new name: Mrs. James O’Brien. We believe she and her family stayed in Eastern Washington thereafter, with both her and her husband being buried at Spokane’s Holy Cross Cemetery — he having passed in 1944, she in 1966.

... in Browne’s Addition ...

The building the sanitarium occupied — which still stands as an attractive part of Spokane’s historic Browne’s Addition — has its own history. It was built for Annie and Reuben Weil, owners and managers of Spokane’s first department store. Sources indicate construction on the family residence was completed in 1905, the same year Reuben passed away. In 1910 Annie married Adolph Weil, brother of her first husband. The family apparently suffered a financial setback, so in 1912 the department store was sold, and around the same time (certainly before the spring of 1913) the Weil’s home was converted into the Palace Hotel. Annie operated the hotel until she and her family moved to California in February or March of 1917. After that — but prior to April, 1918 (as noted in the following paragraph) — the hotel became the Lewis & Clark Sanatorium.

An article in the April 28th, 1918, edition of the Spokesman-Review says the building was sold as an investment to mining engineer Arthur Booth for $25,000. The article noted that “the house is built of sandstone and brick, contains 18 rooms and is one of the most elaborately built in Browne’s Addition.” It also noted that the building was being “used by the Lewis & Clark sanatorium under a long lease.”

A clue to the building’s capacity as a sanitarium appears in an article in the October 13th, 1920, issue of the Spokane Chronicle where Mrs. (Ella B. Meyerhoff) O’Brien is quoted as saying, “We have 26 beds, but in an emergency can take care of more than 30 patients.”

... finding the Prestini letters ...

On August 17th, 2011, an article appeared in the Deer Park Tribune announcing that the local historical society, the C/DPHS, had acquired a significant cache of Prestini family artifacts. As society president Bill Sebright related, “At a Deer Park Historical Society meeting earlier this month, two envelopes containing a total of 19 letters were brought to our attention by Mr. James Battista.”

The letters translated in this article were contained in six stamped envelopes — though only one of the envelopes carries a legible time-stamp, and one other’s stamp doesn’t appear to have been canceled. Three of the envelopes were addressed to “Luigi” (as spelled) Prestini — with a fourth spelling the letter’s name with a capital L — while the last two continue with the Lewis & Clark Sanatorium address. Two others were addressed to Mrs. Caterina Prestini, Box 154, Clayton, Washington. All the letters inside the envelopes, with one exception, were dated; those dates beginning on February 21st, 1919, and ending on March 9th, 1919 — the last date being ten days before Luigi’s death. The one exception, enclosed with one of Caterina’s letters, but written by neither Caterina or Luigi, will be explained later.

As for the contents of the letters, all were written in Italian.

After several initial attempts at finding a translator, we found images of the handwritten letters online, our hope of finding out what was being said languished.

... translators found ...

Renewing our attempt, the society printed a scan of one of Caterina Prestini’s letters in the April, 2016, Mortarboard — along with a continuation of our ongoing plea for a translator. When prepping each issue of the Mortarboard, it’s standard procedure for the editor to send a proofing copy to the members of an editorial advisory group for corrections. In this case the proofing copy, sent in mid-March, was gone a day before the following came back from editorial group member Paul Erickson.

“I know a couple in New York who may be able to help translate the letters. Angela Barbieri has been in the United States for 40 plus years, but speaks with such a heavy Italian accent you’d swear she just got off the boat. Her husband, John, speaks Italian as well — they grew up in Italy. John and Angela still travel to Italy with some frequency.”

High-definition scans of the entire set of letters were forwarded to Paul. A few days later he wrote back, “I’ve learned from my New York/Italian friends, John and Angela, that John’s family is from northern Italy and Angela is from southern Italy. The Prestini dialect in the letters is from northern Italy, and John seems to easily read and understand the writing. I think they are having a good time with the project.”

“Nothing too earth shattering from the two letters I’ve read so far, but John does say that Leno’s artistic skills make sense, since northern Italy is known as a granite cutting area, etc. And that the blank scraps of paper (Caterina appears to have inserted (into the envelopes) may have been sent so Luigi had something to write a reply on.”

The last comment above was in response to the fact that Paul’s letter added, “The Barbieris also have an Italian niece (Christina Percoco) living in Philadelphia with a PhD in Languages, and they will let her look at their translations when they finish.”

On the first of April, John Barbieri forwarded translations of the first two letters — the envelopes and every scrap of paper inside, written on or not — had been scanned and made available to the volunteer translator.

Paul wrote, “John, a pharmacist, noted that Luigi had stomach surgery. He said that there were no antibiotics back then, so people could often die from something as simple as a follow-up infection or pneumonia. He also noted that Caterina was very supportive in her writing, and that her words and punctuation show she has above average skills.”

Further Reading Regarding the Prestini Family.

Coming to America: The Prestini Family & The Immigrant Experience.
Mortarboard #17, September, 2009, page 213 — Collected Newsletters, Volume 5.
and vocabulary. She writes ‘classic Italian’ — not a dialect — which suggests more education than the typical individual born in the mid-1880s in northern Italy. We believe that the typical person in northern Italy at that time had about a third grade education, and these four letters seem to be written by someone with more formal education (then that).

“Her letters — encouraging her hus-
band to stay positive and be strong — do not seem to be written by a depressed individual.

“Mr. Prestini’s letters, while using classic Italian words, are not well written — poor punctuation and misspellings.”

The translations of the Prestini letters will appear in the Mortarboard’s next issue.

—— to be continued ——

When Alexander Pope called and asked if I could send him a copy of the Deer Park High School class of 1919 photo — that being his mother’s — Lucy Hopkins — class, I told him “sure”. Lucy was the daughter of Brayton Hopkins, developer of the Hopkins addition on the north end of Deer Park in the early 1900s. Working for the city of Deer Park, I had easy access to the class photos from 1913 to 1958 that are on display in city hall. But after a quick check the next day, I found the 1919 class photo to be missing. I checked with Jack Lewis, who was responsible for saving all the class photos and getting them displayed, and he could not tell me why that photo was missing.

I did, however, find in the 2011 Set-
ters Edition from the Tri-County Tribune a listing of the Deer Park grads from that era (see figure #1 below), which I sent to Mr. Pope. He immediately called after receiving the list and asked if I had noticed that several members of the class of 1919 were also in the Class of 1920. Lucy Hopkins, who was listed in the class of 1919, was not. Off to the archives of the 1919 Deer Park Union I went.

Perusing the scans of the old Unions is tedious, not only because of the conditions of the papers when scanned, but also because they contained local, national, and world news, mixed in with local goings on about folks going to have dinner with their neigh-
bors, runaway horses, someone buying a new car, the winding down of World War I, and other fascinating looks into the times. I started at the beginning of the school year in 1918 and found nothing out of the normal until I hit the October 11, 1918, edition with a front page article written by H. H. Evans, the City Health Officer. He started his article with this: “A good deal has been published with regard to this outbreak of ‘Spanish Influenza’ in our army camps and cities, especially in the eastern part of the United States. This disease is spreading very rapidly. We are frequently asked, ‘What is the probability of an outbreak of this disease in the State of Washington?’ My answer is the disease is already here. It has not assumed epidemic form as yet. It can be prevented from assuming epidemic form only by the ear-
est, conscientious, and intelligent help of every citizen of the state. It is not deemed practical to establish quarantine for this dis-
ease.”

Mr. Evans then goes on to speak about taking preventative measures and avoid-
ning crowds to keep the disease under control. He also urges that “schools, churches, theatres, lodge rooms and places of public meet-
ings must be closed until further notice.”

In the Union’s November 15, 1918, issue, an announcement (see figure #2) from the Mayor and a note from the Health Officer was on the front page. This seemed to say the flu was being managed and if no further cases developed that public meeting places could be reopened. In the same issue the Clayton corre-
respondent wrote that the flu scare was over and that the quarantine was a needless measure in a place like Clayton, and had people realized the Spanish influenza was nothing but the grippe of 1889, not so many would have been scared to death.

In the November 22, 1918, issue (see figure #3), an article claims the flu ban was raised at noon, Tuesday, and that Deer Parkers are again breathing normally. The situation here is well in hand owing to the vigilance of those in charge of the epidemic. The November 29th issue states school reo-
pened Monday after being closed for six weeks, and any pupil showing signs of sick-
ness should stay home.

The first issue of December, 1918, is not available, but things apparently got worse as the December 13th edition speaks of 104 new cases in a second outbreak, 25 cases entering the hospital (school was closed and the Craw-
ford High School was used as a hospital), and commends the generous donations of food, bedding, and towels. It also reported that the death of Mr. Ray Neaville from the flu was a
no knowledge of any more new cases." Things obviously worsened in Deer Park as the headline for the December 27th issue (see figure #4 above) shows.

Over 200 cases and 4 deaths were reported in the December 27th issue, with an order for a strict quarantine to be put in place. Things must have improved by the next issue — January 3rd, 1919 — as H. H. Evans raised the quarantine but urged the public to use good judgement in dealing with any symptoms. According to the paper, "The high school has been fumigated and is in fine condition." Then, in the January 10th issue, the Union reported "The school board, at a meeting this morning, decided that schools would open on the 20th of January." The Clayton correspondent reported in the January 24th issue that school had been reopened with over 50 percent present on opening day, and there had been a steady increase up to the present time. School cancelled, football season cancelled, pool halls and the movie theater closed, only one person at a time allowed in the post office, all forced by the quarantine. Now I had an idea of what had happened to the Class of 1919 as far as their school year, but I found nothing looking into future issues of the Union concerning graduation. Since the Class of 1920 had some of the same classmates as 1919, I would have to guess that in order to graduate they were required to go to school again in that year. I was able to find there was a Senior Class Play, presented on May 15, 1919, in which Lucy Hopkins played the part of "The Witch" (see figure #5). Later, in the August 22, 1919, issue (see figure #6), I found Brayton (Brady) Hopkins' widow, Mabel, had moved her family into Spokane soon after — and that would explain why Lucy Hopkins wasn't in the class. But for the rest, the mystery continues. Maybe if we could just find that first issue of the December, 1918, Union.
... historical records acquisition ...

On April 19th last, the following missive regarding the donation of a large cache of important documents was forwarded to the Mortarboard by the historical society's vice-president, Pete Coffin. Pete wrote, “During the 2015 Settlers Picnic celebration, Kim Hickethier came up to the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society’s booth and asked me if the society would be interested in old business records. I said yes, we were, and she told me that she had quite a ‘heavy’ accumulation of such records and would bring a sample to the park. The records that she brought that day included daily sales lists for a store dated in the 1910s, and some of Deer Park attorney Olaf G. Follevaag’s records. We agreed that we would meet at a later date and load my truck with the remaining records which were located in a downtown building’s second floor.

“During the last Society meeting Marilyn Reilly told me that Kim had asked if I was still interested in picking up the records. That afternoon I contacted Kim and she asked if I could pick up the records that afternoon. I took my truck downtown, parked it on the street in front of Johnny Erickson’s old realty business location, and with Marilyn Reilly and Kim’s help began to pack up and carry the boxes and boxes of records down a very steep stair.

“After about an hour of heavy lifting and stair negotiation, all the dusty old business records were loaded in my truck. “The loaded truck was then stored in my pole barn until I could clean out a place in my basement to store the records. When I was able to unload the records I used my air compressor to try to blow off the dust of perhaps 100 years. The records included those of the First State Bank from about 1907 to 1922, and a large number of files from Johnny Erickson’s real estate business in the period of time from 1970 or so to 2000. There were records...
of daily sales of the O.F. Kelly store in the early 1900s, a book of legal records of the
Arcadia Orchards Irrigation Association, and other smaller business records.

“These recollections will have
things of much historical interest. Sorting
through them will be quite a task and if some-
one is interested they could certainly go
through them looking for a historical treas-
ure.”

Which brings forward a growing
problem for the historical society — the lack of a single location for storage of our growing
collection of documents, artifacts, and art-
work. These items are currently scattered in
a number of members’ basements, backrooms,
and storage sheds. In fact, we are currently
turning items away because of a lack of space.
If anyone has any practical (read affordable)
suggestions or solutions regarding this, please
forward them to the society.

… the temperamental artist ...

In the June Mortarboard we printed a
remembrance penned by former area resident
Edward Kingrey titled “Frank Frey’s Break-
fast.” This month we’re including this from
Ed’s recollections of Clayton’s Leno Prestini.

“Many artists being a bit short tempered when they are deeply in-
volved in a new creation. Leno Prestini was no exception. My memories of Leno were mostly
positive, except for one incident. “One summer day, Billy Jarret, my
cousin John “Dickie” Bailey and I, “Pudgy”
Kingrey, were wandering out and about from
the King farm. We had been exploring (trespassing) through the old terracotta build-
ing at the Clayton brickyard. Although the
brickyard was still in full production, by then
the terracotta operation had been shut down
and was vacant. Only a few remnants of ter-
cias laying around on tables and shelves.
Very mysterious and interesting to three young
boys.

“The way back home, we wan-
dered through the back yard of the Prestini
residence and happened by Leno’s art studio.
We decided to knock on the door and see if
Leno was about. Leno was there but, appar-
ently deep in thought and his creative juices
flowing. All we heard from within the studio
was a very loud, ‘Get the hell out of here!’

“All three of us took off running, like
a bear was on our tails, and we did not stop running until we got home. Next time we saw
Leno, he was casual and friendly as he always
was. However, we never wandered through that back yard or knocked on his studio door
again. Lesson learned.”

Looking forward, we expect to see
more of Ed’s stories in these pages.

… online tour, Luigi Prestini’s hometown ...

As noted in the lead article of this
issue, the society received a number of post-
cards in the trove of Prestini artifacts donated
by John and Pat Colliver. One of these post-
cards carries an image of the Prestini family’s
hometown of Besano, Italy. Without stamp or
postmark, the card likely dates somewhere
around 1920 or somewhat thereafter — this
assumed from the apparent vintage of the one
automobile seen in the photo.

The image, along with the message
handwritten in cursive Italian on the reverse,
will likely be reproduced in a future issue of
the Mortarboard.

The photo side of the card shows a
street scene — the street being identified as
the Via Pietro Girola. The most notable land-
mark in the photo is an ornate combination
bell and clock tower — which one could rea-
sonably assume as being part of the historic
center of the town.

Curious as to the identity of the tow-
er, I began an online search. This brings us
to the realization that cars usually begin
with the Google trademark on the sides and a
large domelike structure on the top that are
occasionally seen running around the local
neighborhood. What they’re doing is taking
photos of the streets and buildings — photos
that will then be accessible within Google’s
online map application.

Well … those cars are running
around Italy too.

Once in the Google Maps application,
I find an overview of Besano. Enlarge, en-
large, enlarge, and I can maneuver right down
on top of the aforementioned “Via P. Girola.”

Enlarge, enlarge, enlarge, and I’m suddenly
on the street itself — able to turn my view in a
full circle, seeing all the photos taken by one
of Google’s dome equipped cars on a previous
cruise through the town’s streets.

This is so near magic. I can move northeast along Via Giro-
la, past the combination bell and clock tower that, it turns out, belongs to the Parish of Saint Martino. Approaching the next intersection, if I turn to the right I’ll pass the Parish schoolyard. If I turn left, I’ll start down a nar-
row, alley-like street bearing the name “Via
Pietro Prestini.”

Hmm. Interesting. Covering approximately one square mile, the modern town has around 2,300 resi-
dents. The worse thing about taking a street
by street tour of this vintage village — which I
did — is the voyeuristic desire to peek over fences and enter courtyards. To knock on this or that random door and ask ... make a nuisance of my-
self. Perhaps it’s just as well that the technol-
logy hasn’t as yet advanced to that degree.

… remembering Eddie ...

Thinking back, trying to discern what it
was that made the recently passed Eddie
Olson so special to an entire community, ... of everyone. If there was a secret to his likeability, it may have begun there.

My family settled in Williams Valley
Minutes of the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society
June 11, 2016

In attendance: Mike Reiter, Roberta Reiter, Tom Costigan, Bill Sebright, Pat Parker, Wally Parker, Marilyn Reilly, Dianne Allen, Bob Hennes, Sue Fisher, Pete Coffin, Lorraine Nard, Judy Coffin, Roxanne Camp, Jody Lentz, Bill Phipps, Sue Rehms, Don Ball, and Betty Deuber.

Society President Bill Sebright called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He reported that: 1) The Society received a large box of artifacts from Barb Bogdan and Paul Erickson. There is a good picture of Neil Gahor and Chuck Yoke standing where the “new” Yoke’s (now NAPA) would be. In the background is the Kelly (Follweaga) house up on blocks. Bob Huntord was getting ready to move it. There are 5e, 10e, 25e, 50c, and $1 trade coins from O. F. Kelly’s general merchandise store along with tax tokens. Two large Metser’s map books, one Stevens, one Spokane County, and one smaller Washington State Metser’s map were included. There is a Class of ’47 40th reunion picture. There is a large folder containing class and reunion information for classes from ’39 to ’45. It includes a yearbook, yearbook plus data, as well as some reunion books. We now have a ’39 DPHS Stag newspaper. There is a Hazelwood Co. group picture. It seems to be to P. J. Kelly. Has anyone heard of this company before? Two different people said there is (was?) a Hazelwood Dairy Company. Included were many newspaper “extras” and newspaper clippings. There were also zip-lock bags with buttons from Settlers and Brickyard Days. There were even business cards for Tuffy Luhr and Jim Swinyard. The treasure box was on Neil Gahor’s closet floor of the DP City Hall. Marie Martin got Betty started on the historical research. Marie was active in the Fair Association. Betty was able to get information and pictures from Etta Mae Ben-

late in 1947. The next year my dad began working at the Clayton brick plant. And that’s how the family came to know Eddie. The first thing anyone meeting Eddie figured out was that he loved to tell stories. Once he got go-
ing, he could go on for hours.

Now my mom, being Okie, was a natural born storyteller herself. She could swap Eddie tale for tale. The last time those two got together was in the living room of Eddie’s farmhouse on the outskirts of Clayton. It was just after the millennium’s turn. Our intention was to relive a part of my dad’s youth. The time at the brick plant for the family history I was writing, and Eddie had agreed to tell us what he remembered. So there we were; fifty plus years since the family had first met Eddie, and the stories were flying as thick as ever.

In the midst of all this, Eddie turned to me and said, “You know, I really miss your dad.”

And there it was. Listening to these eighty some year olds converse — meaning I was still very much the kid in the room, alt-

ough grown a bit taller since grade school — and Eddie still took the time to notice.

And now the stories have stopped. If so inclined, we can light a candle and whisper ques-
tions, but neither Eddie nor my mother could seem to answer them. All we have of them and their many stories is what we can recall. And that will have to do.

— Wally Lee Parker —
This year’s Brickyard Day button.

at 9 AM at the Clayton Drive-In.
Meeting adjourned at 9:56 AM.
The Society meeting minutes submitted by Bill Sebright, acting Secretary.

—— end ——

Society Contacts

We encourage anyone with observations, concerns, corrections, or divergent opinions regarding the contents of these newsletters to write the society or contact one or more of the individuals listed below. Resultant conversations can remain confidential if so desired.

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—— C/DPHS ——

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Join the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society.

This organization is meant for those with a reverence for the past. For those believing lives long gone are still important. For those believing tradition still has a place in the modern world. For those believing the richness of history can teach. And for those that believe a community’s heart can be found in its history.

C/DPHS, Box 293, Clayton, Washington
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(Yearly dues: Twenty dollars per household.)