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THE
**CLAYTON/DEER PARK
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Coming to America The Prestini Family & The Immigrant Experience

— by —
Wally Lee Parker

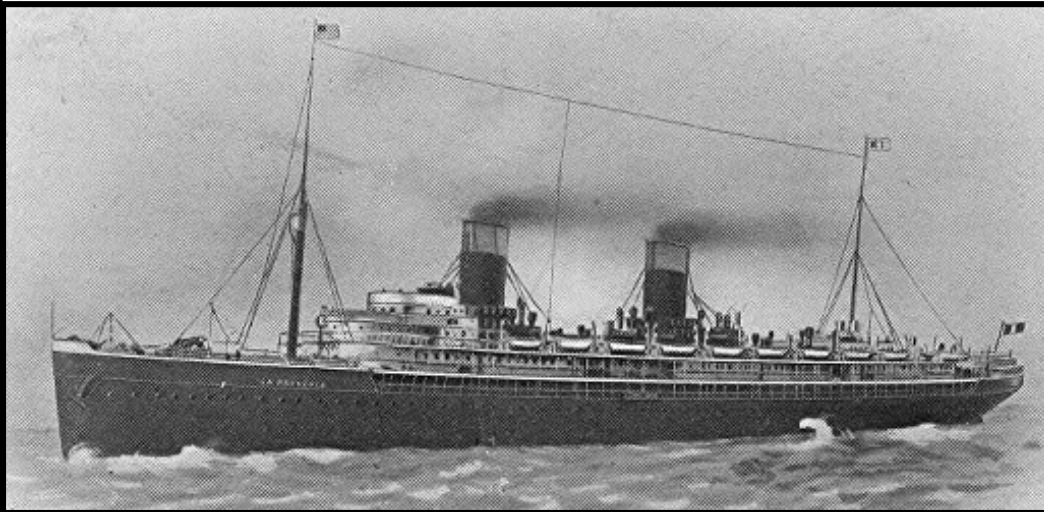
Costantino, Biatti, Pagliero, Pino, and Prestini are among the Italian surnames found penciled across the aging paper of Clayton's early school censuses. The heads of those listed families likely worked at one of Washington Brick & Lime's two factories — the brick plant or the terra cotta factory. It was hard, dirty work — something Italian immigrants were used to.

Clayton artist Leno Prestini and his older

brother Battista were on that list. Both were foreign born. Ferdinando Prestini, the boys' uncle, was the first to bring his family to America. Ferdinando's brother Luigi — Leno and Battista's father — was in America half a dozen years later. We have no direct knowledge of why the Prestinis left their homeland, but we can make an educated guess.

During the last decades of the 19th century and first of the 20th, transatlantic steamship compa-

The image below, scanned from a vintage postcard, is stated to be of the La Provence — a French Transatlantic Line steamship built specifically to travel the Havre, France, to New York route. This is the ship that brought Luigi Prestini's wife, Caterina, and the couple's two sons, Leno and Battista, into New York Harbor on the 2nd day of May, 1908.



nies in the competitive pursuit of profit were conspiring with American companies in their own search for relatively cheap foreign labor to fabricate an idealized image of America and then advertised that dream to the able-bodied workers of Europe. Few of the foreign workers actually expected to find the streets of the New World paved with gold, but they did expect to find the advertised jobs. Desperate for work, these people were willing to set sail for distant shores with little more than the clothes on their backs and the few coins in their pockets. They understood that the promised jobs would likely be hard, filthy, and often downright dangerous — and often things native born Americans would prefer not to do. But still, they expected those jobs to pay better than anything they could find at home — if there was anything at home to find. Then, as now, for the majority of those coming to America, the immigrant experience began as a desperate flight from chronic poverty.

What impact advertisements of potential wealth had in spurring immigration is debatable, but what is known to have significantly motivated the great influx of European immigration clustered around the turn of the century were the letters sent home by those who had already made the journey. The letters sent to friends and family told of prejudice, exploitation, and hardship — and in that they told the truth. America was not easy. But America most certainly had something that long ago had wasted away in much of the old world. In America there was the hope of a better life.

And in particular those letters flooding home to an absolutely destitute Italy — perhaps the poorest country in late 19th century and early 20th century Europe — contained the most telling argument for life in America. Those letters often contained cash. According to a 1904 *New York Times* article, in 1903 sixty-three million dollars flowed back to Italy — a significant amount of wealth in 1903 dollars. Due to the fairly common practice of underreporting to avoid Italy's excessive taxes, the actual amount may have been much higher.

The Ships

La Savoie, Luigi Prestini's transatlantic steamship, was constructed in France. A 1901 edition of the *New York Times*, datelined August 31st, states that the La Savoie left Havre, France, for New York on her maiden voyage that morning.

Documents declare that the ship was 580 feet long and 60 feet wide with two smoke-funnels and two masts. Her steam engines, producing about 22,000 horsepower, gave the craft a maximum speed of 25 miles per hour — that power pushed into the water through twin screws.

The ship originally carried 1,055 passengers — 437 as first class, with second class accommodations for 118 souls and 500 third class berths.

The January 19th, 1902 edition of the *New York Times*, under the banner "*La Savoie Transmits Many Dispatches Successfully by the Marconi System*", detailed how well the new wireless telegraph system was being adapted for ship to shore and ship to ship communication.

Like many passenger ships during WWI, the La Savoie was refitted and pressed into military service in 1914 as an auxiliary cruiser for the French Navy. It returned to passenger service in 1919 and continued in that capacity until it was scrapped in 1927.

The La Provence, the boat Luigi's family came over on in 1908, was built in France in 1906. It was 627 feet long, 65 wide, and slightly faster than the La Savoie. It also carried two funnels and two masts.

Of the ship's 1,362 passengers, 422 were first class, 132 second class, and 808 could be accommodated in the third class sections of the ship.

At fifteen minutes after midnight, on the 15th of April, 1912, the La Provence had the distinction of being the first ship to detect — via the Marconi wireless telegraph — the distress signal from the sinking British liner Titanic.

The La Provence's career as a transatlantic liner came to an end on the last day of July, 1914, when the French government announced the ship was being requisitioned and refitted as an auxiliary cruiser and troop transport for the war effort. On February 26th, 1916, while operating in the Mediterranean Sea off the southern coast of Greece, the La Provence was sunk by a torpedo fired from a German submarine. Of the men on board, 742 survived and approximately a thousand were lost.

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The majority of Italian immigrants weren't really immigrants — at least that was not their first intent. In reality they considered themselves migrant workers. Predominantly young and male, they came to America to work. They lived as cheaply as possible and either saved their money or sent every penny they could back home to the family — as was the Italian way. Since their intent was to eventually return to Italy — as many did — they were not highly motivated to learn English or otherwise integrate into American society. But other Italians chose a different path — or circumstance chose it for them.

As it developed under the newly formed constitutional monarchy, the old country's economic and political structure insured that only two percent of Italy's population controlled ninety percent of the nation's wealth. And, since foreign colonies seemed an easy road to national economic solvency, soon after its formation Italy's elitist national government began a series of aggressive wars against areas of northern Africa not already claimed by other European powers. These wars were not going well, and Italy's citizens were taxed at every turn to pay for what amounted to one military disaster after another. Despite the assumption that the primitive tribes would be quickly crushed when confronted by well armed soldiers, things had quickly deteriorated and by the last several decades of the 19th century poverty and starvation had become a normal part of everyday life for most Italians.

Italy's agricultural south — the source of eighty percent of the nation's immigrants — was largely owned by absentee landlords with little interest in the land or the people working it — little interest other than squeezing both dry. The tools and techniques used by farm laborers were generally described as medieval. As a result most immigrants from southern Italy had no experience at state-of-the-art farming, and certainly no remaining taste for farming in any form. And there was also the simple fact that building a profitable farm took far longer than most Italians intended to stay away from their homeland.

The north of Italy was beginning to industrialize and as a result was generally better off. But like the south, it also contained more people than jobs. Many of its citizens would migrate for seasonal work in other areas of Europe. They learned about potential jobs through social networks — through a system of Italians helping Italians find

work and otherwise deal with the many difficulties of living in the mist of foreign cultures, often without understanding the native language, laws, or customs. So it was only natural that Italian immigrants to America would follow that same pattern — finding their way across the continent by moving from Italian enclave to Italian enclave.

Eastern Washington had a number of draws for new immigrants. Homestead lands were available for those willing to undertake the rigors of carving farms out of forest. Miners were in demand in northern Stevens County and across the border in Idaho. And the arrival of the first Northern Pacific train in June of 1881 and Spokane's subsequent linkage into the new transcontinental system of tracks in 1883 brought the need for even more laborers to string the numerous railroad spurs threading north and south. Work was plentiful, and the explosive population growth created new opportunities for the shrewd at every turn.

Of the two Prestini elders, the first to arrive — Ferdinando — never lived in Clayton as far as we know. And even though we currently have no documents linking Ferdinando and Luigi Prestini together as family, we do know these men, and their wives too, considered the same small Italian community of Besano to be their place of origin. Also, there is a longstanding understanding within the local community that the above two men were brothers. All said, the circumstantial links are sufficient.

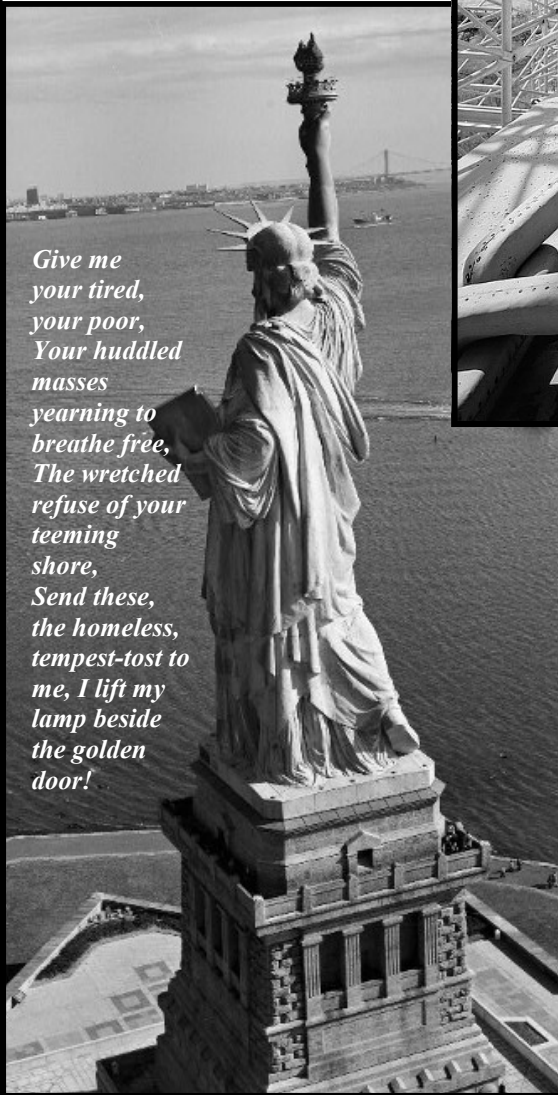
Besano is a small town in the Lombardy region of northwestern Italy. The community is located in a mountainous area of the Varese Province, very close to the southernmost incursion of Switzerland into Italy. In fact, the town is located less than ten miles from the Swiss border, and just a few miles south of the westernmost limb of very scenic and very large Lake Lugano — which is itself divided between the two nations. Best known today as a tourist destination, perhaps the most significant current claim to fame for Besano's two thousand residents is the *Besanosaurus* discovered close by. The name given this fossilized middle Triassic marine ichthyosaur literally means 'Besano lizard'.

As for what brought Ferdinando to Eastern Washington — Italians were well represented in early Spokane and it's likely that reports from already immigrated family, friends, or acquaintances led him to this area — at least this is what the evi-

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Mother of Exiles

Deeply moved by the torment the United States had endured throughout its civil war, in 1865 a French citizen, Edouard de Laboulaye, conceived the idea of a giant statue as a gift from the French people to the American people. It took twenty years to gather the necessary support and complete the project. Imported



*Give me
your tired,
your poor,
Your huddled
masses
yearning to
breathe free,
The wretched
refuse of your
teeming
shore,
Send these,
the homeless,
tempest-tost to
me, I lift my
lamp beside
the golden
door!*



in pieces, the statue was assembled and dedicated in New York Harbor in 1886.

The artist, Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi, named his work “Liberty Enlightening the World”. One of the more interesting details is the broken chain around the statue’s feet, which, according to most sources, is meant to represent the “chains of slavery” being shattered during the Civil War.

Though believed to have been conceived as an idealization of America as a constitutional republic, the statue — due in large part to a poem written in 1883 by Emma Lazarus — came to represent liberty welcoming the world’s disenfranchised.

In her poem Emma gave the statue another name, “Mother of Exiles”, though the lines reproduced to the left — “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” — are the most famous from the poem.

*Photos from Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Engineering Record
HAER NY, 31-NEYO, 89-9 — general view looking south — HAER NY, 31-NEYO, 89-54 — broken shackles and axe head, right foot*

National Parks Service Heritage Documentation Program
Historic American Engineering Record

Island of Tears



Ellis Island — 1905

Originally called Oyster Island by Dutch settlers, New York Harbor's Ellis Island took its current name after Samuel Ellis bought the island in 1785. Purchased by the federal government for the placement of a harbor defense battery in 1808, over the years backfill has expanded the original 3.3 acre island to its current 27 acres.

In 1890 the federal government took over the regulation of immigration into the United States — a matter previously deferred to the individual states. That year, entry through New York was moved from a state run facility on Manhattan to a barge anchored in the harbor while a federal facility being constructed on Ellis Island was completed. Ellis Island officially open January 1st, 1892, and quickly became known as the Island of Tears — although a surprisingly small percentage of potential immigrants were actually turned away and sent home at the expense of the delivering steamship company.

In the summer of 1897 the island's new complex burned to the ground — incinerating almost all state and federal immigration records for the Port of New York dating back to 1855.

Reconstructed — this time of “non-combustible” materials — the facility again opened in December of 1900. During the construction the immigration terminal was again housed on a barge anchored in New York Harbor. After the second inauguration, the facility

continued on until officially shut down in 1954. After that, immigration processing was again carried out at a facility on Manhattan Island.

Although other port cities — New Orleans and San Francisco among them — admitted immigrants, up until the closing of Ellis Island the majority of new citizens came through the federal facility at New York. Official policy allowed all first and second class passengers to undergo a casual screening on board ship, and, having passed that screening, disembark directly into the city. Only if there were some obvious health problem or some question regarding the passenger's legal status would first and second class passengers be ferried to Ellis Island for processing alongside the third class passengers.

The average time for screening before admission was from three to five hours. And 1907 — the year immediate preceding the arrival of Caterina Prestini and her two sons, Battista and Leno — saw the largest influx of immigrants to ever pass through Ellis Island in a single year — one and a quarter million souls.

Federally issued passports were available for naturalized citizens and it's assumed that having such documentation would have prevented any unfortunate incidents for new United States citizens returning from visits to the old country.

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dence found in various Prestini documents would suggest. Those documents often give conflicting dates, spellings, and facts — facts that sometime appear to have been fabricated as the necessity of the moment required. Much of this can be laid to an inaccurate understanding of written or spoken English, or to various translation and transcription problems, or to a transcriber's misunderstanding of answers clouded by heavy Italian accents. But a portion of it likely resulted from the relentless bureaucratic demand that every blank space on official forms should be filled with something — be it known, guessed at, or invented on the spot.

Census forms place Ferdinando, his wife Giovanna, and their son Alberto in Spokane by June of 1900. Other documents suggest that they most likely landed on New York's temporary immigrant processing barge that spring — (see "Island of Tears" page 217). The implication would be that Ferdinando knew exactly where he intended to settle before he left Italy — since the family crossed the entire continent in a few months at most. Reinforcing this timeline is a column on the 1900 census that states the family had been in the United States less than a year, and that Arnaldo — born in Zurich — was less than a year old at the time the census was taken. Later documents suggest that Giovanna was very pregnant with her second son, Emilio, when the census was being taken in June.

A 'Petition for Naturalization', dated 1912, states that Ferdinando was born on the 3rd of May, 1871, in Besano, Italy. A later immigration form gives the same birth date, but states his place of birth as Ruschein, Switzerland. Ferdinando sometimes gives his nationality as Swiss, other times as Italian. But there is little doubt that he considered his home as Besano, and his actual nationality as Italian.

The same situation exists with the family's first son, Arnaldo. He was most likely born on the 17th of August, 1899. His place of birth is listed as Zurich, Switzerland. His nationality is listed as either Swiss or Italian, depending on the document being read. This may explain a comment made by Spokane writer Jack Nisbet in his 2002 *Pacific Northwest Inlander* article about Leno Prestini when he states that Leno's father and mother, Luigi and Caterina, were working in Zurich, Switzerland, just prior to the time of the birth of both Leno and his older brother Battista, but that Caterina traveled

(possibly by rail) the 145 miles south to Italy's Comune di Besano each time to give birth. Though this was likely for the comfort of being close to family at that particular time, it also may have been to prevent any legal problems regarding the actual nationality of the two boys — the kinds of problems Ferdinando could have been having regarding both himself and his first son.

The fact that Ferdinando had been born in Switzerland in 1871 suggests that working north of the Italian border might have been a long tradition for former generations of the Prestini family.

Various documents state that Giovanna Prestini, Ferdinando's wife, was also born at Besano. On one document she is listed as Giovanna Giuglia. Giuglia occasionally appears as a woman's middle name in Italian literature. As to whether this is Giovanna's middle or last name, sources suggest that the common naming convention used in Italy, though similar to that of the United States, does have a tradition of women keep their maiden names after marriage and placing it just before their husband's surnames. If Giuglia is actually Giovanna's middle name, we have the mystery of the name Ferdinando place on one of his documents when asked what his wife's name was. The single name in the blank space was Biatti. Could this have been Giovanna's maiden name?

The 1910 census, also taken in Spokane, indicates that Ferdinando's family had grown by three after landing in America. Regarding the family members' first names as used on various documents, over the years, there appears to have been a back and forth efforts to find suitable Anglicized versions for them. The head of the family, Ferdinando, is also recorded as Federico or Fred, Giovanna as Jennie, Arnaldo as Arnold, Melio as Emilio or Amelio, Rena as Prenni or Cereno, and Josephine as Giuseppina.

In Josephine's case the literature states that Giuseppina is the feminine form of Giuseppe, and that Giuseppe is the Italian form of Joseph. Possibly similar correlations could be found for the other names.

The 1920 census again finds the family in Spokane. What has changed is that Emilio is missing from the list. One possible answer is that Emilio was close to being of age, and could have been on his own by that time. The other possibility is suggested in later documents.

Between 1910 and 1920 the Luigi Prestini

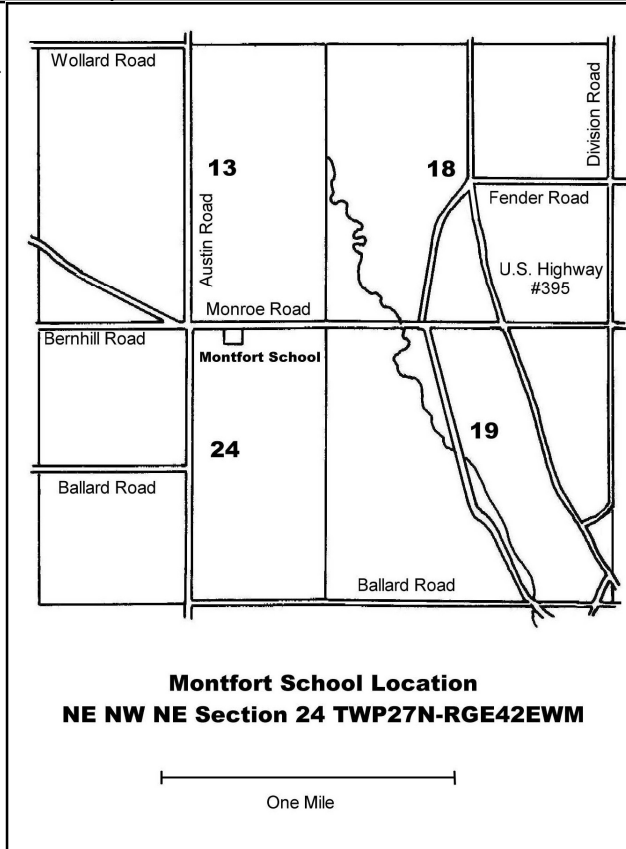
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family arrived in Eastern Washington. According to Jack Nisbet's 2002 *Inlander* article, Luigi came at the invitation of Ferdinando (Federico in the article) to join him at his "stump ranch" in the Buckeye area. In order to tie the same Ferdinando Prestini first found in the 1900 Spokane census to the "Federico" Prestini found in the *Inlander* article, we need some form of documentation that places Ferdinando's family in the Buckeye area at the same time the "Federico" in the *Inlander* article extending his invitation to Luigi Prestini.

Several such documents exist. One is Ferdinando Prestini's 1912 "Petition for Naturalization". On this document he states his place of residence as Buckeye, Washington. Also on the list are the names and birthdates of his four children. This is the document where he states his wife's name as Biatti, and his wife's place of birth as Besano, Italy. The second document is a set of census forms from the Montfort public school west of Buckeye. These forms cover the years 1912 through 1916 and list all four of Ferdinando's children — though Emilio is missing from both the 1915 and 1916 lists.

The next document is a "Declaration of Intention" to naturalize filed by "Ferdinando Dominick Prestini, also known as Fred Prestini", and dated 1940. These declarations were only valid for a limited number of years and if the application of intention Ferdinando submitted in 1912 was not acted on he would have had to apply again — which appears to have been the case. In this document, as in most others, the specific dates and such tend to drift. But what is perhaps most interesting is that Ferdinando states he only has two children — the first boy, Arnold Arthur, and the first girl, Rena. Both Emilio and Josephine are missing.

We also have a copy of a "Declaration of Intention" to naturalize submitted in 1936 by Ferdinando's son, "*Arnaldo Arturo Prestini, also known as Arnold Arthur Preston*". The data on this document lends some weight to the long held suspicion among those acquainted with the family that there were hard feelings among the Prestini family regard-



Map by Pete Coffin.

ing Arnaldo's apparent rejection of his Italian heritage as suggested by the complete Anglicizing of his name. What should be remembered is that some of the most powerful political and social leaders in America at that time were virulently anti-Italian and openly critical of the Italian people as a "race". Arnaldo did marry an American girl, and it's possible he changed his name to protect his family from the Italian prejudice common at that time.

The data we have for Luigi Prestini and his family is much less factually scattered. The first document is officially titled "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers to the U. S. Immigration Officer at Port of Arrival" — or "ship's list" for short. This is a catalog of all foreign passengers arriving on ships in New York Harbor. Luigi Prestini of Besano, Italy, is listed as arriving on the 19th of May, 1906, on the ship La Savoie from Havre, France. The ship left Havre on the 12th of that month. The document

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Photo from C/DPHS collection.

The above photo 'might' contain the earliest image of Leno Prestini currently in the C/DPHS collection. We simply don't know. The photo was likely taken in 1915 or shortly thereafter on the south side of the new Clayton schoolhouse. The young gentleman in the front row center is believed to be Robert Huffman, and the very small boy in the back row, second from right, may be Leno. Both Robert and Leno were born within a few months of each other in 1906, so they could have been in the same class in school.

indicates that Luigi's stated destination was Barre, Vermont, and his contact there was his brother-in-law. The name of that relative appears to be Andreo Celti. (It should be remembered that other than the above ship's list reference we currently have no other documents suggesting brothers or sisters for Ferdinando and Luigi. However, considering the prevailing custom among Italians of that period, siblings could have been numerous.)

The next document is a ship's list for the S. S. La Provence on which Luigi's wife Catterina (Caterina), and their sons Battista, and Lino (Leno) are recorded. The list states that the Provence left Havre on the 25th of April, 1908, and subsequent

documents indicate that the ship docked in New York on the 2nd day of May. Our assumption is that the three new immigrants immediately traveled (most likely by rail) to Vermont to join Luigi in Barre's Italian community.

The founding of Barre dates back to 1793. Originally organized around a lumber mill, the town's reputation as a center for the manufacture of building stone only began to develop after the War of 1812. Its early peak occurred in 1838 with the production of the blocks and sculpted granite used for the state's capital building at Montpelier. At that point further expansion of the industry failed due to the problems of transporting the stones any distance

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by mule team, as well as the expense associated with carving suitable blocks of this very hard rock using technology little advanced from ancient times.

That began to change in the 1870s with the introduction of steam drills at the Barre quarries. By the turn of the century all types of steam and electrical driven power tools were being used – and along with these modern tools came an increase in the amount of silica dust the stoneworkers inhaled while quarrying, cutting, shaping, and polishing the granite.

The granite throughout the Barre area is very ancient rock believed to have been exposed when the last several incursions of ice-age glaciers decapitated the peaks of Vermont's Green Mountains. In general Vermont's granite differs from the granite forming the mountains surrounding the Deer Park basin in the amount of mineral feldspar incorporated into the chemical makeup of the rock. Because of the ease with which feldspar can be broken down by exposure to the weak acidic action of rainwater, or the stronger organic acids prevalent in groundwater, the low feldspar content of Vermont's granites contributes to that rock's resistance to weathering — whereas the high feldspar content of our local granite allows much of our local granite to chemically "rot" in spans of time considered very short by geological standards. The upside to this is that the feldspar weathering from our local granite has become the source mineral for Clayton's excellent clay deposits.

The problem of transporting Barre's granite to the world's markets began to dissipate with the arrival of the railroad at Barre in 1875, the completion of a spur track up the slope of the quarry mountain in 1888, and the continuous introduction and upgrading of machinery to handle the stone. All this created a need for labor that drew a large number of experienced stoneworkers from Europe.

Italians have a long history of working with granite. According to the Random House Dictionary the English word granite is a 17th century extraction from the Italian word for the same type of stone. The Italian word granito is in turn thought to be extracted from the Italian word for grain — the association between granito and grano being the grain-like appearance of the granite stone itself.

At the beginning of the 20th century a large percentage of Barre's total population of over 10,000 were Italian immigrants. The Italians were a dy-

namic part of the community, forming their own self help group, Società di Mutuo Soccorso — literally the "society/company of mutual relief/succor" — which at one time was the largest Italian self help group in America.

As for the Americanization of the Prestini boys, Battista may have started school before the family left Barre. If so, it's possible that the school would have been Catholic rather than a public school and that English might not have been the primary language spoken there. If the family actually left Barre for Eastern Washington's Buckeye area in 1911 as stated in Jack Nisbet's 2002 *Inlander* article, more than likely Leno would have not been in school yet. It would be an assumption on our part, but it's possible the culture the boys had been exposed to up until the journey to Buckeye was still predominantly Italian.

Regardless of nation of origin, most European immigrants of that era had one thing in common — the less than pleasant experience of transatlantic steerage passage. For the Ferdinando Prestini family it would have been bad. As an adult male traveling alone, Luigi would have found it bearable. As a solitary young female with two very small children in tow, contemporary reports suggest Caterina may have had a very rough steamship crossing indeed.

Our assumption is that all members of the Prestini family traveled to America steerage class. In nautical parlance the term 'steerage' refers to that portion of a classic sailing vessel usually located below the waterline and toward the rear of the boat through which the lines from the helm's steering wheel run aft to the rudder. In steamships steerage is generally thought of as the passenger areas in the lower hull toward both the bow and stern where the up and down effects of rough seas, the poor ventilation below the waterline, and the general sense of claustrophobia would be most acute. In other words, the areas reserved for steerage passengers are, due to the physics of their location, the most uncomfortable parts of the ship.

Steerage conditions and the general treatment of immigrants in transit was an ongoing issue. At least a few laws were passed in both America and Europe attempting to set minimum standards for transatlantic passenger vessels. Effective enforcement was problematic.

In 1907 an Act of Congress created 'The

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Immigration Commission'. This panel consisted of nine individuals — three senators, three congressmen, and three citizens appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt. The panel was charged with making a *“full inquiry, examination, and investigation, by subcommittee or otherwise, into the subject of immigration.”* The commission's findings were reported to Congress in 1909.

The commission's report was partially, *“based on information obtained by special agents of the Immigration Commission traveling as steerage passengers on 12 different trans-Atlantic steamers and on observation of the steerage in 2 others ...”* The report states, *“practically all of the more important lines engaged in the immigrant-carrying traffic were included in the inquiry, and every type of steerage was studied.”* The synopsis of the report, with its forceful eyewitness accounts, is very worthwhile reading.

The conditions Caterina and her sons endured during their 1908 Atlantic transit may have been mitigated somewhat by two factors noted in the report. First, as the report states, *“the investigation was carried on during the year 1908, when, owing to the industrial depression, immigration was very light”* and therefore *“steerage was seen practically at its best.”* Secondly, passengers were divided into three classes for assignment to the ship's group compartments. Those classes were women without male escorts, men traveling alone, and families. Because Caterina was traveling with Battista and Leno, the three would have been considered a *“partial family”* and placed with the other families. It's probable that this may have reduced Caterina's exposure to what the Immigration Commission found to be the most common difficulty specific to women traveling without male companionship — sexual assault by members of the crew.

At the time the usual fee for a transatlantic steerage ticket averaged thirty dollars — seldom more, often less depending on general economic conditions. Though I've found no data on what the charge would have been for the children — for any special considerations made for youngsters Battista or Leno's age — it was interesting to note that the price of a first class ticket was usually in the range of ninety dollars. Three times the cost of a steerage ticket purchased all the luxuries available — including clean air, good food, access to a real doctor, and total segregation from the steerage class.

The average yearly wage for a working man in the United States in 1900 was just over four hundred dollars a year. By 1910 that had risen to just under six hundred dollars a year. During that decade the majority of working men could expect to earn between one to two dollars a day. The lowest paid group of male United States citizens were African-Americans. The only group of immigrants consistently paid less than Blacks for their labor were the Italians. Pay for working women in the United States averaged from twenty to seventy percent of men's wages. And child labor (children 10 to 14 years of age and sometimes younger) was still very much an issue in industrial sweatshops — especially in the northeast and southern United States.

The issue of child labor was being addressed state by state with varying degrees of success. In general the issue wasn't resolved until the federal Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 that, with few exceptions, officially outlawed the fulltime employment of anyone under 16 and forced a national minimum wage which did away with the chief reason for child labor — the fact that their labor, though usually inferior to that of an adult, could be had for pennies on the dollar.

The usual Atlantic transit time for passenger ships was from seven to nine days. The Immigration Commission report states that on typical ships *“the sleeping quarters are large compartments accommodating as many as 300 or more persons.”* The report indicates that sleeping berths are typically *“6 feet long and 2 feet wide with 2½ feet of space above”* — or two and a half feet to the bottom of the next berth. The bed is covered with a mattress filled with *“straw or seaweed”*. One blanket may be provided, and often the required life preserver was designated as standing in for the berth's pillow. The report states that *“this 30 cubic feet of space”* is the only place provided for the passenger and all that passenger's possessions.

Everything needed for daily life other than food and water the passengers were expected to supply for themselves.

Usually there was no designated dining area. People would gather their meals — dished out by stewards from large vats into tin dinnerware provided by the steamship company. The passengers were responsible for cleaning the utensils in a salt-water rinse after use and storing the tin-ware in their bunks between meals. The food was usually of suf-

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ficient quantity, but of poor quality and unhygienic in presentation. The passenger had to find someplace to eat, and that was usually back at their berths in a cabin with floors strewn with vomit from seasick shipmates.

The number and quality of the toileting facilities were generally considered a joke. If someplace to shower were provided, it was most often cold seawater.

Many passengers attempted to spend as much time as possible topside. In theory there was supposed to be at least five square feet of deck in the designated topside steerage area for each steerage passenger. As the following paragraphs taken from the report to Congress provided by one of the female agents that volunteered to travel steerage incognito indicates, that understanding, just as everything else, wasn't enforced to any great degree.

"There was an outside main deck and an upper deck on which the steerage were allowed. These were each about 40 feet wide by 50 feet long, but probably half of this space was occupied by machinery, ventilators, and other apparatus. There was no canvas to keep out the rain, sun, and contin-

ual showers of cinders from the smokestack. These fell so thick and fast that two young sailor boys were kept busy sweeping them off the decks. It is impossible to remain in one's berth all the time, and as there were no smoking and sitting rooms we spent most of the day on these decks. No benches nor chairs were provided, so we sat wherever we could find a place on the machinery, exposed to the sun, fog, rain, and cinders. These not only filled our hair, but also flew into our eyes, often causing considerable pain.

"These same two outdoor decks were used also by the crew during their leisure. When asked what right they had there, they answered 'As much as the passengers.' No notices hung anywhere about to refute this. The manner in which the sailors, stewards, firemen, and others mingled with the women passengers was thoroughly revolting. Their language and the topics of their conversation were vile. Their comments about the women, and made in their presence, were coarse. What was far worse and of continual occurrence was their handling of the women and girls. Some of the crew were always on deck, and took all manner of liberties with the

Photo from Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division
LC-USZ62-11202 — Immigrants on Atlantic Liner S. S. Patrica (December, 1906)



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women, in broad daylight as well as after dark.

“Not one young woman in the steerage escaped attack. The writer herself was no exception. A hard, unexpected blow in the offender’s face in the presence of a large crowd of men — an evident acquaintance with the stewardess, doctor, and other officers, general experience, and manner were all required to ward off further attacks. Some few of the women, perhaps, did not find these attentions so disagreeable; some resisted them for a time, then weakened; some fought with all their physical strength, which naturally was powerless against a man’s. Others were continually fleeing to escape. Two more refined and very determined Polish girls fought the men with pins and teeth, but even they weakened under this continued warfare and needed some moral support about the ninth day. The atmosphere was one of general lawlessness and total disrespect for women. It naturally demoralized the women themselves after a time. There was no one to whom they might appeal. Besides, most of them did not know the official language on the steamer, nor were they experienced enough to know they were entitled to protection.”

As said, the report in its entirety is well worth the read. The report is available online through ‘Google Book Search’.

Leno would have just turned two at the time of immigration. Battista would have still been five months from his fourth birthday. It’s possible that Battista may have retained a fragment or two of memory from the crossing — and possibly some unpleasant psychological remnants as well. As for the rumor that the boys’ mother may have suffered a lifelong depression, if that were true one might wonder to what extent the probable trauma of the Atlantic transit could have contributed to it. Regardless, after just less than two years of separation the Luigi Prestini family was reunited in Barre.

We don’t know what Luigi’s job would have been at Barre, although we do expect that whatever it was he was being exposed to silica dust. Jack Nisbet’s *Inlander* article suggest that besides the letters assumed to have been exchanged between Luigi in Vermont and Ferdinando in Washington State, the other factor that convinced Luigi to leave Barre’s Italian community for the much smaller rural Italian community located several miles west of Buckeye and known locally by the slur “Dago Heaven” was probably the threat of an affliction

called phthisis (pronounced TIE-sis).

Phthisis — from the Greek and basically meaning to waste away — was the term commonly used by the Barre stoneworkers to describe the consumptive disease epidemic among them. The unions were claiming that the disease was due to the inhalation of dust created by the quarrying and machining of granite. Local physicians seemed insistent on applying the relatively new germ theory to the epidemic by stating the disorder was caused by some form of the tuberculosis bacillus and that its frequency among the workers probably resulted from the men’s personal hygiene habits outside of work. Although tuberculosis could be a secondary infection subsequent to the actual disease, it was ultimately determined that the actual cause of the chronic epidemic was exactly what the unions and workers suspected — dust.

The diagnostic word silicosis was coined in the 1870s to replace the symptomatic terms phthisis and consumption and clearly differentiate the causative factor from tuberculosis since the historic terms used to describe the three primary symptoms of silicosis — shortness of breath, fatigue, and a wasting away of body mass over time — were common to both diseases. But the new term was not commonly adopted until about 1915.

Silicosis is generally recognized as the most ancient of industrial diseases. It results from the inhalation of minute particles of the mineral silica produced during any process that grinds silica bearing minerals into dust in such a way that inhalation by workers is likely. At Barre the machining of granite and the use of silica sands to polish granite surfaces ensured that few stoneworkers would live past the age of fifty, and most could expect to be suffering from some degree of silicosis within twenty years — and many much sooner. The recognized method of reducing stone dust was to add water to the process. But in certain application this would increase the cost and reduce the speed of production — and the industry wasn’t convinced it made economic sense to take those extra steps just to protect the workers.

Silica particles small enough to be inhaled deeply into the lungs settle into the smallest chambers of lung tissue where they, mistaken as bacterial invaders, are attacked by free-moving body cells called macrophages. These cells envelop the silica particles and attempt to digest them — dying in the

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process. The resultant chronic inflammation causes the formation of a fibrous nodule around the site, and over time these protective nodules become so prevalent that both the elasticity of the lung tissue and the lung's ability to exchange gases is sufficiently reduced to cause the consumptive symptoms.

There is no cure, nor is there any treatment that can reverse the process. And at a certain point even removal from the dusty environment can't stop the progression of the disease. Even today silicosis is the most common industrial disease in the world. Any statement to the effect that one of the reasons Luigi left Barre was to escape the silicosis epidemic coincides with the concerns of Barre's workers at that time and is likely true.

Luigi and family reportedly left Barre for Buckeye (the mailing address for the nearby "Dago

Heaven" community and site of Ferdinando's "stump farm") in 1911 and then continued on to settle in Clayton in 1912 — where we can document them as being by Leno and Battista's names being on the 1915 Clayton school census. Our documentation at the Montfort school begins in the spring of the year 1912. Since school census documents were usually completed shortly before the beginning of summer vacation, Montfort does capture Ferdinando's children on the record. But Battista and Leno would not have been recorded if they had left for Clayton before the 1912 census list was made.

Hopefully more data will surface over time. Until then we can only speculate in an attempt to fill in the gaps in Clayton's Prestini family's history.

Society Minutes — August, 2009

Bill Sebright, society president, call the August 8th meeting to order at 09:04 AM.

Mark Wagner, Alan Berg, Sharon Clark, Marilyn Reilly, Warren Nord, Lorraine Nord, Pat Parker, Wally Parker, Pete Coffin, Art Stelting, Betty Burdette, Kay Parkin, Duane Costa, and Sue Rehms were in attendance.

Mark Wagner gave the treasure's report which was accepted entered into the official record. Randy Long presented Mark with \$445 from the benefit breakfast held at the beginning of last Saturday's Clayton Days activities. A big thanks goes to Randy and Taffy Long and the Clayton Drive In!

Bill showed and talked about the area history books Marilyn Reilly and Pete Coffin had given or loaned to the Society. These books are available if anyone would like to borrow them. He mentioned how much history is in them. He also pointed out how professional the Society's publications are by comparison. Wally certainly is to be commended for his work and professional ability.

Art Stelting's brought a classic display listing the local boys that served in the Armed Forces during World War II. We are looking of ways to honor the men still living whose names appear on the display. Obtaining information regarding the current program that flies WWII vets back east to see the war memorial at the national capital was suggested.

In other matters, Wally brought up the two

liability problems which currently face the Society — liability insurance for events like Clayton Day and copyright infringement issues related to the Society's various publication ventures. After much discussion a motion was brought forth by Duane Costa and seconded by Betty Burdette to have Bill talk to Jay Lindh (Attorney at Law) to find the extent the Society is liable in both cases. The motion passed unanimously.

In webmaster Bob Clouse's absence, Bill reported that 1110 unique addresses visited our Website in July. Also 334 have reached the Website so far this month.

Pete Coffin reported that he had scanned in the Big Foot Valley Reunion book to a DVD format. He also spent several days working on building at the Fairgrounds owned by Howard Richards, Cliff Meyer, etc. The Society will use part of the building for its display at the Fair, August 21- 23.

A signup sheet was passed around to work 2 hour shifts at the Clayton Fair, August 21-23. The C/DPHS booth will be open from 10 AM until 4 PM, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

In a discussion about Clayton Day, Art Stelting brought up that no U. S. A. Flag led the Clayton Day Parade. It was also discussed how we could have music again at the School Park next year. Andy Carlson, Tony Goodner, and others are working on it.

It was moved by Duane Costa and sec-

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onded by Alan Berg, to have the C/DPHS membership dues set at \$20 per year per family starting January 1st. Mark will work on a mailing list. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:06 AM.

The Society's next meeting is set for Sep-

tember 12th, beginning at 9 AM at the Clayton Drive In. As ever, our general meetings are open to everyone — members or otherwise — and walk-ins are welcome.

Letters, Email, and Chatter

Please Note:
All comments, corrections, and criticisms printed can and will be edited by the society for clarity, brevity, and — if necessary — content.

Mortarboard issue #15 contained two articles about Big Foot Valley (page 193 — *C/DPHS Field Trip: Big Foot Valley & Beyond* by Bill Sebright and page 196 — *The Big Foot Valley School* by Pete Coffin). Those articles have led to several exchanges regarding the accuracy of the assigned locations on the map on page 194 and the labeling of the photograph on page 197. Former area resident Norma Lindh-Burnett sent the following letter to Warren Nord regarding this subject. The letter included an annotated copy of *Mortarboard* page 197 — which is reproduced here.

Norma wrote ...

"We moved (to Big Foot Valley) in 1937. I do not remember any buildings at the intersection of Jones Road and Redman Road. But as you said, it is hard to argue with a picture. That was 71 years ago that we moved there and I have forgotten many things in the past 71 years.

"The Ness house is in the right location — it wasn't close to the corner. I too remember it as being small and the house in the picture seems rather large. One thing I know for certain, that is the Lindh barn, not our house. I don't know why you can't see the house or chicken house — maybe too many trees. There were quite a few trees.

"Now is one of those times when I need Carl to ask questions because this bothers me.

"On page 194 (Pete Coffin's field trip map) where it says 'Peak House Site', to me that is exactly where Carmean's house was. And where it says 'Carmean House' was right where Peaks lived. I'm sure Carmeans never lived there — although after Mr. and Mrs. Carmean died Peaks may have moved into the Carmean house as I think it was a nicer house.

"We should get a hold of Walt Peak and see what he says. I'm quite sure that Peaks did move to the Carmean house after the Carmean's were gone."

The issue of accuracy is a concern that has generated discussion several times before as regards our publications. To address this concern we need a policy clearly stating the manner in which corrections, clarifications, suggestions, or questions can be submitted and will be handled. In this regard the editor sent an email to the Society's online members and associates outlining the problem, suggesting several possible courses of action, and requesting input from the group.

Ken Westby replied — *"Each person who contributes to these articles has the responsibility to get the facts as correct as possible, but, certainly much of it is from memories that can have inaccuracies. Errors, especially regarding dates or spelling of names will occur from time to time. We need to work together as a team to try to piece together as accurately as possible our collective history for future generations. In the short time I've been participating, I've come to truly value the comments and corrections that other readers have contributed to help fine-tune my own recollections of events."*

Susan Simpson responded — *"I certainly agree with the comments of Ken Westby. Even actual paper documents are occasionally full of errors, and history is just 'stories agreed upon'. So all of us are responsible for trying to be as faithful as possible to the truth in our contributions to the written word."*

Jeff Lily added — *"As Susan so succinctly states, 'history is just stories agreed upon'. On the front page of the Mortarboards (is) a block explaining the mission of the C/DPHS. Adding lines somewhere else in the publication (specific to this prob-*

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I'm not much of an artist!

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a storage shed with a cellar

Our house

Front door

Back door

Clayton area map by Pete Coffin.

The school house was built. One of the original Board of Directors was Redman Jones. Redman received the patent on his homestead in February of 1905. Other original directors were with A. B. Eastabrook and J. M. Phillips.

The school was built on the far northeastern corner of the southwestern quarter of Section 27-129N-R41ECM just east of the intersection of Redman and Jones Roads.

There are no maps indicating whether the customary one acre of land was deeded to the school. A wooden building was erected in 1905 when the Big Foot Valley School District #111 was merged with the Allen's Landing School District #329 to become the Clayton Consolidated School District #159.

United States Census records for 1900 and 1910 provide names of children who probably attended the school. In the 1900

We could get to William Valley road from Clayton either by going past Lyles John's house or going down Swenson Rd and then going on that road when Wood lived and it goes by Corey's place. I guess Bell Star road went by Lyles John's so I don't see the other road on this map.

Lambert's Barn

JONES RD

JONES ROAD

REDMAN RD. APP. WEST OF NESS'S BUILDINGS

The Trees are on the A. Glasner Farm

Emil Ness House

Big Foot Valley School

page 197

lem) would seem appropriate."

Jeff went on to suggest a model for that policy statement. That model became the underlying framework on which the policy statement printed on

page 228 is patterned. As always, this statement can be modified with further discussion. If you feel anything should be added or subtracted please write the editor.

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As Ken Westby has noted, the internet exchange carried out by C/DPHS members and associates contributes much to the creation of the articles published in the *Mortarboard*. Anyone wishing to be included in this ongoing creative process is encouraged to email any of the "Society Contacts" listed at the bottom of this page and request that your email address be added to our "Group's" mailing list. Among other things you will find yourself participating in the editing of the Society's various publications, thereby insuring the continuing quality of our publications.



From American Automobile Digest — 1920

Special thanks to this month's volunteer proofreaders — Jay Hubal, Sue Newell, and Patricia Parker.

Editorial Policy Regarding Correcting Errors and/or Omissions

Information published here is compiled from many sources, including personal memories. It is often difficult or impossible to verify such recollections through outside documentation. Our editorial policy toward the veracity of personal recollections tends toward the casual — since little harm is normally done by such errors. But our editorial process also invites public review and input regarding the accuracy of the information we publish, and when such review either suggests or reveals errors or items open to dispute our "Letters" department will act as a forum allowing the airing of such disagreements in an effort to ascertain the truth and correct any probable or demonstrated errors. We also believe it's important that such disagreements be recorded, even if they can't be settled to the satisfaction of all parties.

We encourage everyone to submit any arguments as to fact to the editor in writing — since the written form reduces the chance of further misunderstandings. As is standard policy, all letters will be edited for spelling, word usage, clarity, and — if necessary — contents. If advisable, the editor will confer directly with the letter writers to insure that everyone's comments and corrections are submitted in a literate, polite, and compelling manner — as best suits the editorial image of this society's publications.

Society Want Ads

WANTED: Leno Prestini artwork. If you have or have access to any paintings, sketches, or sculptures created by Clayton artist Leno Prestini please contact the Society. We would like to feature either the original artwork or photos of the same at next year's Prestini Project showing. For security reasons, the current owners of the materials may remain anonymous if that is their

wish.

WANTED: Old family recipes for inclusion in a future Society recipe book. Recipes drawn from any given family's heritage are particularly desired — especially if accompanied by related family stories.

WANTED: Photos of local summer events such as the Old Settlers Pic-

nic and Clayton Days. The photos can be old or new as long as the submitter includes a caption for the photos and has the authority to permit reproduction of the image in the Society's publications or on the Society's website.

WANTED: Any stories, photos, or examples of traditional methods of quilt making.

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