



# THE CRACO SOCIETY

## UPDATED CRACO SOCIETY WEBSITE

### CONTENTS CONTENUTO

- **Updated Society Website**
- **Another Italian Ghost Town**
- **In Memoriam**
- **SS Utopia Sinking**
- **Saving the Madonna Della Stella Chapel**
- **Contact us- Contattateci**

Since The Craco Society was formed in 2007 we have maintained a website. As a virtual organization, lacking a physical location, the website served as a place we could house material about the history, culture, and traditions of Craco. The website allowed us to share that information on the worldwide web with anyone who was interested in Craco. Through the website, many people were able to communicate with the Society to ask questions and seek information about ancestors. In addition to the website the Society also has a Facebook Group. We also maintained a mailing list used to communicate messages and send the monthly Newsletter both digitally and by mail for those who do not have email.

Each of these communications channels operated separately and were the result of efforts by individuals started from early in our existence. The website was originally created by Bob and Janet Rubertone and the Facebook Group was started by Lena Camperlengo. A few years back Society member Rita Gallo Lavery, who operates Lavery Design Associates, Ltd., stepped forward and came up with a plan to rebuild the website with up-to-date technology. After that was completed she has been monitoring the management of our website and our other online communications channels. With technology changing rapidly, Rita recommends changes to our digital architecture as well as code compliance with web security, browsers and devices.

Besides several technical background changes to the website which would not be no-

ticeable to users, Rita and her team at Lavery Design has worked to integrate all of our digital outreach and social media channels.

For example, did you know that on Instagram we have a space that Lena Camperlengo set up with fantastic images of Craco which has 171 posts and 353 followers to date? These are now reachable directly from the social link that is on the Society's home webpage.

Over the years we have accumulated a great deal of pictures, film, and video of Craco. Lavery Design created a "Craco Society Youtube Channel" that is displaying this historic film material. The channel also provides a place to house additional items in the future. These too are now available from the YouTube link on the website.

The reorganized website still contains a depth of information about history, genealogy, culture, and visiting Craco. There are also links to our online store and to Amazon where the book about the history of Craco is available for purchase.

Please take a moment to visit and explore all that is available on the new website.

[www.thecracosociety.org](http://www.thecracosociety.org)



**Madonna della Stella In the Piazza**—This early 1960s photograph of the Madonna della Stella procession in Craco Vecchio shows all the elements that were part of the morning event. Taken at the Piazza Largo Vittorio Emanuele II, the "cirio" is visible in the lower left while the statue of the Madonna in procession is visible at the right entering the piazza.

The chapel that is the home to this historic statue. Is undergoing a restoration. See page 4 about how you can help save the Chapel and this part of our history, culture and traditions.

## ANOTHER CRACO FRANA-LIKE DISASTER



The World Monuments Fund, the organization that recognized Craco Vecchio as a historic site, recently published an article in [The Globe and Mail](#) about another Italian town undergoing a similar fate as Craco.

Their story follows:

*“Calling yourself “the dying town” may not sound like the best way of attracting visitors, but Civita has learned to make a living out of dying.*

*And it has resisted definitive death for so long that Italy has nominated it and the surrounding area of stark cliffs and valleys known as “badlands” to be a UNESCO World Heritage Site.*

*Centuries ago, the town was much larger and connected by road to other settlements. But landslides, earthquakes, cracks and erosion have reduced its size dramatically and left it sitting spectacularly alone at the top of a spur.*

*When winter clouds are low, Civita looks like a floating castle in the air. On a clear day, the rock on which it rests looks like a slice of a multi-layered cake.*

*Clay from an inland sea a million years ago supports strata of compacted ash and magma from subsequent volcanic eruptions.*

*Civita’s past, present and future are the stuff of a geologist’s dream, with a major landslide that occurred in 1114 still under study today.*

*“During three millennia, regressive erosion has*

*practically reduced Civita to a nucleus, leaving the square and a few streets around it,” said Luca Costantini, 49, a geologist who is part of project to monitor and slow down the erosion.*

*In underground caverns cut out of soft volcanic rock known as tufo, steel bars hold walls together.*

*“Our motto is ‘resilience’ because Civita was founded by the Etruscans, passed through the Roman era and the entire medieval period to reach the present day,” said Luca Profili, 32, the mayor of Bagnoregio, of which Civita is a part.*

*That fragility is measured in part by an “extensometer”, an external telescopic rod that detects movement.*

*The Civita that remains today is mostly from the Medieval period and measures about 152 by 91 metres (500 by 300 feet), less than two soccer pitches. Its main square is about the size of a basketball court.*

*Once spread out on a hill about three times its current size, over the centuries entire neighbourhoods collapsed in landslides. Today it is accessible via a long and steep ramp for pedestrians or golf carts.*

*The number of permanent residents fluctuates between 10 to 14 depending on the season. Before the pandemic Civita was a draw for tourists travelling between Rome and Florence.*

*Road signs direct visitors to “Civita - The Dying Town”.*

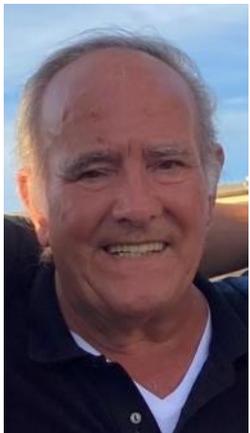
*Stefano Lucarini, 29, bought a restaurant in Civita in March, 2020, just days before the first Covid lockdown.*

*“The timing was not great,” he joked. But he is optimistic that after the pandemic, the town can get back on its feet.*

*“The environmental risk is worrying (but) we hope that for many years everyone will be able to enjoy the town,” he said.*

*The mayor’s spokesman, Roberto Pomi, said Italy submitted the heritage site proposal in January and expects UNESCO to decide in June next year.”*

## IN MEMORIAM



† *With Our Ancestors*

**Giuseppe “Joe” Francavilla**

**April 19, 2021**

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Joe Francavilla one of our Founding Members.

Joe was born in Craco on October 19, 1939. He and his wife Maria attended the Society’s events and meetings regularly. Besides impacting

his family, John’s passing is a great loss to all of us in the Society.

His kind smile and warm personality will be missed by us whenever we gather.

## GAETANO GRIECO AND THE UTOPIA TRAGEDY

On the night of March 17, 1891 one of the most tragic events in Italian immigration history occurred. The consequences of this event on a stormy night 130 years ago are still felt today.

The steamship *Utopia* was a transatlantic passenger vessel built in 1874 and starting in 1882 she regularly carried Italian immigrants to the United States. To maximize revenue on the Italian route, first class accommodation were reduced, second class was removed, and steerage capacity was increased to 900 bunks.

On February 25, 1891 the *Utopia* sailed from Trieste for New York City, stopping at Naples, Genoa, and Gibraltar. She carried 880 people including 59 crew, 3 first class passengers, 815 third class passengers, and 3 stowaways. The *Utopia* normally carried seven lifeboats that could only accommodate 460 people.

Among these passengers was Gaetano Grieco, the ancestor of several Craco Society members. Gaetano was born in Albori, part of the town of Vietri sul Mare in the province of Salerno on March 24, 1860. He was the son of Giuseppe, who was a tailor and Brigida Fiorillo. His birth took place at the home of the then mayor of the town suggesting a connection between the mayor and Gaetano's mother (but records supporting that have not been located yet.) Gaetano grew up to become a merchant of fine silk linens and jewels. On April 7, 1882 Gaetano married Giulia Maria Baldassarre in Craco. Giulia was born there on June 26, 1856 to Giovanni and Rosa Maria Matera. Gaetano and Giulia settled in Craco where two children were born, Giuseppe (Feb. 13, 1885) and Margarita (Apr. 27, 1887). The family then immigrated to New York City where another daughter, Brigida was born (Feb. 5, 1890).

Grieco family descendants had an oral history of the loss of Gaetano in a shipwreck but lacked full details and understanding about it until recently. With the help of the staff at the Gibraltar Museum the story of Gaetano's fate was resolved. The final piece of the puzzle fell into place when Pina Maffoda, a researcher who recovered in archives from Naples, Palermo, and Trieste the names of all the passengers and reconstructed the last voyage of the *Utopia*.

The *Utopia* reached Gibraltar on March 17 and navigated to her usual anchorage in the harbor but the location was occupied by two battleships HMS Anson and HMS Rodney.

The *Utopia's* captain said he was temporarily blinded by the Anson's searchlight and "suddenly discovered that the inside anchorage was full of ships". When attempting to steer *Utopia* ahead of Anson's bow a



The sinking of SS *Utopia* (March 17, 1891, the Bay of Gibraltar) by Ms. Georgina Smith. Original caption: "sketch by Mrs Georgina Sheriff (courtesy Gibraltar Museum)". The site operator is Mr. Clive Finlayson, Gibraltar, Director of the Gibraltar Museum.

strong gale combined with current swept the vessel across the bows of the Anson, and in a moment her hull was pierced. The impact occurred at 6:36 p.m. and with a hole 16 ft. wide below *Utopia's* waterline her holds quickly flooded.

The *Utopia's* captain ordered the lowering of the lifeboats and to abandon ship, but *Utopia* suddenly listed 70 degrees, crushing and sinking the boats. The survivors clung to the starboard of *Utopia* while hundreds were trapped inside steerage holds but within 20 minutes the *Utopia* sank. Her masts, protruding above the waves, became the last refuge for survivors.

Nearby ships immediately sent rescue crews to the site, but rough weather and a strong current made it difficult for them to approach the wreck. Rescuers were blinded by the wind and rain but saw a confused, mass of human beings entangled with wreckage. Out of 880 passengers and crew of *Utopia*, there were 318 survivors: 290 steerage passengers, 2 first class passengers, 3 Italian interpreters, and 23 crew. The remaining 562 passengers and crew were dead or missing.

Divers sent to examine the wreck reported that the inner spaces of *Utopia* "were closely packed with the bodies ... who had become wedged into an almost solid mass"; and that "the bodies of many of the drowned were found so firmly clasped together that it was difficult to separate them." Hundreds of bodies remained trapped in the steerage holds of the sunken ship.

The *Utopia* captain was found guilty of grave errors in judgement. After the accident the remains of *Utopia* were illuminated by lights hoisted on each masthead. However,

this did not prevent another incident; the SS *Primula*, entering the harbor, collided with the wreck of *Utopia*.

The wreck of *Utopia* was raised in 1892 and brought to Scotland. It was scrapped in 1900.

Pina Maffoda's research provided the death record that was sent to Vietri sul Mare. But we do not know how and when Giulia Baldassarre and her children learned of Gaetano's death.

The Grieco family knows that after the loss, an uncle who was a professor in Salerno, wanted to educate Giuseppe and raised him there for several years until Giuseppe expressed a desire to return to America to be with his mother and sister.

When he returned to New York City, settling in with the family on Mulberry Street, Giuseppe and his mother started a scrap rag business that evolved into a successful paper stock enterprise. On October 23, 1902 Giuseppe married Maria LoPorchio in Manhattan. She was born in New York to Francesco (b. 1862, Craco) and Giulia Demma (b. 1870, Craco). Giuseppe and Maria would have 11 children that were supported by Giuseppe's paper stock business. He had several business locations, the last being on West 27th Street in Manhattan, which is now the Selina Chelsea Hotel New York.

Brigida Grieco married Pietro Paduano (b. 1880, Craco) on April 27, 1905 in Craco. Pietro was the son of Giuseppe Paduano (b. 1836, Craco) and Filomena Rinaldi (b. 1846, Craco). Brigida and Pietro immigrated to New York and settled in Brooklyn along with Giuseppe and Maria.

Their many descendants now know how those tragic events so far away occurred.

## SUPPORT SAVING THE MADONNA DELLA STELLA



Helping to save the historic Madonna della Stella Chapel and statue which are important parts of Craco Vecchio's history, culture, and traditions is a significant and worthwhile objective. In support of the effort started in Italy, the Board of Directors encourages members to contribute to the Madonna della Stella Restoration. All funds collected will be sent to Craco for use in preserving the chapel and statue. Generations of Crachesi will thank you for your donation.

PLEASE SEND YOUR DONATIONS TO:

The Craco Society  
14 Earl Road  
East Sandwich, MA 02537  
Or

by PayPal to: [memberservices@thecracosociety.org](mailto:memberservices@thecracosociety.org)

Questions: contact us at 774-269-6611 or by email at: [memberservices@thecracosociety.org](mailto:memberservices@thecracosociety.org)

Those supporting the preservation effort by contributing so far are:

- Patrick Colabella
- Leonard Francavilla Family
- Salvatore Francavilla Family
- Angela Gallo
- Richard Gorgoglione
- Damiano Greci
- Isabelle Grieco
- Janis Grieco
- James Mastronardy
- Leonardo Modena
- Isabella Pause
- Ann Pirozzi
- John Sarubbi
- Spero Family
- Ugenti Family

HOW TO CONTACT US—COME CONTATTARCI



The Craco Society  
14 Earl Road  
East Sandwich, MA 02537 USA



[www.thecracosociety.org](http://www.thecracosociety.org)  
E-mail: [memberservices@thecracosociety.org](mailto:memberservices@thecracosociety.org)

