



# THE CRACO SOCIETY

## MADONNA DELLA STELLA RESTORATION

Last month we learned of the plans for the restoration of the Chapel of the Madonna della Stella and the historic statue that is housed there in Craco Vecchio. This beloved Madonna has a long and interesting history as part of the town.

Craco Vecchio supported many churches and chapels over its history but most notable in recent times was the main church (San Nicola), a Franciscan monastery (St. Peter's), a small chapel in the center of town with a small cemetery (Santa Maria di Monserrato) and a chapel outside of town on the road to Stigliano—the Chapel of the Madonna della Stella.

This is the only one of the original churches in Craco Vecchio still left intact and useable.

Nowadays the Feast of the Madonna della Stella is celebrated twice, the first Sunday of May in Craco Vecchio and on the second Sunday in August in Craco Peschiera.

The chapel is located on the north side of Craco Vecchio and according to Prof. Dino D'Angella in *Note Storiche sul Comune di Craco*, it was founded in the first half of the 17th-century around the time of the construction of the Chiesa Madre. The chapel always held sacred artifacts, including the body of San Vincenzo when it first arrived in 1792.

In the eighteenth century the 17.5 x 30 ft. chapel also had three gardens and some houses as part of the complex. After the Unification of Italy it was restored and then again in 1904 and 1951 with the financial assistance of Crachesi in America. More recently, the chapel was modernized. The inside of this church in a rural setting is simple with a couple of small frescos.

In *Omaggio alla Stella*, a book about the Madonna, there is a bit more about the architecture describing the high marble alter dating to 1909, the wrought iron gate, and the main façade of carved wood. The chapel, which was initially larger than it is today was scaled back due to landslide damage in the 1930's. The property description from that era also mentions features now gone but included a side chapel and external oven that was used to roast meats on the feast day.

*Omaggio alla Stella* also relates the story of the Madonna della Stella connecting it to the adjacent water well where the chapel is now located. Apparently, centuries ago a natural spring was located there and a shepherd bringing his flock to water discovered the statue of the Madonna and Child. The statue from the 1700s survived hundreds of years of movement from the chapel for annual procession events. Unfortunately, the infant did not fare as well. Those with a keen eye will see the difference in the child shown in older photographs (see photo-story on page 4). But this was due to theft. There were at least two Infants as part of the statue that were adorned with valuables of jewelry, crowns, and scepters. The theft of the original Child occurred in the late 1960s.

The centuries long devotion to the Madonna goes far beyond annual festivals and included, Masses, daily visits to the chapel, or workers stopping to pray as they were passing to and from work in the fields. More indicative of their fervour was the unique aspect of the Crachesi naming their daughters "Stella" as a veneration to this Madonna.

There is also evidence supporting this deep devotion in the photographs of Craco by Cav. Vincenzo Simone. Of the 31 images the Society of the town taken by him and his son, five are the Madonna della Stella alone. The popularity of the Madonna allowed them to create two other instances where the images were used in a composite to make postcard photo montages.

*Contributions to support the restoration effort can be made directly through Pay Pal to: [pasquale.ragone@alice.it](mailto:pasquale.ragone@alice.it)*

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MADONNA DELLA STELLA  
CRACO (Matrone)



**Processions Over Time**— Time has changed the way the statue is processed. The photograph above shows a scene from the 1962 procession in Craco Vecchio taken in the Piazza Largo Vittorio Emanuele II.

The color photograph below shows the adjustment made to the procession after Craco Peschiera was established with the route between the town and the Chapel traversed by the procession using a motor vehicle to carry the "cirio" or candle house.



# THE ART OF IMMIGRATION NYC

April 11-May 11, 2019

Mon-Fri 9-5 pm,

Sat <sup>except</sup> April 20 1-4 pm, Sun closed

**Rectory Gallery,  
St. Patrick's Old Cathedral**

263 Mulberry Street,  
New York, New York 10012

+1 212 226-8075

oldcathedral.org/shrine-church-of-  
the-most-precious-blood

**Opening Reception:**

Thursday, April 11, 6-8 p.m.

**Related events celebrating  
art and immigration:**

Mon, April 22, 6-8 pm: **Lou**

**del Bianco**—Luigi del

Bianco, Italian-trained,  
immigrant carver of Mt.

Rushmore

Weds, April 24, 6-8 pm: **Paul**

**Moses**—"From Herod to

Pilate": How the Italian

Community Built Most

Precious Blood Church

Thurs, May 2, 6-8 pm:

**Olga Nikolic-Litwin,**

Why Paintings Need

Conservators

Sats, April 13, 27, May 4 &

11, 3-5 pm: **Exhibit plus**

**Tour** of Shrine Church of

Most Precious Blood, meet

at the Rectory Gallery.

*All events are free and open  
to the public.*

The Shrine Church of the Most Precious Blood, the home of the beautiful and historic statue of San Vincenzo Martire di Craco, in New York City is also graced by many other works of art.

Among the most striking are those of Donatus Buongiorno (see December 2017 Newsletter). His artistry is being recognized in a special exhibit titled, "The Art of Immigration" at the Rectory Gallery of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, 263 Mulberry Street that will open with a reception on Thursday April 11 at 6pm.

Running through May 11, it will be open Monday to Friday 9-5pm and Saturdays 1-4 (except April 20).

Donatus Buongiorno (1865-1935), the Italian immigrant artist who came to America, contributed significantly to the world of art.

He was born in Solofra, province of Avellino, Campania Italy, then came to America in 1892 and became a citizen. He painted privately and in churches in America and Italy.

His images express appreciation for the opportunity to make the U.S. his home, while also recalling memories of the people and landscapes of his native southern Italy.

This exhibit displays samples of his secular work, easel paintings from private collections—images that capture the same passion for human life seen in his inspirational murals at the church.

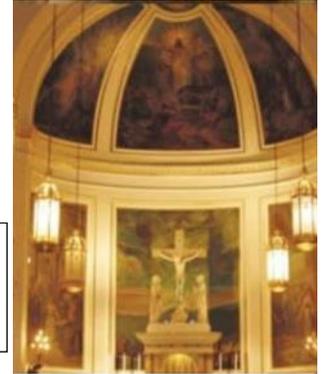
Monsignor Donald Sakano, pastor says about the exhibit, "We gaze upon these pictures from a distance, measured by the passage of time, and find ourselves mystically connected to the people of this disappeared world. These fine paintings remind us of who we are and inspire us to see the world around ourselves as a beautiful place to live and work."

The Craco Society and the San Rocco Society of Potenza are collaborating in support of the event, sponsoring a portion of the exhibit catalogue. Both societies benefit from the hospitality at the Shrine Church of the Most Precious Blood for their patron saint's statues, the 130 year old San Rocco statue and the 113 year old statue of San Vincenzo Martire di Craco. The proceeds from the exhibit will go to restoration of the Buongiorno paintings located in the Most Precious Blood Church at 113 Baxter Street in Little Italy.

The Shrine Church of the Most Precious Blood contains 38 Buongiorno murals telling the stories of both spiritual salvation and of immigrants seeking a better life. The church is open for anyone wanting to visit and see these works along with the other historic pieces of art from Monday-Thursday 11am-5pm, Friday-Saturday 11am-7pm, and Sunday 11am-6pm. We encourage you to take a trip into "the old neighborhood" and see the exhibit and visit Most Precious Blood.

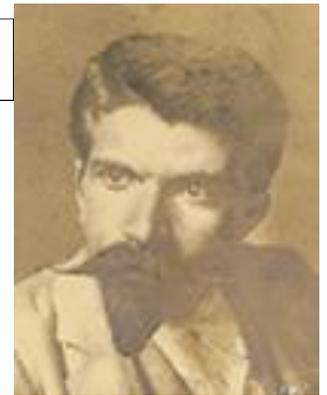
Ongoing research into Buongiorno's life and works is being done by the curator of the exhibit, his great-grand-niece, Janice Carapellucci. More about him can be found at: [www.donatusbuongiorno.com](http://www.donatusbuongiorno.com).

For more information about "The Art of Immigration" exhibit, contact Bill Russo, Producer, by telephone at: 347-933-3337. Sponsors and donations are welcomed.



Some Buongiorno paintings at the Shrine Church of the Most Precious Blood

Donatus Buongiorno



# THE CHAPEL OF THE MADONNA DELLA STELLA



**The Chapel**—The scene above is a postcard image done by Cav. Simone’s son in the mid-20th century while the one below dates from 1990.



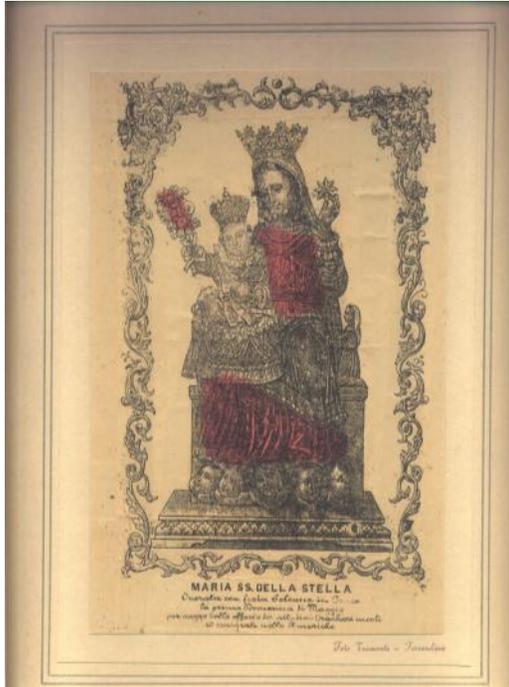
**Chapel Interior**—The image below is a 1990 photograph showing the chapel interior with the statue in a locked case. The altar and wrought iron altar railing is also visible.

The photo above, a Cav. Simone image shows the interior in earlier times with a larger altar and more ornate decorations on the chapel wall visible in the background.



**Craco postcard**— Left is one of the montage postcards created by Cav. Simone using images of the Madonna della Stella statue and the chapel. These postcards were commissioned by the town’s shopkeepers and sold in their stores.

# THE STATUE OF THE MADONNA DELLA STELLA



**Statues Over Time**—The colored woodcut (left) shows the original figure while the black & white image (right) shows one of the two infants that replaced those that were stolen along with the golden ornaments. Although the stolen items were replaced, culture and history are lost each time original items are damaged or destroyed.

Directly below is a photograph showing the statue when the Infant was missing and also with a different paint scheme. The color photograph (bottom right shows the statue today.)

The image below left of the Madonna and Child is a Cav. Simone photograph showing what the statue looked like in the late 1920s.

*Black & white photos right and below courtesy of Fil Francavilla.*



The image of the Madonna della Stella was also used by Cav. Simone in another postcard shown just below that included other scenes of Craco.



HOW TO CONTACT US—COME CONTATTARCI



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East Sandwich, MA 02537 USA



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E-mail: memberservices@thecracosociety.org



## NEW MEMBERS

Frank Viverito—St. Louis, MO  
Dianna (Colabella) Marino—Toms River, NJ

The Society now has 510 members.