



THE CRACO SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER IN CRACO VECCHIO

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The annual pattern in Craco, combining the demands of the agrarian life and church calendar's events continued in September.

Those tied to the land ended the growing season by burning hay stubble in the fields to prepare the soil for next year's crops.

This was also a time for wine making. Very few people had vineyards but those who did were busy turning the harvest into wine.

On the third Sunday in September the town celebrated the "Madonna del Monserrato" in the usual manner with a mass, procession, marching band, and fireworks!

The image (shown to the right) is the procession for the feast of the Madonna del Monserrato in the piazza where the chapel dedicated to this Madonna was located. This unique photograph is the only one known to exist of the chapel and the event.

The chapel, according to *Note Storiche sul Comune di Craco* originated in the early 16th Century as a private chapel subsidized by the DeSimeone family. Located in the center of Craco, the chapel had a small cemetery adjoining it and it housed many religious antiquities. The chapel was restored at the beginning of the 20th century with donations from Crachesi who had immigrated to America.

The Madonna del Monserrato, sometimes referred to "[Santa Maria del Monserrato](#)" or "[Our Lady of Montserrat](#)" originated in Spain and is a statue of the Virgin Mary and infant Christ venerated at the Santa Maria de Montserrat monastery on the Montserrat mountain in Catalonia, Spain. It is one of the black Madonna's of Europe. Believed by some to have been carved in Jerusalem in the early days of the church, it is a Romanesque sculpture in wood from the late 12th century. Upon his recovery from battle wounds, Ignatius of Loyola visited the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat where he hung his military accoutrements before the image. Then he led a period of asceticism before later founding the Society of Jesus. On September 11, 1844, Pope Leo XIII declared the Virgin of Montserrat patroness of Catalonia.

The Crachese devotion to this Madonna probably stems from the period when Spanish influence dominated this region of Italy.



September brought winemaking for the town.



Statue of Madonna del Monserrato in Craco Peschiera



Madonna del Monserrato — The scene in the above photo was taken around 1965, on the third Sunday in September when everyone in town would celebrate the Feast of the Madonna del Monserrato in the usual manner with a Mass, procession, marching band, and fireworks.

SAN VINCENZO IN CRACO

Craco's connection to San Vincenzo starts with the former Franciscan monastery of St. Peter, (the Observant Order of Friars Minor, O.F.M.) that was in the town. In 1769 a reliquary with bone fragments of San Vincenzo was sent from the Roman Curia to the head of the friary, M. Rev. Francesco Antonio. Following that, Fr. Prospero of the friary obtained permission to bring "a great relic of a glorious martyr and warrior named Vincenzo to his town and convent."

The relic accompanied by a bull by Francesco Saverio Passari, Archbishop of Larissa, assistant Papal and domestic Prelate of the Pope, written on April 18, 1792; attested to the authenticity of the relic. It mentions, "sacred body with flask of blood of San Vincenzo martyr exhumed at the cemetery of St. Ciriaca, ennobled by vestments of gold and silver ... and placed in a purple wooden casket decorated with gold and a crystal pane at the front."

The friars arrived with the relic of San Vincenzo's body and its case in Craco on May 9th at the Chapel of the Madonna della Stella. From there, "the holy body which was then carried in procession to the church of the Convent where there is a continuous flow of citizens and foreigners..." The Bishop of Tricarico designated the fourth Sunday of October as the feast day and that was certified by a letter from the Pope on September 8.

Attached to the convent was a chapel with a large alcove dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption. The benefactor of the alcove allowed it to be redesigned so it could accommodate the relic of San Vincenzo in the center along with the other saints. They remained in that alcove until 1983 when an earthquake destroyed a portion of the chapel.

The townspeople also created a statute of San Vincenzo in an upright position showing him as a Roman Legionnaire (shown on page 1). It was used for the feast celebrating San Vincenzo which had a specific format. It began nine days before the fourth Sunday in October with the recitation of solemn afternoon novenas. On one of the evenings a small procession took the statue from the Convent and walked around the "Cross" (La Croce), located at the entrance to the town. On Friday evening, after the novena, the statue of the saint was brought into the Chiesa Madre [San Nicola] located in the heart of the old town. On Saturday evening, before the novena, the statue was carried in procession back to the Convent. All celebrations culminated on Sunday with the Mass at the monastery and the procession

that crossed the entire town. In the evening, in front of the Palace Rigrone there were bright fireworks.

The devotion to the saint also included the formation of Confraternity of San Vincenzo, which lasted into the early 1900s. The confraternity members wore a white tunic with a turquoise color cape and belt. This group took part in the Mass, processions and, upon request at funerals.

Coming at the end of the growing season, the feast also played a role in helping the town prepare for Winter. On the Saturday before feast day a fair was held, a tradition that has lasted since the 1700s. Traditionally it was visited by people from neighboring towns of Salandra, Fernandina, Montalbano and Pisticci. The fair stretched from the entrance of Craco Vecchio to the other end of the town, at the drinking trough. On that day, people made major purchases of animals, foodstuffs: dried beans, "winter" apples, and dried peppers that would be used to season salami. This occasion allowed people to purchase provisions for the long winter that awaited the rural population.

Currently, the body of the San Vincenzo is in the small church, created from a former elementary school, in the Sant'Angelo section of Craco.



St. Peter's Friary—Shown above is a 1930 view of the monastery on a postcard shows the chapel that housed the San Vincenzo relic. It is the round shaped structure on the side of the building in the center of the image.

San Vincenzo Relic—Below is the relic as it is displayed today in the small chapel in the Sant'Angelo section of Craco Vecchio.



BISHOP SCALABRINI CANNONIZATION

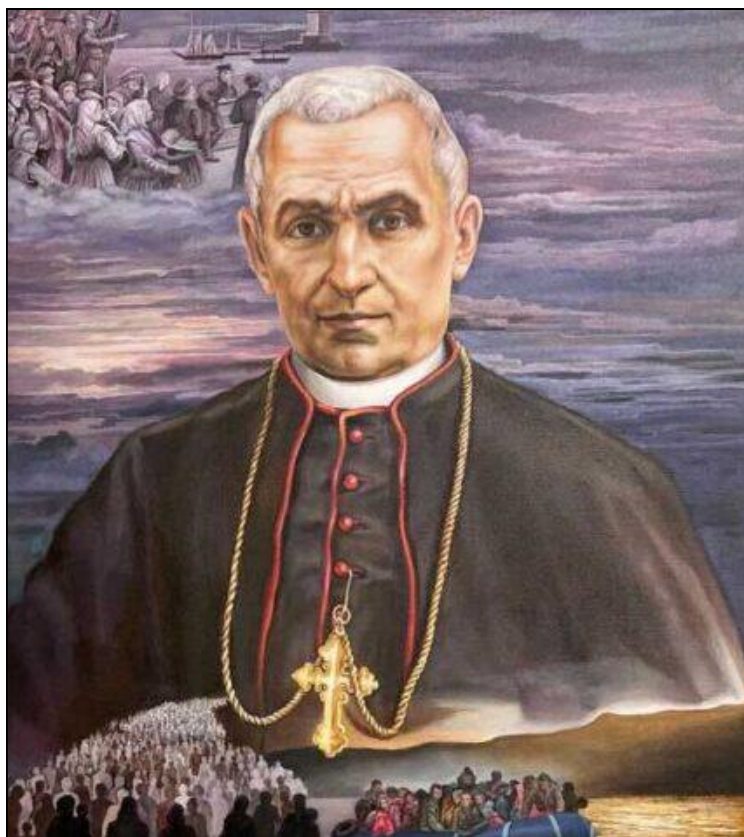
Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini was declared a saint on May 17th and it is expected his canonization ceremony will take place in October. The timing of this could not be more fitting for us with a historical connection of the Scalabrini Order and San Vincenzo in New York City.

His efforts dedicated to the care of Italian migrants directly led to the establishment of St. Joachim's Church on Roosevelt St. and The Church of St. Joseph on Monroe St. in New York City's Lower East Side. These churches served as meccas for our Italian ancestors arriving from Craco and settling in the area. Bishop Scalabrini not only dispatched priests from the order he founded, the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Charles Borromeo (Scalabrinian Missionaries) to minister to immigrants in the New World, but also was responsible for having Mother Cabrini sent to America.

In 1888 he dispatched priests and lay-brothers to the Americas. After their arrival in New York City, the new missionaries secured a site on Centre Street, where there was a colony of Italians, and in a short time a chapel was opened. Soon after, the Church of the Resurrection was opened on Mulberry Street. Then, a building on Roosevelt Street, which had been a Protestant place of worship, was acquired and became the Church of St. Joachim, the first national parish for Italian immigrants in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York. As the parish grew, a new church, St. Joseph's just down the street from St. Joachim's was built to accommodate the large crowds attending Masses.

The two churches, St. Joachim's and St. Joseph's, founded by the Scalabrini Order, served as the home for the statue and bone relic of San Vincenzo Martire di Craco in New York for 114 years, from 1901-2015.

In 1901, the Cracotan mutual aid society, the Società San Vincenzo Martire di Craco arranged with the pastor at St. Joachim's to place the statue of San Vincenzo and a bone relic brought from Craco in the church and hold an annual feast day event. In 1957 when the church was closed due to an urban redevelopment project, the statue was removed by the Gallo family and kept in their house until arrangements could be made to house it in St. Joseph's. When that church was closed in 2015 the statue was relocated to The Shrine



Giovanni Battista Scalabrini (1839–1905) served as Bishop of Piacenza from 1876 until his death. He was the founder of both the Missionaries of Saint Charles (also known as the Scalabrinians) and the Mission Sisters of Saint Charles.

Church of the Most Precious Blood. There it resides in an alcove with two other historic statues, San Rocco and San Gennaro.

PLANNING FOR SAN VINCENZO IN NEW YORK



Rev. Fr. Robert Campagna, OFM

With the Society preparing to mark the 121st time Cracotans will be celebrating the feast of San Vincenzo in New York City we share some Providential developments.

As always, we are extremely thankful to the Rev. Fr. Brian Graebe, the pastor at the Most Precious Blood Church for allowing us to hold our celebratory Mass there on Oct. 23rd at 11:30am.

Since our own Cracotan cousin, Fr. Nick Mormando, OFM, Cap., cannot make it to New

York this year, the hand of Providence seems to have intervened sending someone who is also connected to us.

The Rev. Fr. Robert Campagna, O.F.M., will be the celebrant for the Mass bringing with him amazing and unique connections to Craco and many of us.

Fr. Campagna is the Provincial Minister of the Franciscan Friars-Order of Friars Minor Province of the Immaculate Conception, 125 Thompson Street, Manhattan. His

connections to us include:

1. His Order founded St. Peter's Monastery in Craco and brought the San Vincenzo Relic to the town in 1792 (see story on page 2)
2. Our own Fr. Regis Gallo, OFM is a member of the same Province. Fr. Regis (who is now residing in Albany, NY) along with his family, saved the statue and Relic that is in Most Precious Blood from destruction when St. Joachim's Church was closed in 1957.
3. Fr. Regis was Fr. Campagna's mentor and instructor.
4. Fr. Campagna served for many years at St. Peter's Parish and Friary in Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada which is part of their Province. This is the hometown of Joe Rinaldi, the Society's president and several of his family members.

There is a saying, "Dio scrive dritto con linee storte" (God writes straight with crooked lines). It appears to apply here.

Viva San Vincenzo!

After this year's Mass we are planning an informal feast day luncheon for members who are interested in meeting with each other again. Please make plans to join us in this traditional celebration of our history and culture.

The Craco Society
invites you to join us in celebrating the 121st Feast of

SAN VINCENZO MARTIRE DI CRACO



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2022

Mass at 11:30 AM

Most Precious Blood Church, 113 Baxter Street, Manhattan NY

**Anyone interested in participating should contact
The Craco Society**

memberservices@thecracosociety.org

774-269-6611

NEW MEMBERS

Valerie (Sinisgalli/Manghise) Nansen
Clermont, FL

HOW TO CONTACT US—COME CONTATTARCI



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