



# THE CRACO SOCIETY

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## CRACO'S OTHER PATRON—SAN NICOLA VESCOVO

Years ago, when the Crachesi adopted San Vincenzo as their patron and proctor, in their great wisdom they also kept San Nicola Vescovo (Bishop) as their patron saint too.

For several years the Craco Society has used an image to represent this well loved saint. But we were wrong. *Mea culpa*.

We were given a beautiful picture (shown below left) and were told it was San Nicola in the church in Craco Peschiera. Unfortunately, we didn't research it and only learned of the error when Joe Rinaldi, the Society president visited Craco in connection with his trip to the Basilicata Regional Meeting (see story page 2).

Joe learned the image we thought was San Nicola is actually San Biagio (St. Blaise). The correct photograph of San Nicola in the church in Craco Peschiera is shown to the right. Both statues are housed in the main church that serves the

parish of Craco Peschiera named after the patron, San Nicola Vescovo. The parish has a prayer card featuring San Nicola imposed in front of the church building (see page 8).

San Nicola was the Bishop of Myra a city on the Turkish seacoast. In the 4th century, after his death, his tomb became a popular Christian pilgrimage site. When Myra came under Islamic rule sailors from Bari Italy took his body to their home port in 1087. Once there a crypt and ultimately a Basilicata was built for him by the mid-12th century.

In Craco Vecchio, the Church of San Nicola Vescovo (Chiesa Madre) measured 48 ft. at its maximum width and 90 ft. at the maximum length. It was erected in three different stages: the

main section in the thirteenth century, an additional section in the sixteenth century, and in the eighteenth century the dome and some additional windows were added. The interior was restored in the 1800s and decorated on the initiative of Archpriests Molfese and Giannone, with paintings of the Neapolitan school.

The church contained a mixture of styles: a bit Romanesque with a facade that does not have a cornice and some classic Byzantine domes that suggests a presence of the Greek Empire in the area. It was restored several times: late in the eighteenth century, just after the unification of Italy, and again in 1903. The church was maintained, until the 1970s. With the relocation of the church to Craco Peschiera.

Although most of the non-orthodox Christian countries celebrate his feast on December 6th the feast day for San Nicola in Craco was traditionally celebrated on the first Saturday in May.

During the week before Christmas, the kitchens in Craco were busy making seasonal specialties including *cartellate* (crisp pinwheel pastries) sometimes called the "dahlia of San Nicola" because of their color and shape and their association with the nuns of a hospice for pilgrims of Saint Nicholas of Bari.

On Christmas Eve, families gathered to eat *baccala* (dried salted cod) and other seafood, then attend midnight Mass at La Chiesa Madre—the Church of San Nicola.

More information about San Nicola can be found at the [St. Nicholas Center](#) website which includes listings and photographs of La Chiesa Madre and Chiesa di San Nicola Vescovo in [Craco](#).

The Board of Directors of The Craco Society would like to wish our members and friends a Blessed Christmas, and a Happy and Healthy New Year!

**Buon Natale  
Felice Anno Nuovo**



San Nicola Vescovo  
In Craco Peschiera



San Biagio Vescovo (St. Blaise) statue at the church of San Nicola in Craco Peschiera

## BASILICATA REGIONAL MEETING

# Federazione Lucana d'America



*By Joseph Rinaldi, president Federazione Lucana d'America  
(and president of The Craco Society)*

On October 7-8 I had the privilege of attending a conference hosted by the Commissione Regionale dei Lucani nel Mondo (CRLM), the branch of the Basilicata government that supports Lucanian associations around the world in promoting the history and culture of Basilicata. The conference was held in Viggiano, Potenza and was attended by over 60 Lucanian federation presidents from four continents. The overall theme of the conference was "Lucanian Associations in the Age of Covid" and focused on exploiting what Covid has taught us: the use of new technologies and previously untried methodologies in order to communicate in a smart way, and to make Lucanians around the world feel less distant. The conference consisted of both working sessions as well as exploration of the towns in the Val d'Agri area of Potenza, site of the largest onshore hydrocarbon field in Europe.

The delegates participated in three working sessions: The first, "For a Basilicata Beyond Stereotypes," addressed the possible role of Lucanian associations in overcoming issues that have affected the socio-economic development of the region - infrastructure gaps, demographic issues, the enhancement of energy resources, social and territorial cohesion, and emigration which continues to be a weak factor for any development policy.

In the second session of the proceedings, "Basilicata and the Fate of the Boroughs", the focus was on sustainable development for Lucanian villages, tourism, the rebirth of small villages, and taking advantage of new forms of work such as "smartworking" (remote working) and "southworking" (A new term for young professionals, managers, entrepreneurs or academics, mostly from the regions of Southern Italy. Forced to leave their places of origin in order to follow their professional ambitions, they now have the opportunity to return home and contribute to the revitalization of the southern regions). Nicola Morea, mayor of Irsina, spoke about the success they have had in selling abandoned homes to Lucanians and foreigners who have renovated them and brought about revitalization of the town. Available properties are listed with two prices, a base price and a price that includes essential restoration works. Additionally, Antonio Nicoletti, Director of the Agenzia di Promozione Territoriale Basilicata (APT Basilicata) spoke about the importance of "turismo delle radici" (tourism of the roots in English) to encourage Lucanians living abroad to visit their

land of origin and reconnect with their roots.

In the third session, participants were given the opportunity to present suggestions to nurture the communities of Lucanians around the world, to make them more alive and engaging. Given that most of the Lucanian associations in other countries are primarily made up of first generation immigrants who live in the same communities and congregate frequently, suggestions made by them focused on obtaining support from the Region in hosting cultural events that celebrate the Lucanian culture.

I took the opportunity to speak about the unique requirements of the Lucanians in the US where more than 95% of them are the children and grandchildren of Lucani who emigrated in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These people know very little about the land of their ancestors. They do not speak Italian. Their families have moved away from the core of New York City where most of the Lucani immigrants had originally settled and are now dispersed throughout the US. They have different needs from other organizations whose members are predominantly first generation immigrants. I proposed regional support for an enhanced "tourism of roots" program that would allow second and third generation Lucanians around the world to rediscover their roots by visiting their homeland and learning about their genealogy, history, and culture.

In between the working sessions, the delegates visited the Castello Sanseverino in Grumento Nova, the Musei Aiello in Moliterno, the Santuario Madonna di Viggiano, the Giuliano Grittini exhibit on Alda Merini "Atto d'Amore" ("act of love" in English). The group was also treated to traditional Lucanian delicacies (peperoni cruschi, local salami, baccala, lamb, wild boar, chestnuts, mushrooms, ricotta, pecorino), and participated in a pasta making demonstration, and even a tarantella lesson.

Throughout the two day conference many new friendships were formed with fellow Lucani and, together with the CRLM, there was a renewed commitment to continue to preserve and promote the history and culture of Basilicata around the world.

As the president of the US Federation, I intend to develop an educational program that highlights Basilicata. Hopefully, with collaboration of the interested Regional organizations in Italy and the other US Lucanian associations we can play a role in promoting the history and culture of Basilicata and providing "turismo delle radici" opportunities for our memberships.



## MADONNA DELLA STELLA RESTORATION UPDATE



**Finishing Touches**– Workers on scaffolding are working on the interior details of the Chapel before the reopening on November 6th. The finished ceiling, chandelier, and painting are visible.



**Making Old New**–the bell from the chapel suffered from neglect but was lovingly restored.

Besides having a relief of the Madonna della Stella, the bell includes one for San Vincenzo. Inscriptions indicate the bell was donated by Donato F. Colabella in 1957.

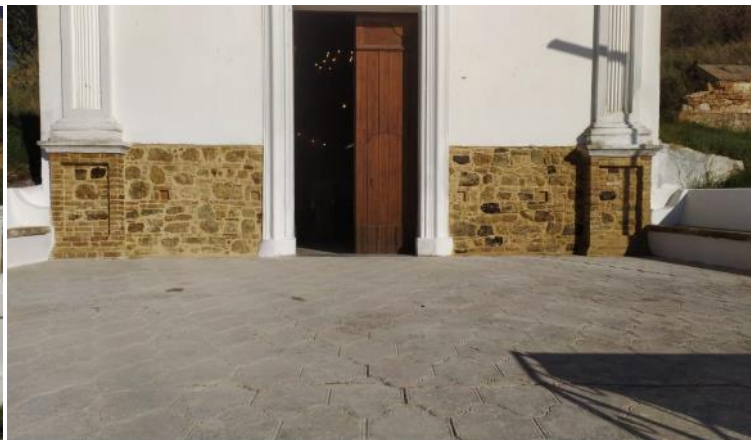
The bell maker is identified as Roberto Pazzola, of Valduggia, which is a commune in Piedmont.

See the results of all this work on page 4.

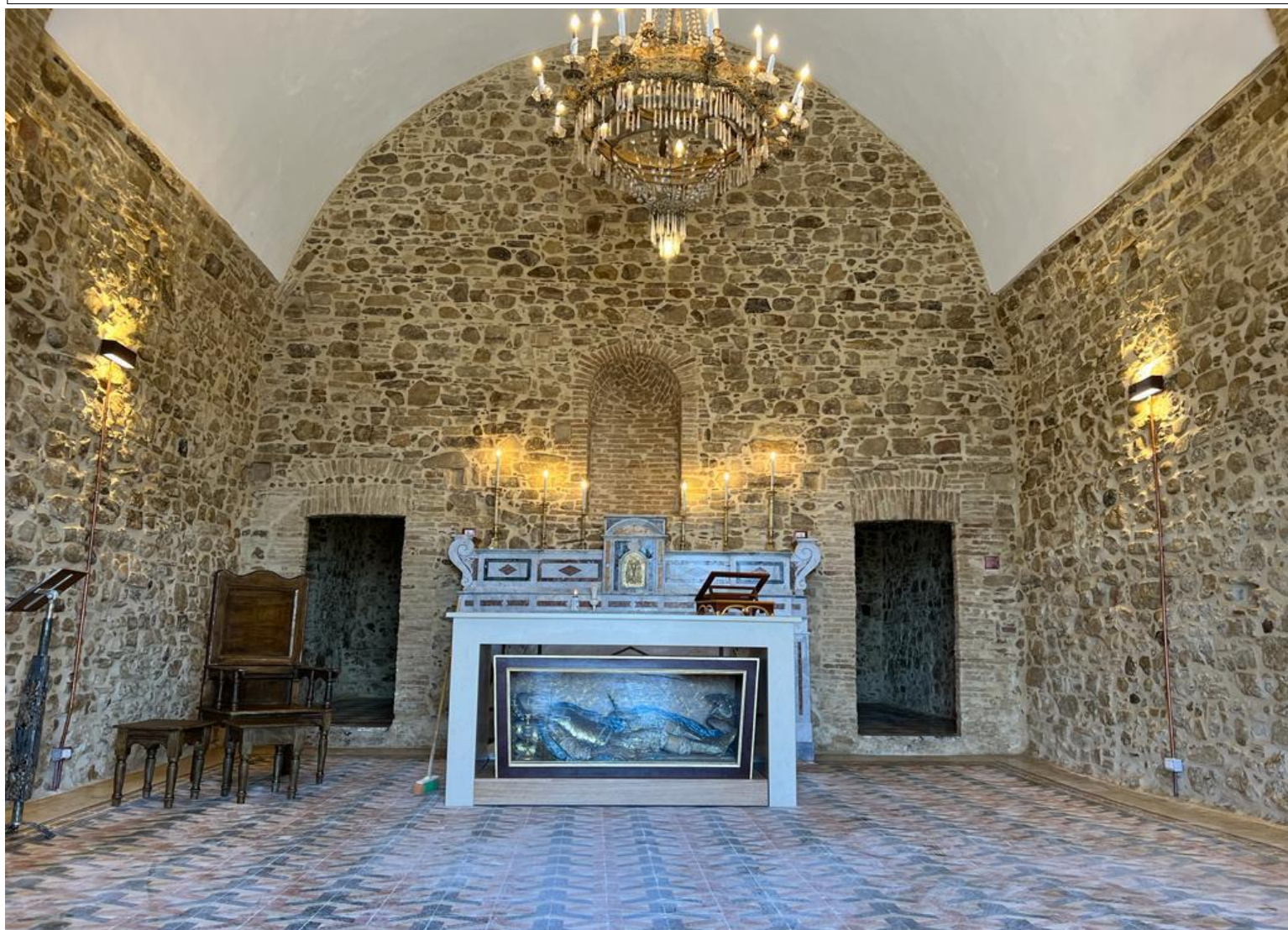




## THE CHAPEL BEFORE THE REOPENING



The exterior of the chapel while still to be completed the open doorway invites us to enter and see the wonder of the interior restoration, managed by Nicola Camporeale, architect. Shown below is the new altar that is resting place for the San Vincenzo relic, which was where San Vincenzo was brought in 1792 when the relic first arrived in Craco .





## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHAPEL

The statue of the Madonna della Stella (Our Lady of the Stars), that is so revered in Craco, as suggested by a popular song of praise (Madonna de la funtane gleriosa, [Madonna of the Glorious Fountain] a Cracotan song of praise), was found in a well of spring water near the location where the chapel was built.

Located north of the old town of Craco Vecchio, on the road to Stigliano, the church was founded by the spouses Leonardo Antonio Lanziano and Giulia Barberio, in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Many elements show the strong link of this Madonna to the rural community, the very fact that the chapel was immersed in the countryside and the farmers had to pass by it on their way to the fields is indicative of the attachment of these people to the devotion to the Madonna della Stella. Women who went to the "Piscicchio" [water spring near the chapel] to fill their buckets with water passed in front of it with their buckets on their heads and made the sign of the cross as to invoke relief from the arduous task. The farmers, before embarking on a day of hard work in the fields, used to kneel in front of the chapel and say a prayer to their beloved Madonna. There's more: when the weather was inclement, or a threat of drought was anticipated the statue of the Madonna was taken to the Chiesa Madre, in hopes she would heed their prayers for rain.

The chapel was incorporated into the church of San Nicola Vescovo, referred to as the Mother Church (La Chiesa Madre) in the same century it was built. The clergy celebrated Mass there every Sunday.

The small chapel, measuring 15.5 ft. x 30 ft. (6.50m x 10m), was restored after the unification of Italy, again in 1904, and 1951 with the financial contribution of the Crachesi of America. After extensive restoration efforts on Sunday, November 6, 2022 a ceremony reopening the Chapel of the Madonna della Stella with the blessing of a new altar took place.



The restoration of the chapel is not only a significant religious milestone but also a preservation of Cracotan history, culture, and traditions. We are grateful to every individual who played a role in this important and meaningful undertaking.

### Eviva la Maddonna della Stella!

#### Song of the Madonna of the Glorious Fountain (in dialect)

Madonnë de la funtanë gleriosë  
 Nd'a na funtanellë te pundist  
 Na bella cappelluccia te facistë  
 La gentë ca vannë fòre la matinë  
 Tuttë davantë a  
 Te vannë a passà  
 Primë s'ingenocchienë e po' s'inchinenë  
 - Madonnë mijë, pecche non fa chiovë  
 - Javë du misi ca non e chiuvtë  
 Dicenë la gentë ca so' chiusë le portë  
 Mo' se votë le viëntë a li cchiù fortë  
 Se mendë a trunà a tutte partë  
 Se votë lu punentë a le cchiù fortë  
 Scascijë fenestrë, caterattë e portë  
 Ci lu cantë, ci lu parlë e 'ntendë  
 Ave Maria e la Madonna. Amen

#### English translation:

Madonna of the glorious fountain  
 You planted yourself in a stream  
 And built a beautiful chapel  
 The people that go to their fields each morning  
 All pass by you  
 First they kneel and then they bow  
 - My Madonna please send us rain  
 - It hasn't rained for two months now  
 The people say the doors are closed  
 The wind will change for the strongest  
 And start to thunder everywhere  
 The westerly wind starts to blow for the strongest  
 It breaks windows, attics, and doors  
 Those who sing, those who speak and understand  
 Ave Maria is the Madonna. Amen



Restored statue of the Madonna della Stella in the chapel alcove



## A VISIT TO CRACO FOR THE CHAPEL OPENING

By Victoria Ascione, Craco Society Member

The Friday before the reopening of the Madonna Della Stella Chapel, my husband and I were on the road from Naples to Pisticci to stay with friends for a few days when I received the email from The Craco Society regarding the reopening of the Madonna Della Stella Chapel. It was a beautiful surprise, and we immediately decided to be in Craco for this very special occasion.

It was a cold, rainy morning on Sunday, as we joined with our "Crachese cousins" in the small chapel, where Monsignor Caiazzo celebrated Mass and blessed the altar. The local priest thanked everyone who helped make the new chapel possible and mentioned The Craco Society.

My great grandmother, Teresa Plati Tanico, was born in Craco and left to start a new life in New York when she was a teenager. I felt that I brought her back home today, as I held her photo close to my heart and struggled to hold back my tears. I said a special prayer for all our Crachese ancestors, and I hope that in a small way I was able to represent The Craco Society today here in Craco on this beautiful occasion.



Above, crowd gathering outside the restored Chapel on Sunday for the reopening ceremony. Below, the congregation inside the Chapel.  
Photographs courtesy of Alberto Raimondo



Left is a view of the new altar which holds the relic of San Vincenzo and showing the placement of the restored Madonna della Stella statue in the alcove on the rear wall. The venerated body of the saint, followed by a great crowd, arrived in Craco and was brought first to the Chapel of the Madonna della Stella on 4 June 1792.

Right, Victoria Ascione



A touching poetic statement that Victoria found written on a roadside wall in Craco written by Rocco Scatellaro:

*And there in the shadows of the lost clouds  
Lies in fragments a little Lucanian village*





## VICTORIA'S STORY- IT IS OUR STORY

By Victoria Ascione

Once upon a time in the Italian hilltop town of Craco, a boy and a girl fell in love and married. It was 1905, the bride was Teresa Maria Plati, and she was 17 years old; the groom was Nicola Tanico, and he was 21 years old. They were farmers, and life was hard. Teresa and Nicola were my maternal great grandparents. The Plati's lived on Via San Felice in Craco, and the first of their six children, Antonio, was born there. The family left Craco in 1908 and sailed aboard the "San Giovanni" from Naples to Ellis Island to begin a new life in America, far from the land they knew and loved.

They settled in New York, in a neighborhood filled with other Southern Italian immigrants. Teresa and Nicola had five more children and one of their daughters was my maternal grandmother, Vittoria Concetta Tanico Stabile. Teresa and Nicola worked hard to support their family and eventually moved to Astoria, Queens in the 1930's.

I never met my great grandfather, Nicola, as he died in 1937 at the age of 53. However, my sister and I were blessed to grow up with our great grandmother in our lives for many years. Because we had two sets of grandparents and one great grandmother, we lovingly referred to our great grandmother, Teresa, as "Cuandabella". This was because every time she greeted us, she would caress the sides of our face with her hands, and say "Cuanda Bella".... how beautiful! Cuandabella spoke only a few words of English, pronounced as best she could with an accent of her beautiful Crachese dialect. I was a young child, who spoke only English but somehow, I understood her and we never had a problem communicating. Thinking back, I believe it is because she spoke from her heart, and children always understand the language of love.

It was many years after Cuandabella had passed away that I became intrigued about my ancestry. There was always such a great sense of Italian pride in our family, but I longed to know more. I knew that my Italian ancestors were from Southern Italy, but it was the Craco Society, along with my many years of research, that helped me to discover the details that had been missing for so long. Although I eventually found the birth and marriage records for Cuandabella, I could not find any birth records for her parents or siblings. Again, it was the Craco Society that helped me to begin piecing together my genealogy puzzle. Fred Spero was instrumental in helping me, and he suggested that I reach out to the Commune of Pisticci; as many families had relocated from Pisticci to Craco in search of work opportunities.

In 2015, my husband and I traveled to Italy with plans to visit both Pisticci and Craco in search of any family information that we could find. Because my husband is from Torre del Greco, Naples, he was able to communicate fluently in the planning and requesting of family research records in Pisticci. When we arrived in Basilicata, our first stop was Pisticci. Fred Spero was spot on, as we learned that Cuandabella's parents, Michele Plati and Carmina Maria Caramanda, were both born, married, and lived in Pisticci. We received a copy of the *Stati di Famiglia*, which showed that Michele and Carmina had three children born in Pisticci, before moving to Craco where their fourth child, Cuandabella, was born. After our research in Pisticci was completed, we visited Craco. I will never forget the moment I first set eyes on it. I had looked at photos of Craco for years, but nothing prepared me for the mix of emotions I felt in those first few seconds. Instantly feeling joy and heartache... the joy of finally being in Cuandabella's homeland and the heartache of reality that so many lives were disrupted by the Frana and only crumbling buildings and rubble remain. I felt instantly connected to this special place and promised I would return.

After years of dreaming, we traveled back to Italy in 2022. We visited first with my husband's family in Torre del Greco, and then began our journey to Basilicata. We planned to spend five days in Pisticci visiting the friends we made during our first visit, and of course, visiting Craco again. When we left Naples on Friday, November 4, to travel to Pisticci, it was a foggy, damp morning. Despite the lack of sunshine, it was still a beautiful drive. When I saw the directional signs that we were entering the region of Basilicata, my heart filled with happiness and anticipation. Along the way, we stopped on the side of the highway for a warm cappuccino and a cornetto. When I checked my emails, I found a message from The Craco Society regarding the re-opening of the Madonna Della Stella Chapel on Sunday, November 6... just two days away. It was

the most beautiful surprise, and we immediately decided that we would plan to be there for this very special occasion.

I began counting the days, hours, and minutes until Sunday, when we would be back in Craco. We were up early on Sunday morning, and it was cold and raining. We set off for the 20 minute drive from Pisticci to Craco. As we drove up the winding, gravel road, Craco came into view. I could not hold back the tears, as I felt I had arrived back "home." We found an area to park and there before us was the Chapel of the Madonna Della Stella – a small, beautiful, white chapel. We climbed the stairs and stepped inside to join our "Crachese cousins" for mass and consecration of the altar by Monsignor Caiazzo. It is a small chapel, and there were only a few pews on each side of the center aisle, all filled to capacity. People were standing around the perimeter of the chapel, and we were happy to find space available and join others standing in the center aisle. As I looked around the chapel, I could not take my eyes off the beautiful statue of the Madonna and Child placed in an alcove, overlooking the altar. The lovely chandelier above filled the chapel with a warm glow and the altar was adorned with beautiful autumn flowers in white and shades of orange.

It is difficult to describe the emotion I felt that Sunday morning, as I listened to the beautiful voices of the small choir at the front of the church. I thought about my ancestors, who walked along the dusty road and passed by the Madonna Dell Stella Chapel every morning and evening on their way to work the fields. I thought about Cuandabella, as I held her photo close to me, and imagined what must have been on her mind and in her heart, as she prayed in that very chapel so many years ago. I said my own prayers of thanks for the hard work and courage of my immigrant ancestors that blessed me with the opportunity to live in the freedom, comfort, and safety of the USA. Although I have lived, worked, and raised my family here, my heart will always be Crachese. I prayed for the wellbeing of the members and leaders of the Craco Society; and that we will all continue to do everything possible to support and grow this society in order that our ancestors will never be forgotten but will live on in us and in our future generations.

During mass, the local priest thanked everyone who helped make the chapel renovation possible, and he specifically mentioned the Craco Society in the United States for all their help and support. I felt that I had brought Cuandabella back home, as I held her photo close to my heart and struggled to hold back my tears. I said a special prayer for all our Crachese ancestors, and hoped that in a small way I was able to represent all the members of the Craco Society who could not be there for this most memorable occasion. After a beautiful Sunday lunch with our friends in Pisticci, I sent an email to Fred Spero, sharing my experience and amazement of the coincidence that I was on my way driving to Pisticci/Craco, when I received the email from the Craco Society. He reminded me that it had to be more than a coincidence. Of course, he was right!

On Monday morning, the sun was shining, and we drove back to Craco and visited Craco Pescheria to take photographs. Sunday had been a rainy, overcast day, and I wanted my last vision of Craco on this trip to be in the beautiful Basilicata sun. The calanchi (badlands) were glistening in the sunlight, and we drove uphill slowly, savoring every minute, and making several stops to take photographs. As I stood there on the side of the road looking up, I thought about all the stories and articles I had read about Craco and how it is very often referred to as a "ghost town". It's not hard to understand why.

Although Craco may be abandoned, I don't believe that it is void of life. Standing there alone in the silence, looking up at this hauntingly beautiful town – the remains of our ancestral home – I was overcome with an important realization. Craco is not abandoned, for it is still very much alive with the spirit of our ancestors. If you quiet yourself and become one with the silence, you will allow them to speak to your heart. I will hold their message safe in my heart until I can return to Craco again.

Cuandabella lived to be 95 years old. She stood at 5 feet tall, beautiful dark eyes, and long hair that she twisted up into "u tupp" (bun) at the top of her head. She was a very special woman, and I feel her love and spirit with me every day.

One of my greatest joys in life is that I was able to visit my ancestral home of Craco, holding my great grandmother's photo close to my heart. If I close my eyes, I can still feel her warm, soft, wrinkled hands caressing my face and hear her sweet voice telling me ... "Cuanda Bella".



"Cuandabella"  
Teresa Plati Tanico



Prayer card of the statue of San Nicola Vescovo shown in front of the church of San Nicola Vescovo in Craco Peschiera.

*O santo vescovo Nicola, Cristo Dio ha voluto presentarti al tuo gregge quale regola di fede e immagine di mitezza. Tu risplendi fulgido nella rettitudine delle tue divine azioni. Ti chiediamo perciò di non cessare di intercedere per la salvezza delle nostre anime. Amen.*



In foto: Statua di San Nicola Vescovo venerata in Craco (MT)

**Rear of prayer card which reads in English:**

*O holy bishop Nicholas, Christ God has willed to present you to your flock as the rule of faith and image of meekness. You shine resplendent in righteousness of your divine actions. We therefore ask you not to cease interceding for the salvation of our souls. Amen.*

## IN MEMORIAM

### † With Our Ancestors



**Alfred Grieco**

October 28, 2022



**Peter Modena**

August 26, 2022

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