



## President's Annual Message

This was an amazing year for preserving our heritage. In Craco, our family and friends restored and renovated important buildings, statuary, and relics of our history, culture, and traditions. Here we contributed our support to their efforts and maintained time honored traditions.

On my trip to the Basilicata Regional conference in October, I learned of differences between immigrant experiences in other places and here.

In the United States, since our ancestors arrived from Craco over 100 years ago the subsequent generations were assimilated into American culture. The "Americanized" generations gave up their native language, lost their culture, and modified or gave up traditions.

But a spark of change is surfacing. Italian Americans are realizing a new desire to connect with their roots as evidenced by a surge in the number of individuals seeking dual citizenship. Nevertheless, there is still a great deal missing in the Italian American ethos.

The Society's mission has always been to preserve our history, culture, and traditions. This enables us to play a role in dealing with the opportunity to educate our community.

In Italy, there is also a desire to help those of Italian descent learn about their heritage. The Regione Basilicata and an array of allied organizations are promoting educational programs and "Turismo delle Origini" (tourism of origins). The Agenzia di Promozione Territoriale Basilicata (APT Basilicata) is fostering "turismo delle radici" (tourism of the roots) to encourage Lucanians to visit their land of origin and reconnect with their roots. The organization known as, "ROOTSin – Borsa Internazionale del Turismo delle Origini" is making Basilicata a laboratory putting it at the forefront of territorial promotion by including cooking courses, crafts, and cultural workshops as part of travel programs to Southern Italy. The Centro Studi Internazionali Lucani nel Mondo is actively pushing for policies that support "roots tourism" and village regeneration. These programs will certainly help in the education process and may even stimulate a return of individuals to live in Italy, repopulating the wonderful small Southern Italian hill towns that suffered from the diasporas of the last century.

*"Italian Americans are realizing a new desire to connect with their roots."*

My commitment to this process will unfold over the next year. Hopefully, we will be able to organize educational seminars that will help achieve these objectives.

Meanwhile, we will publish a series of articles that tell the story of Basilicata and the Crachese immigration story.

I invite you our members to contribute to these with stories, family recipes, photographs, or material that help us all understand our shared history. My belief is that all of us from Craco are "cousins" and drives me to seek to learn more about each and every one of you through these stories.

**With best wishes for a joyous Christmas season and Happy New Year.**

*Joseph Rinaldi*



*See the story behind the Christmas card on page 4.*

# Basilicata:

## A Brief History

Basilicata, also known as Lucania, borders Campania to the west, Apulia (Puglia) to the north and east, and Calabria to the south. The regional capital is Potenza. The region is divided into two provinces: Potenza and Matera.

Basilicata is the most mountainous region in southern Italy, with 47% of the area mountainous, 45% hilly and 8% is made up of plains. Geological features include the volcanic Monte Vulture and the seismic faults in Melfi and Potenza in the north and around Monte Pollino in the south.

Much of the region was devastated in an 1857 earthquake. There was another major earthquake in 1980. The combination of the mountainous terrain with the rock and soil types makes landslides prevalent but the problem is compounded by the lack of forested land. Originally abundant with dense forests, they were made barren during the Roman era.

*“Basilicata is the most mountainous region in southern Italy...Human presence the dates to the late Paleolithic Age.”*

The variable climate is influenced by the coastlines (Adriatic, Ionian and Tyrrhenian) and the region's physical features. The climate is Continental in the mountains and Mediterranean along the coasts.

Human presence in Basilicata dates to the late Palaeolithic Age. From the 5th millennium BC people built settlements on rivers leading to the interior (Tolve, Tricarico, Alianello, Melfi, Metaponto). The first known stable market center of the Appennine culture on the sea is near Maratea, dating to the Bronze Age. The first Iron Age communities lived in large villages on plateaus bordering the plains and the rivers, in places fitting to their agricultural activities. In ancient times the region was known as Lucania, named for the Lucani tribe, the first known settlers. Their name was derived from “lucus” Latin for forest. The first colonists, coming from the Greek islands and Asia Minor, date to the late 8th century BC. The Greeks established a settlement first at Siris and then Metaponto which led to the conquest of the whole Ionian coast.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Basilicata fell to German rule, which ended in the mid-6th century when the Byzantines reconquered it. They also renamed the region “Basilicata”, from the Greek term basilikos, meaning “imperial.”

In the 11th century Basilicata, together with the rest of southern Italy, was conquered by the Normans. Later it was inherited by the House of Hohenstaufen, who were ousted in the 13th century by Angevine domination. This led to the establishment of a feudal system that hampered economic growth.



After a century or so under the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Basilicata autonomously declared its annexation to the Kingdom of Italy on August 18, 1860 with the Potenza insurrection. It was during this period that the State confiscated and sold off vast tracts of Basilicata's territory formerly owned by the Church. Since the owners were a handful of wealthy aristocratic families the average citizen did not see economic and social improvements after the Unification and poverty continued unabated. This gave rise to the phenomenon of brigandage when the Church encouraged the local people to rise up against the nobility and the new Italian State. This strong opposition movement continued for many years.

After the Second World War things slowly began to improve due to land reform but many of Basilicata's population had emigrated or were in the process of emigrating, which led to a demographic crisis from which it is still recovering. Meanwhile, Fiat Italian automobile manufacturer established a huge factory in Melfi, leading to jobs and an upsurge in the economy.

In the same year the Pollino National Park was established. Agriculture consists mainly of grains (especially wheat), which represent 46% of the total land use. Potatoes and maize are produced in the mountain areas. Olives and vines are also commonly found. A quality wine called “Aglianico del Vulture” is produced. Among industrial activities, the manufacturing sector contributes with 64% economic activity while the building sector contributes 24%. Recently, new production of oil provided 11% of Italy's domestic demand.





# The Crachesi Come to America

*“...the immigrants created small ethnic communities where they preserved the culture of their homelands by publishing newspapers in their native languages, opening specialty grocery stores, restaurants, establishing churches, synagogues, and schools.”*

The story of the Crachese immigration to the Americas occurs in two phases. Both phases share common motives—the search for a better life; which is the reason behind all immigration and are usually part of larger events of the eras they occur. Before the 1880-1924 arrival of Crachesi most immigrants to the US arrived from Western and Northern European nations. Early immigrants were mainly English, Germans, and Scotch-Irish with a small percentage of other Europeans - French, Dutch, Welsh, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Swiss and African slaves who were forced immigrants.

By the 1850s two million Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine, and 1.5 million Germans fleeing crop failures and the collapse of their democratic revolutions, arrived. These immigrants generally were Protestant with some Catholics (particularly the Irish) and their cultures easily meshed into American culture of their era.

Then from 1880—1924, 24 million immigrants arrived primarily from Italy, Croatia, Greece, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Russia. They came for a variety of reasons including economic, social issues, disease, escape from forced military conscription, and religious persecution.

This coincided with the boom of the industrial revolution in the eastern US providing opportunities for individuals to fill the need for laborers and created the largest increase in the standard of living and production in history. These new immigrants faced difficulties in assimilating into American culture that earlier immigrants did not. Most could not speak English, nor were they literate.



*Italians have been influencing America starting with its discovery and continued through its exploration, naming, and founding as a country in 1776. The greatest cultural impact came from the 4 million Italians that came in the early 20th century making them the 4th largest European group in America.*

They typically settled in Eastern seaboard cities and entered low-paying, wage-labor jobs. They filled the growing factories and other jobs such as construction or sewing. Often arriving with little money and forced into substandard housing in the worst sections of the overcrowded cities, their increasing numbers strained the cities causing problems with sanitation, and overcrowding.

*Continued on page 4*

## Lucanian Immigration

*Although the major immigration to America from Lucania occurred from 1880-1924 there were small groups immigrating before then. San Fele, a town that is about 90 miles north of Craco, in the southern part of the province of Potenza, had an earlier response to conditions in the region with immigration that started in the 1860s.*

*The San Felese Society of New Jersey has a website which documents the immigration from their “paease” that started in 1862. Very detailed records that were kept in the town were so unusual and complete that 20th century Italian sociologists used them for impact*

*studies of immigration. The San Felese Society met Prof. Pietro Stia on their group trip to Italy in 2012. He wrote a book on the impact to San Fele of emigration between 1862 and 1895. His study focused on the culture and economic impacts that the emigration caused to the town in the second half of the 19th century.*

*The book, San Fele La Grande Emigrazione” is available in Italian. It uses San Fele as a model to project the consequences of the mass emigration which would take place between 1905-1930. The early San Fele experience became helpful to Italian social planners as they wrestled with the exodus of millions of southern Italians.*

*To judge the impact of the emigration from San Fele one only needs to look at the difference between the census figures for the town in 1860 with 10,000 residents versus the census of 1880 where the town's population dropped to 7,000. Interestingly, Professor Stia's work identified that immigration from San Fele made up 6%-8% of Italian immigration to the U.S. in the 1860s. This remarkable proportion of US immigrants from this small town is due to the small number of Italians arriving in that period.*



San Fele Stemma

## The Crachesi Come to America *continued from page 3*

Meanwhile, the immigrants created small ethnic communities where they preserved the culture of their homelands by publishing newspapers in their native languages, opening specialty grocery stores, restaurants, establishing churches, synagogues, and schools. But these enclaves could not protect immigrants from discrimination. Native-born Americans blamed the immigrants for the poor conditions and for taking over "their" nation creating prejudices and biases that continue today.

These biases were among the underlying reasons for [US Immigration Act of 1924](#) creating a quota system reducing the number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and largely ending the Crachese migration until the mid-1960s when a new wave arrived.

The causes creating the need for the first group of Cracotans to leave the land they inhabited for over a thousand years were multiple and built over a long time. These included economic, social, and political issues that impacted Italy for centuries reaching a peak when the future in Craco no longer offered an opportunity for a better life. This occurred twice, from 1880-1924 and again in the mid-1960s after the Frana. The first wave of arrivals from Craco coincides with the great immigration period from 1880-1924 that brought millions of immigrants from Europe to the US. During this period over 1600 Crachesi arrived along with 4 million other Italians.

As part of the Society's mission to preserve the history, culture and traditions of Craco in North America we will be documenting the story of the Crachese immigration beginning from 1880 when the first villager is known to have left for New York. Although some details about the families that arrived were touched on in previous newsletters or Reunions we will be creating a chronological story that aims to encompass the history of the Crachesi in America. Over the past years we have accumulated photographs and stories that will be used in the narrative but we invite all Society members to share material with us to be included in this effort.

### Note:

Material can be sent by email to: [memberservices@thecracosociety.org](mailto:memberservices@thecracosociety.org) or you can call us at 774-269-6611 to tell us about a story you would like to add to our history.

## 2022 Christmas Card Story

The image on the Christmas card was specifically created for the Society by Garnet Armstrong, to make the unique scene that has been named the "Craco Nativity Journey." This year the image was updated and enhanced to use in our online distribution system and on social media by Board member Rita Lavery.

The setting, the classic image of Craco Vecchio, underlies our historic connections to our roots. The Society continues to appreciate the efforts and creativity on our behalf by everyone who assists us throughout the year and especially for giving us this heartwarming and imaginary scene during this magical time of the year.

**We all have been blessed.**



### Notice:

**Watch for your 2023 membership dues notice coming soon.**

**The Society relies on you for support.**



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