



## Basilicata: Learning More

This month's newsletter has ample opportunities to learn about Basilicata and provides ideas about participating in the BASILICATÈ project by sharing images of your Lucanian home or even visiting Basilicata.

Karen Haid, experienced Basilicata traveler, tour guide, and the author of a book about the Region is sharing information about the area and offering a 12 day cultural tour of the Region this fall. (see page 2.)

*“[Basilicata: Authentic Italy](#), a book by Karen Haid, explores the region with a purpose.”*

Prof. Victoria Calabrese, Ph.D., shares her insights and understanding of the circumstances in the Region during the period of great emigration. Dr. Calabrese is the author of *Italian Women in Basilicata: Staying Behind but Moving Forward in the Age of Mass Emigration, 1876-1914*. This book examines the women who remained behind in the southern Italian region of Basilicata while thousands of married men called “Birds of Passage” left. Their wives remained in Italy, taking on new roles and challenging stereotypes. (see page 2.)

The Hon. Thomas P. Frascella, M.ed, J.D., followed up on his articles about immigration from the Region before 1880 with more information and notes about people from Basilicata that established a presence here long before the great period of immigration took place at the turn of the 20th Century. ■

## BASILICATÈ

THE LUCANIAN HOUSE AROUND THE WORLD  
DISCOVERING YOUR HERITAGE AT HOME

Are you of Lucanian descent?  
Did your family come from Basilicata,  
either recently or in the past?  
We believe that your home holds signs  
of Lucanian heritage.

**Join us by taking photos of areas in your  
home that showcase your Lucanian roots.  
Contribute to building the global  
Lucanian house!**

Sign up by filling  
out the form before  
April 12, 2024.



*Learn about seeing this stunning landscape in Basilicata on page 2*



# Basilicata: Authentic Italy

[\*Basilicata: Authentic Italy\*](#), a book by Karen Haid, explores the region with a purpose. The author tells us that after publishing *Calabria: The Other Italy*, which grew out of several years living in the region in the toe of the boot, people asked, "What's next?"

Conventional publishing would have directed her to add to the shelves of books about Rome, Venice or Florence. That's what sells. But she wanted to continue her exploration of the lesser known, the underrated. And Basilicata (also known as Lucania) was the perfect choice. She traversed Mediterranean beaches and Alpine forests, visited medieval castles and modest homes, attended folkloric festivals and sampled earthy local cuisine, uncovering Basilicata past and present, from pre-Greek to the story of emigration that continues today.

Regarding the region's challenges, the author reflects, "How could such a noble land, the birthplace of the likes of Horace and final resting place of Pythagoras become the 20th century's back and beyond, a place where the Fascists exiled political prisoners? What motivated the likes of Carmine Crocco, Basilicata's most famous brigand and others to common criminality or social revolt against the devastating consequences of Italian Unification? At times, progress has seemingly passed the region by, while other events, have wreaked havoc, such as in the case of the ghost town of Craco and big oil in Viggiano. Religion has played its part, as well, and I encountered symbols from ancient burial objects in numerous archeological museums to the Jewish catacombs of Venosa, from the extraordinary Early Christian cave paintings in the Crypt of the Original Sin to Maratea's Christ statue that rivals Rio's."

[\*Basilicata: Authentic Italy\*](#) is available in paperback and e-book versions from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Apple and directly from the author's website. Outside the US, the book is available through Amazon.



## [Basilicata Cultural Tour](#) [12-Day Basilicata Land Tour](#) [October 8 – 19, 2024](#)

Explore one of Southern Italy's hidden gems on a comprehensive, small-group tour! Join Karen Haid, author of [\*Basilicata: Authentic Italy\*](#), and travel through a region of magnificent natural beauty, rich culture and longstanding traditions. [Check out the exciting itinerary](#), highlighted by medieval castles and ancient historic sites, excellent food and wine, dramatic mountain scenery, coasts of both the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas, and of course, the world-famous Sassi di Matera, a UNESCO Heritage Site! Basilicata packs an incredible diversity into the unassuming instep of the Italian boot. Karen is offering a \$100 discount for tour registration to Craco Society members through May 31st.

How do you sign up? Go to her [contact page](#) or email [Karen](#) directly and she'll get in touch with all the particulars!

# Birds of Passage from Basilicata

By Victoria Calabrese, Ph.D.

Dr. Calabrese is the author of *Italian Women in Basilicata: Staying Behind but Moving Forward in the Age of Mass Emigration, 1876-1914*. This book examines the women who remained behind in the southern Italian region of Basilicata during the age of mass migration. While thousands of married men left, their wives remained in Italy, taking on a new role and challenging stereotypes.

[Birds of Passage: The Italian Americans - Re-imagining Migration \(reimaginingmigration.org\) https://reimaginingmigration.org/birds-of-passage-the-italian-americans/](https://reimaginingmigration.org/birds-of-passage-the-italian-americans/)

When I first began researching my great grandfather Nicola's family history, I found his Ellis Island manifest. He arrived in New York in 1905 and was going to stay with his brother. Great!-this is the moment my direct ancestor entered the US and I

was happy to have found his arrival record. As I continued my search, I saw his name again, and realized he also arrived in 1911. As a new researcher, this was strange to me. Then I researched his brother Giovanni who Nicola had said he would be

living with. I found Giovanni's arrival at Ellis Island in 1904, and then found that he also had at least two more known arrivals in 1909 and 1913. All of these arrivals got me thinking-why were these brothers both going back and forth?

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# Birds of Passage from Basilicata

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These two brothers were birds of passage, meaning they were migrants that went back and forth between Italy and New York. This was a common practice for many young Italian men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who would use this strategy to earn money while continuing to support a family at home. Some of these men were married, some weren't, but all were building a life for themselves, despite multiple long distance journeys. Most birds of passage were unskilled laborers from rural areas who worked in agriculture. Life in Basilicata was generally difficult for agricultural laborers. Wages were low, and there was little chance of moving up the social ladder or making a better life for oneself. Furthermore, stories from family, friends, and neighbors about prosperity in America convinced many young men to take the risk and emigrate. The prospect of returning home - that migration wouldn't be permanent but a temporary fix - made it less of a drastic and life changing decision.

Once he made the decision to leave, a migrant would have to request a passport, which was valid for three years. Birds of passage would likely have to request a passport from their municipality each time they planned on emigrating. They would also need a steamship ticket, which they could purchase in advance. Most migrants from Basilicata would have boarded the ship in Naples, the largest port for emigrant ships leaving from Italy. By the end of the 19th century, it was becoming easier than ever to emigrate from Basilicata because of train lines expanding in the region. A rail line connecting Metaponto, Potenza, and Eboli, bringing passengers to Salerno and Naples was completed by the 1860s. The railroad network would continue to expand in the coming decades. So even though the railroad didn't reach every small town in the region, migrants could make their way to the closest station and from there get to their port of departure.

After making their way to Naples emigrants would lodge in the city until their ship was to depart. Before

boarding the steamship, officials completed manifests and conducted medical examinations. Anyone boarding steerage on a ship going to the United States underwent a medical exam. These were conducted on the part of the US government to ensure that only healthy immigrants were coming into the country. Once the manifests were filled out and the passengers received medical clearance, they boarded their ship for America. Steerage was uncomfortable, to say the least. The journey from Naples to New York took up to two weeks. During this time migrants would spend much of their time below deck, sometimes with access to a small deck for fresh air. Generally they were located in one big room, where people had little privacy, shared beds, and shared meals. It was crowded and loud, with babies crying and young children running about. Many people were probably seasick, especially if it was their first experience on a ship. Birds of passage would be familiar with these conditions, and chose to travel back and forth, despite these hardships.

Wives of birds of passage were usually left behind in Italy. It was extremely rare for wives to join their bird of passage husband when going back and forth, and women rarely migrated on their own for work. Women during this time period had very few legal rights, but nonetheless stepped up to care for their families. While their husbands were away, they were left to manage the household. They would be the primary caretaker for their children, and would probably decide whether or not to send their children to school. Wives would have had to manage and handle the family's finances, especially money coming from America. Some women might have worked to make some extra money, doing things like sewing, cooking, or other small tasks. Wives might have gotten used to having their husbands being away for months if not years at a time - maybe some even liked the increased freedom. As birds of passage traveled back and forth, young married men continued to expand their families, often leaving behind pregnant wives as they left for America.

Community would also be important for the people who had family in America. Wives and mothers probably shared similar experiences and helped each other out in the absence of their loved ones. When in America, birds of passage had to find a job and a place to stay. This would be difficult due to the language barrier. Most migrants spoke a local dialect, not even Italian, so it was unlikely they knew more than a few words of English. Usually they got help from relatives and friends who were already in the country. Ellis Island manifests show that most young men traveling to the US alone more often than not went to stay with close relatives. This way they could share expenses and save more money.

Immigrants also helped others find work. In their new home migrants often congregated with people from the same village or region, forming their own small community away from home. It must have been lonely for some of them in a new country, with a completely different language and culture. While abroad, there would be little to no communication with family and friends at home. Most people were illiterate, so they could not send or receive letters. Any communication would be through friends or fellow villagers traveling back home. Most migrants sent remittances back home to their family. Despite being absent, husbands were considered the heads of household and still responsible for providing for their families. A migrant could do this by using a bank, such as the Banco di Napoli, which had branches abroad, or they could send money home with a friend or someone they knew. It is estimated that in 1896, 7,319,530 lire were deposited in Basilicata alone. This number almost doubled by 1905 to 13,802,018 lire (this would be about 73 million euros today). This sum does not include people who carried cash themselves, which was probably more common given people's mistrust for banks. This influx of money from relatives abroad meant economic survival for the people in Italy. Some of them depended on this money to care for their families

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# Birds of Passage from Basilicata

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and buy the basic necessities. Others would use it to improve their lives and their household, giving them access to goods they never had before.

So, did these birds of passage stay in America or return to Italy? Well, it depends on each person. Some men decided to settle in America. Often this meant calling their wife and children to join them, or if they were single, finding a new wife to settle down with in their new home. Others decided to return to Italy. They might remain home for a few months, then emigrate again.

Others might have decided to return to Italy for good. The two brothers mentioned in the beginning of this article serve as an example of each - one brother Nicola remained in New York, while his brother Giovanni went back to Italy to retire. I can only speculate as to why one brother decided to stay in America and the other decided to return to Italy. Overall, it is estimated that about half of all emigrants eventually returned to Italy. Unfortunately, it is impossible to track the exact number of migrants who returned to Italy, as manifests for return migration were not preserved in Italy.

Birds of passage were migrants who took great risks, going on a long and difficult journey across the ocean, all to try to improve their situation and raise the standard of living for themselves and their families. ■



## Lucani Musicians in America

By: Hon. Thomas P. Frascella, M.ed, J.D.

I thought our membership might like some additional information arising from the aftermath of the earthquakes that struck Basilicata in the 1850s.

First I would like to say that most Italian American histories suggest that few southern Italians were in the U.S. prior to the mid 1880s. I do not entirely agree with that, and that is not what certain facts reveal. For instance, in the area of music, President Jefferson asked the Navy to recruit [“Italian” musicians to supplement the Marine Corp Band](#). As a result, in 1805 one half of the U.S. Marine Corp Band were Sicilian born and trained musicians. Several of these musicians went on over the next twenty or thirty years to direct the Marine Corp band. Clearly they were southern Italians. In addition, it was common after 1860s to find many U.S. military bands which included or were primarily composed of Italian musicians. This would include the regimental band of the U.S. 7th Calvary when commanded by George Armstrong Custer in 1876. Most of his band was Italian, and most southern Italian. I count within this group Custer’s bugler John Martin who was born [Giovanni Martini](#) in Sala Consilina.

Musical skill is a very transportable skill. So it should not be surprising that many such skilled persons emigrated when the need arose. During the earthquakes of the 1850s in Basilicata the massive destruction included destruction of the musical venues in the region. So I was not entirely surprised to come across a reference to the 1850s music scene in Philadelphia. Specifically, a reference to performances at the Walnut Street

Theater which was built in 1809 and the Academy of Music built in 1857.

From the 1830s thru the 1850s, because of the immigration of German speaking peoples, the music halls incorporated mostly German based Operas and concerts. However, starting in the late 1850s’ earthquake period, Philadelphia experienced an ever increasing inflow of musicians from Basilicata. As a result, over the next ten years one half of the musical productions were “Italian” composition based.

On a more local note, it is referenced in Trenton, New Jersey history that music teacher, conductor and musician Vito Di Lorenzo came to the U.S. from San Fele sometime probably in the 1860s and preformed mostly in Boston, but sometimes in New York City and as far west as Chicago. In the 1880s he settled in with the Basilicata community in Trenton. Basilicata being where the majority of Italians in Trenton at that time were from. In 1890 Professor Di Lorenzo formed the City’s first all Italian band, mostly with musicians from Basilicata, which was called the Metropolitan Band. It played for over a decade under his leadership including at the 1892 Columbus centenary.



Giovanni Martini



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