



MARINAI d'ITALIA NEWSLETTER GRUPPI USA



CELEBRATION OF SAINT BARBARA 2024 IN PHILADELPHIA



Rosario Dominianni, Massimo Recchia, Angelo Tartaglino, CF (CM) Claudia Marcolini

On December 4 at 6 p.m., accompanied by Angelo Renzulli, I arrived at the residence located at 3301 33rd Street in Philadelphia to participate in the celebration of the Feast of Santa Barbara organized by the Giovanni Caboto Group, but what a surprise! We were received by the President of the group Massimo Recchia and the Vice President Angelo Tartaglino, owner of the building: a Protestant church, built in 1887 and deconsecrated at the beginning of this century. As soon as I entered, I felt the same emotions as the day when, being on liberty, I visited the St. Peter's Basilica in Rome for the first time. I walked through the Bernini's Colonnade and found myself staring at the marvelous cathedral, a sight that left me breathless. It may seem absurd to compare the two situations, yet it was not so. Entering this church, now Angelo's residence, I felt those same emotions. Angelo bought the building about 7 years ago and for two years he did not try to remodel it, but in the following three years Angelo's will, creativity, and imagination, combined with his expertise and excellence, were unleashed giving life to a work of art. At that time, all the past efforts spent to find the right place to celebrate Santa Barbara for our NJ group, all the hours and discussions spent choosing various music, orchestras or DJs with an appropriate repertoire for the occasion, and the anxieties that followed the signature of the contracts came back to my mind. Nothing compares to this place where I was standing, to the relaxed atmosphere where all the participants were exchanging hugs, conversing, and sharing stories, and where the pleasure of meeting again made everyone

feel part of a big family. I also realized how lucky the Caboto group of Philadelphia was, as it could benefit from the great generosity of Angelo Tartaglino. Angelo Recchia, the president of the Caboto group, introduced and welcomed the many guests, then the CF (CM) Claudia Marcolini, Head of Delegation of the Italian Navy at the NAVSUP in Philadelphia, and others addressed the participants. After an exchange of gifts and mementoes, the youngest member of the group present recited the Sailor's Prayer. We then headed to the room set up for dinner where four tables, masterfully set by Mrs. Maria Recchia, were waiting for us. The tables were more than sufficient to comfortably accommodate the forty-two participants in this year's celebration, a slightly lower number than those of past celebrations. The food, prepared by a friend, Chef, and owner of a nearby restaurant, was excellent just as the service provided by numerous waiters very attentive to the needs of the guests, professional and polite. Dinner was followed by more exchanges of opinions and more time to admire the numerous paintings and artwork adorning the interior of the building. We came to Philadelphia to celebrate Santa Barbara, but we found and saw so much more. Meeting again with Angelo, seen only a couple of times in the past at events attended by both the Caboto and Banfi groups, and listening to his story was the experience that I valued the most as I was able to fully understand his talent and his passions, gifts that allowed him to envision and then to realize this wonder.

(Giacomo Bandino)



Angelo Tartaglino, Massimiliano Tommasiello, Massimo Recchia, Giacomo Bandino, Angelo Renzulli



NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2024



CEREMONY AT PINELAWN, NY, IN HONOR OF THE ITALIAN FALLEN SOLDIERS



Near Farmingdale, a town located in the middle of Long Island, in the State of New York, there is the Pinelawn Memorial which occupies an area of 364 acres and is known among other things for its Gardens, and for housing the memorial of the Normandie ocean liner, surrounding the statue of Peace, and the memorial of John Donne, on which are carved the verses of his poem "No man is an island". This poem inspired Ernest Hemingway to write the novel "For Whom the Bell Tolls". Like all memorial cemeteries, it is a place of peace and prayer where everyone feels equal



and where you can experience a deep meaning of life. In these hollow grounds rest 364,000 fallen soldiers, including 54 Italians, 36 of whom are unknown and buried in a common grave.

On November 4th, Italian National Unity and Armed Forces Day, a delegation of the ANMI Groups of New York and New Jersey honored the fallen Italians buried in the Pinelawn cemetery with prayers and by laying a wreath of flowers on the tomb. Present to the ceremony, organized by the Assoarma association, were Capt. Marco Bagni, Lieutenant Garofolo, General Alfonso Manzo and Colonel Luca Vitali on behalf of the Italian Embassy.

The vast majority of the Italian community is not aware of the site where the tomb is located within the cemetery. Perhaps they do not even know that its discovery took place at the beginning of the 70s by a journalist of the New York magazine, "la Follia", by an employee of the Italian Consulate and by members of the ANMI Group of New York, named after Amerigo Vespucci. Since then, the Italian community has done little to improve the appearance of this tomb that contains the remains of our unknown soldiers in order to give it the greater dignity it deserves, although it should be noted that interacting with the authori-



ties who manage the cemetery is very difficult; these are the same authorities who publish the history of the cemetery, in which the tombs of the prisoners of war are barely mentioned. The section of the cemetery that houses World War II prisoners of war includes the graves of 37 Germans and 54 Italians. It is natural to wonder: what were the circumstances that between the years 1943 and 1945 led to the burial in Pinelawn of the remains of our 54 fallen?



THE ITALIAN UNKWON SOLDIERS BURIED AT THE PINELAWN CEMETERY

Our "Unknown Soldiers" were part of a group of 1,800 prisoners of war aboard the SS Benjamin Contee, one of the many Liberty class convoy-ships, built in America and used by the British following the "American British Combined Shipping Adjustment Board" agreement for the transport of weapons and goods needed for the war in Europe. She was one of the first Liberty to be converted to transport troops, and as such she took part in the D-Day landing in Normandy, where afterward, on June 16, 1944, she was abandoned.



During one of her voyages, on August 16, 1943, she embarked 1,800 Italian prisoners (part of the contingent of 125,000 prisoners under U.S. responsibility under the Geneva Convention of 1929) to transport them behind the British front lines at the battle of El Alamein. She joined other ships of convoy ON-187, leaving the port of Bône (now Annaba) in Algeria en route to Oran, also in Algeria, to embark other prisoners of war. After only 23 minutes of navigation, about sixteen miles from Bône she was hit by a torpedo dropped by a German plane. The Contee was damaged but did not sink and while it did not lose any crew members, the fate of the prisoners on board was quite different. Huddled and confined in the holds of the ship, many of them were killed by the explosion, were injured, or drowned; 264 Italian prisoners were declared missing. The ship was able to return to Bône where she was temporarily repaired to allow her to transfer to Gibraltar where she underwent the greater, more

extensive repairs needed to cross the Atlantic back to the US. The Benjamin Contee reached the port of New York on January 24, 1944, four months after, Italy had signed the armistice of Cassibile (September 8, 1943); it is here in New York that, while the ship was being overhauled, the remains of the Italian prisoners of war were discovered.

It is difficult to imagine or understand how the remains of the 36 POWs had remained undetected on board the ship for over 180 days from the date of the torpedo attack, despite the temporary repairs done in Bône, the major works the ship underwent in Gibraltar, and the many long days of navigation. To completely understand this story very dear to us, more in-depth research would be needed, perhaps based on no longer classified documents.

At this time we must also mention the name of other Italian fallen WWII POWs, whose graves are properly marked and identified, who were buried at Pinelawn between 1943 and 1945:

ARIOLI Antonio, **BASSACANTILLI** Giovanni, **BATTISTINI** Giuseppe, **BIGLIARDI** Fermo, **BISCEGLIA** Francesco, **BRAMBILLA** Felice, **CATANESE** Eugenio, **DE ANGELIS** Pasquale, **EMALDI** Nilo, **GRASSI** Giuseppe, **ORDIGO** Fausto, **PERELLA** Enrico, **PIZZO** Carlo Giuseppe, **POLI** Agostino, **ROSSONI** Pietro, **STABILE** Francesco.



Regardless of the armed force to which they belong, we think and hope that some readers of our Newsletter, searching for a friend or relative who disappeared during the Second World War, may find leads or clues about them in this article. Those of us who can, given the advanced age of many, will return here again next year to continue to honor our fallen and to pray for them, perhaps more numerous, accompanied by our children and grandchildren, and perhaps joined by other members of the Italian community and, who knows, our consular authorities.

WELCOME 2025!



I want to wish a Happy New Year 2025 to all the Members of the USA Groups, to their families and to all the readers of our Newsletter. I would like to invite everyone to spend a moment reflecting on what we have accomplished during the Year 2024 that just ended, on what we would have liked to do and on what we could have done. Good intentions are remarkable things but left on their own, not followed by facts, unfortunately they are known only because, as people say, they pave the way to failure.

Let us look together at the positive points that distinguished us in 2024:

- Strong attachment to ANMI by the Effective Members.
- Large and varied presence of the staff on duty among the participants in our meetings.
- Unconditional support from the P.N.
- Considerable number of Italian Navy ships visiting ports in the US.
- The publication and distribution of 6 Newsletters, one every two months, as scheduled.
- The meeting in Lambertville in which we drew up guidelines for the future.
- The continuity of our meetings with the relevant meeting minutes.

Let us look now, in the same fashion, at what are the opportunities we could focus on to improve in 2025:

- Doubtful understanding of the Mission of ANMI by the Associate Members.
- Little visibility outside of our groups to other (e.g.: Italian Consulates, Schools, Cultural Institutes).
- Poor or lack of communication between Members within certain Groups.
- Insufficient number of new registrations.

This is the framework on which to reflect and propose new ideas that will allow us to fulfill our mission in a better way.

Over to us!

(Salvatore "Turi" Cervone)