Le intricate radici degli Italiani a Los Angeles

L’ITALIAN AMERICAN MUSEUM DI LOS ANGELES ASSISTERÀ GLI ITALO-AMERICANI NEL LORO VIAGGIO ALLA SCOPERTA DI SE STESSI

di Marianna Gatto, Executive Director dell’Italian American Museum di Los Angeles

Quando si pensa all’emigrazione italiana negli Stati Uniti, raramente si pensa a Los Angeles. Sebbene nella città si trovi oggi la quinta più grande comunità italiana del Paese e la presenza degli Italiani nella parte occidentale degli Stati Uniti risalga a prima della nascita della nazione, la storia degli Italiani a Los Angeles è poco nota.

L’”EPOPEA” DEGLI ITALIANI NELLA WEST COAST. Da pionieri a imprenditori, da artisti a uomini politici, gli Italoi-Americani hanno svolto un ruolo determinante nello sviluppo di Los Angeles e rappresentano una parte integrante del tessuto sociale della California del Sud. Già dal XVI secolo i racconti degli esploratori italiani stimolarono interessi coloniali nella regione, ma il primo insediamento permanente degli Italiani avvenne solo quando Los Angeles divenne parte del Messico.

Mentre nel resto del Paese gli Italiani furono oggetto di discriminazione, trovarono invece ben poca ostilità a Los Angeles, una città influenzata dagli Spagnoli e dal retaggio messicano. Giovanni Leandri fu il primo italiano a stabilirsi nella città nel 1827. Il buon clima sociale offrì favorevoli opportunità, e nel 1850 diversi cognomi italiani comparvero tra i “prominenti” della città.

VITICOLTORI E BANCHIERI. Alcuni emigrati, approfittando del clima della California del Sud, cominciarono a dedicarsi all’agricoltura e alla viticoltura, che presto divenne la spina dorsale dell’economia dello stato. Significativamente tra i primi Italiani a Los Angeles ci fu Secondo Guasti, che nel 1883 creò la Italian Vineyard Company. Vent’anni dopo, la sua proprietà aveva raggiunto 5.000 acri, diventando la più grande al mondo. Il finanziere Joseph Sartori fondò due dei prin-
Los Angeles’ Tangled Italian Roots

The Italian American Museum promises to assist Italian Americans in their journey of self-discovery

When we think of Italian immigration to the United States seldom does Los Angeles come to mind. Though the city is home to the nation’s fifth-largest Italian population today, and the Italian presence in the American West predates the nation’s founding, the history of Los Angeles’ Italians is largely unknown.

THE HISTORY OF THE ITALIANS IN THE WEST COAST. From pioneers to entrepreneurs, artists to civic leaders, Italian Americans have played an instrumental role in the development of Los Angeles and comprise an integral part of Southern California’s social fabric. As early as the 16th century, accounts of Italian explorers encouraged colonial interest in the region; however it was not until Los Angeles became part of Mexico that permanent Italian settlement took root.

While discrimination punctuated the lives of Italians elsewhere in the country, Italians faced little hostility in Los Angeles, a city influenced by its Spanish and Mexican heritage. Arriving in 1827, Govanni Leandro was the city’s first Italian settler. Los Angeles’ hospitable social climate provided opportunities for advancement, and by 1850, Italian surnames could be found amongst the city’s prominent.

WINEMAKERS AND BANKERS. Some immigrants, encouraged by Southern California’s climate, pursued agriculture and viticulture, which formed the backbone for the state’s economy. Noteworthy early Italian Angelinos included Secondo Guasti, who established the Italian Vineyard Company in 1888. Two decades later, his 5,000-acre vineyard constituted the world’s largest.

The financial mogul Joseph Santori founded two of the city’s principal financial institutions and acted as a catalyst of Los Angeles’ growth and modernization.

The first Italian settlement was located at the site of the city’s original pueblo, or town. From there, Italians established enclaves in Elysian Park, present-day Chinatown, Lincoln Heights, the San Gabriel Valley and San Pedro, where more than 40,000 Italian Americans reside today. La Colonia included dozens of Italian language newspapers, organizations and ethnic churches that eased the immigrants’ transition to the new land.

FROM THE ITALIAN HALL... In 1906, the Italian Hall was constructed in the heart of little Italy listed today on the National Register of Historic Places, the Italian Hall hosted countless events and noteworthy individuals such as Emma Goldman, Umberto Nobile and Francesco de Pinedo. The building served as the community’s socio-cultural center until the 1950s, when it was purchased by the State of California. In the years that followed, the Italian Hall fell into disrepair.

...TO THE ITALIAN AMERICAN MUSEUM. When a commercial development threatened the Italian Hall’s historic character in the late 1980s, the community created an organization to restore the building and create a museum. Approximately $1 million was raised and worked to address the most critical deferred maintenance issues began. Slated to open in 2013, the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles (IAMLA) will be a dynamic 21st century museum showcasing the history and contributions of Italian Americans and Italians in the context of our multi-ethnic nation to an audience of two million visitors annually. In preparation for its grand opening, the Museum presents satellite exhibits, educational programs, and popular events, such as Italian Heritage Month and Taste of Italy, a cultural-gastronomic event that takes place annually in October. Taste of Italy 2017, produced in collaboration with the Italian America Chamber of Commerce West, drew an excess of 2,000 people and featured 40 fine restaurants and wineries, for which a special section was created inside the Pico House.