

PIEMONTESI NEL MONDO OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

BOLETIN BOGIANEN IN ACTION

Andrew M. Canepa, *Editor*

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President's Message

I am proud of my Piedmontese heritage. Growing up, we spoke *piemontèis* at home, but I knew very little about Piemonte. Many years afterwards, I did research on the region, travelled there extensively, maintained membership in the Piemontesi nel Mondo, and participated in its Piedmontese Study Group (the *Cit Sircol*). I've acquired an appreciation and connection to the land, its people, and its language and culture, which I hope to pass on to my children and grandchildren.

Do your families know about their Piedmontese heritage? As an Association member, you can sponsor a free 2021 Piemontesi nel Mondo membership for family and friends. Your sponsorship will help strengthen our Association and hopefully encourage interested parties to connect or re-connect with their own Piedmontese heritage. Accordingly, as an attachment to the present Boletin, you will find a membership form that you can submit by mail or email to our Membership Chair, Vincent Fausone, 87 Crags Court, San Francisco, CA 94131, or vince@amcdesigns.net.

During these challenging times, everyone's life has been affected. Until we can return to normality and once again enjoy our social events with their fellowship and camaraderie, we will strive to keep the Piemontesi nel Mondo alive and vital with the quarterly newsletter, mailings and emails.

Where Are We?

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains an annual registry of Italian citizens living abroad. Called the Anagrafe degli Italiani Residenti all'Estero (AIRE), its 2020 edition counted 310,931 Piemontesi living in more than two dozen countries. That's about 7% of the 4.3 million people in the home region. The ten major countries of destination are, in descending order, Argentina (98,645), France, Switzerland, Spain, the U.K., Germany, Uruguay, the U.S. (11,641), Brazil, and Belgium.

Bear in mind that these are relatively recent migrants, whether temporary or permanent, and that the countries of destination are not necessarily those of the historical great migration of the turn of the last century or even the post-World War Two period—which begs the question: Where are the descendants of the Piemontesi who left permanently some time ago? Where are, so to speak, the *Piemontesi nel mondo*? Where are we?

For the earlier period, there are statistics compiled by the Commissariato dell'Emigrazione in Rome. We know that from 1876 to 1925 1,910,844 persons left Piemonte. They scattered throughout the world—including such destinations as Portugal, Algeria, Egypt, Turkey—but the majority emigrated to five primary countries: France (921,063), Argentina (368,637), Switzerland (264,441), the U.S. (170,798), and Brazil (41,853).

These numbers, of course, don't account for the so-called birds of passage and for return migration, especially from neighboring countries, but they are certainly indicative of where our forebears ended up. Then there was the more recent postwar surge of Italian immigration, including to new destinations, such as Canada and Australia, which swept along many of our *corregionali*, though without any specific stats that I know of.

There exists a curious backhanded indicator of where to find the progeny of Piedmontese immigrants. The Fall 2019 *Boletín* highlighted a website, www.namespedia.com, which provides the transnational distribution of surnames. For example, I looked up five last names typical of the area of Asti (Fassio, Maggiora, Orecchia, Viarengo, Fausone). The three countries where they are currently found to the greatest extent are Italy, the U.S. and Argentina. Another indirect gauge of where we are is the worldwide distribution of Piemontesi clubs and associations. They proliferate in Argentina, France and Brazil. It's not a really accurate indicator, though. There's an affiliate of the Associazione Piemontesi nel Mondo in Shanghai!

Monviso, Il Re Di Pietra

Where did Hannibal cross the Alps?

What is the source of the River Po?

Where is the oldest tunnel ever built through the Alps?

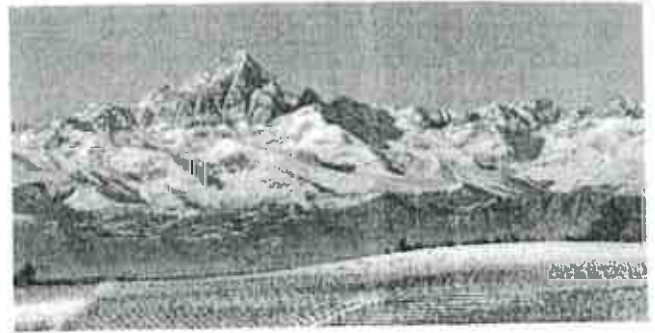
All three questions have the same answer. It's Monviso, also known as Monte Viso or "The Stone King," an imposing 12,602-foot pyramid-shaped mountain, the highest in the Cottian Alps, that can be seen from a great distance throughout Piemonte. Many believe that the mountain inspired the famous logo of Paramount Pictures.

The Col de la Traversette pass located on the north slope of Monviso is considered one of the most probable routes Hannibal and his elephants used to descend into Italy in 218 BC. John Prevas in *Hannibal Crosses the Alps* (1998) makes a good case for this thesis. (By the way, our Association has a copy of this book in our Piedmontese Lending Library.)

The Po, the longest river in Italy, travels over 400 miles from Monviso to the Adriatic Sea. The headwaters of the river are a spring seeping from under the northwest face of the mountain at an area called Pian del Re ("Plane of the King"). A small beginning for such a large river.

The Monviso Tunnel (*Pörtus dël Viso* in *piemontèis*) is the oldest Alpine tunnel. It was created by order of the Marquis of Saluzzo in 1476 to facilitate trade. It links the present villages of Crissolo in the province of Cuneo and Ristolas in the French department of Hautes-Alpes. Mules were used to transport goods back and forth from the Po Valley to France. It's about 250 feet long, 8 feet wide, and is located at an altitude of 9,449 feet.

I myself have entered the tunnel, but I was only able to walk to where snow from the French side blocked the passage. It was quite an experience! *Joseph Tonda*



Another Social Saint—The Gallows Priest

Remember Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo, whose efforts on behalf of destitute patients in mid-19th-century Torino resulted in an extensive chain of care centers for the physically and mentally impaired, called appropriately...*cottolenghi*? Well, there were other so-called social saints, more or less his contemporaries and working in the same city. These were clerics and lay persons engaged in works of practical charity aimed at aiding the dispossessed and the marginalized, as opposed to mystics, contemplatives or those endowed with a purely passive holiness à la Padre Pio.

One such saint was Giuseppe Cafasso (1811-1860), born of a peasant family in Castelnuovo d'Asti, a seedbed of sainthood, as we shall see in future issues. There's no point dwelling on his ecclesiastical trajectory. Suffice it to say that, in spite of frailness and a hunched back, he became an eloquent orator, to the point that his fans pushed for his candidacy to the Chamber of Deputies. However, his real claim to fame was as "Il Prete della Forca," ministering to those condemned to death by hanging, and consoling their families, often in the form of practical support. He is the patron saint of Italian prisoners. Near the actual site of the gallows, a small square in the Valdocco neighborhood called by the locals the "Rondò dla Forca," there is now a statue of Cafasso consoling a "dead man walking."

As beloved as Giuseppe Cafasso was among the Torinesi, the figure of the executioner, the saint's counterpart—the person without whom the saint wouldn't be a saint—was universally excoriated. Cafasso's foil was Pietro Pantoni, a *boia* par excellence from an Emilian family of professional executioners, with 127 hangings under his belt. I remember that my mom would never place a bread roll or a French loaf upside-down but always on its flat side. Otherwise, *mala fortuna*. Well, whoever served Pantoni a meal would always do the opposite. *Bòia fauss!*