

# PIEMONTESI NEL MONDO OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

## BOLETIN BOGIANEN IN ACTION

Andrew M. Canepa, *Editor*

Summer 2021

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### President's Message

After more than a year of shelter-in-place and pandemic restrictions, we are slowly returning to normality. Accordingly, the Association plans a long-awaited Piemontese “reopening” with social and educational events.

There will be a *bagna cauda* dinner this coming winter, which will be free of charge to members. Details will be provided later this year.

In addition, the Piedmontese Study Group or *Cit Sircol* will resume its activities. It meets at the Italian Community Services offices on the third floor of Fugazi Hall, 678 Green St., San Francisco. The fall class schedule is as follows: Thursdays, 1:30-3:30pm, August 12 and 26, September 9 and 23, October 14 and 28, November 11, and December 9.

The *piemontèis* language is a distinctive feature of our culture, heritage and identity. In the past, dialects were considered a sign of cultural and intellectual inferiority, but today there is a renewed interest in and appreciation of regional languages, and gone by the wayside is the old social-cultural bias against them. Please consider

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## Dateline Buenos Aires, 1952

Evita Perón lay dying. The situation was desperate. Diagnosed with metastasized cervical cancer, there wasn't much of a chance. Three eminent international physicians were called to her side: the American oncologist George Pack of New York, the Russian-born British cosmetic surgeon George Alexis Bankoff aka George Sava—according to his memoirs, a personal friend of hers—and an Italian luminary. Nothing could be done, and on July 26, 1952, Eva María Duarte de Perón *pasó a la eternidad*. She died. The Italian consultant was none other than Achille Mario Dogliotti (1897-1966), born in Torino and a graduate of the medical school of that city's university in 1920 at the unusually young age of twenty-three. His father had been mayor of Alba. Achille's specialty was heart surgery, and at a certain point in his career he was president of the International College of Surgeons. By the way, the common language between Evita and George Sava was Italian, and her last words to him, three days before her death, were "Arrivederci, mio amico."

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## The White Truffle of Alba

The world famous and rare white truffle of Alba (*Tuber magnatum Pico*), found in the Langhe and Monferrato areas of Piemonte, is prized for its intense aroma and flavor, and it elevates a simple dish of pasta to gastronomic heights.

A truffle is a sort of mushroom that grows underground on the roots of certain trees from which it gains nutrition. Many species are found across the world, including the black truffles of Périgord and Umbria, but the Alba white truffle is unique and is held in the highest esteem among the many varieties.

*Continued*



*Alba's Fiera Internazionale del Tartufo Bianco*

### *The White Truffle of Alba continued*

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The truffle harvest takes place from September to December. The tubers are located by especially trained dogs. The 2020 documentary *The Truffle Hunters*—Watch the trailer!—follows elderly *tartufai*, some speaking and even singing in *piemontèis*, with their prized dogs hunting for white truffles.

My wife and I went to Piemonte in the fall, a perfect time with its pleasant weather to experience the white truffles, attend Alba's Fiera Internazionale del Tartufo Bianco, and explore Piemonte. The 91st edition of the fair and attendant festival will take place on weekends from Saturday, October 9, through Sunday, December 9, 2021.



At most restaurants in Piemonte, your waiter will weigh the truffle with a scale before and after it is thinly sliced. The difference determines the price. A traditional way to serve truffles is over *tajarín*, a thin egg noodle seasoned with melted butter. Truffles also pair well with beef tartare, scrambled eggs, and risotto. *Joseph Tonda*

*Editor's Note:* At the time of writing, July 27, 2021, you could buy an ounce of Alba white truffle at the Gourmet Food Store website for \$263.55.

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### Frank Capra and the Beauty Queen

In November, 1921, the future award-winning director (*It Happened One Night*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *It's a Wonderful Life*) produced a 32-minute documentary of the two-week stay in San Francisco by the Italian

warship *Libia*. It was sponsored (that is, paid for) by the Italia Virtus Club, forerunner of the present S.F. Italian Athletic Club. (Its team of *podisti*, or foot racers, is shown circling Washington Square, and there's a foggy soccer match between the club and the ship's crew.) It is, of course, a silent movie, and the captions are in Italian. It is a rare glimpse into the San Francisco Italian community of the time. The Piedmontese connection is about halfway into the documentary. It highlights a young lady, Livia Maggiora, who won a beauty contest (*gara di bellezza*) sponsored by the *Motion Picture Magazine* of New York. We know nothing about her beyond the fact that, as a Maggiora, she was undoubtedly an *oriunda* of the province of Asti. Another local beauty focused on repeatedly by Capra's camera, "la celebre stella cinematografica" Doris Valerga (1904-1993)—more likely the typically Ligurian Vallerga with two Ls—was a femme fatale under the name of Dorothy Revier, vamping it up in numerous movies in the 1920s and '30s. (There's actually a *Wikipedia* article devoted to her.) The Italia Virtus Club tried to recoup some of its production costs by charging 50 cents to watch the two-reel film at Fugazi Hall in March, 1922.

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## Dateline Palo Alto, 1893

In November of that year a 25-year-old graduate of the Politecnico di Torino was hired as a teaching assistant in electrical engineering by Stanford University. His name was Camillo Olivetti. He went on to found the Società Ing. C. Olivetti & C. of Ivrea, maker of typewriters, calculating machines and, eventually, computers. His stint on "The Farm" ended in April 1894. Long after his death, Camillo's correspondence from the U.S. was published as *Lettere americane* (1968).