

# PIEMONTESE NEL MONDO OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

## BOLETIN BOGIANEN IN ACTION

### 30th Anniversary Edition

*The present Boletin is the 83rd issue that going back to Summer 1991.*

Andrew M. Canepa, *Editor*

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### President's Message and Cit Sircol Update

I am pleased to announce that there will be a bagna cauda dinner at the Galileo Club in Richmond on Saturday, February 5, 2022. The dinner will be free for members and their spouses/significant others. Past President Sue Pricco is handling the arrangements. If anyone would like to help her, contact her at (510) 206-3962 or [spricco@comcast.net](mailto:spricco@comcast.net).

In 2022, we also plan to have a Scampagnata.

In the meantime, the Cit Sircol, our Piedmontese Study Group, will resume in January with Zoom sessions rather than the in-person ones at Fugazi Hall. For more information, please contact class moderator Kevin McCabe at [contacc@att.net](mailto:contacc@att.net).

I hope to meet all of you at our bagna cauda dinner in February! — *Joseph Tonda*

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### A Piedmontese Consul General

By way of clarification, Piemonte does not have direct diplomatic relations with the United States. That said, the new consul general of Italy in San Francisco, Sergio Strozzi, was born in Alessandria in 1972. In 1997, he received two degrees, one in organ music and composition from the conservatory of his native city and another in law from the University of Turin. After a stint as a private attorney, he entered the diplomatic corps in 2001 and has been posted to Hungary and Albania. Dr. Strozzi started his current assignment on June 17th. He is certainly an accomplished and multi-talented person. We wish him the best of luck.

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### Death Has a Name and Her Name is Catherine

In the Piedmontese language death is feminine, because all words in Latin languages have a gender, and none of them are gender-neutral. For example, no matter how much you want to emasculate the Spanish language, the politically correct neologism "Latinx" can never be a substitute for Latinos...at least among real Latinos.

So, Death is *la muerte*, *la morte*, and *la mòrt* in our own language. And she has a name: *Catlin-a*, as in the phrase meaning that Death has arrived for such-and-such, "A l'è rivaje Catlin-a."

Our longtime member and Piedmontese Study Group stalwart, Yolanda Statham, has offered us a florilegium of sayings from her mother, Maria Dugoni, born in Torino in 1892. One of them is as follows: "Catlin-a a l'è sul tecc, ch'a guarda né 'l gio né 'l vecc," or Death is lurking on the roof and she doesn't distinguish between young and old—which brings us to the next item, recycled from the Summer 2004 *Boletin*.

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### Death in Piemonte

First of all, lest there be any doubt, Piemontesi die only once, just like everybody else. What I've noticed though, on a strictly anecdotal basis, is that they consider death an inevitable fact of life and that they prepare for it way ahead of time. Or at least they used to. Take my mother's great uncle, Barba Stevu of Santo Stefano Roero, who had a casket made for himself, which he kept under his bed. Since it was not intended for immediate use, he stored potatoes in it. My maternal aunt, Maria Zaccaro vedova Bossotti (1908-2002) of Asti, had long before her demise prepared what she called *il corredo dell'ultimo viaggio*, her deathbed trousseau, the clothing she wanted to be buried in. Amy Bernardy, a folklorist and sociologist, wrote back in 1926 that in the Valsesia each

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household kept as a prized possession an embroidered sheet, *il lenzuolo della morte*, in which the deceased were wrapped. Fifty years earlier, the Valsesiani used to entomb their dead in the same shroud but without a coffin, just like Muslims do today. Another thing I've noticed, from my very limited provincial perspective, is that among Piedmontese immigrants the attachment to their native soil is so strong that it is not unusual to ship their remains back to Piemonte for burial. My early childhood physician, Dr. Ottavio Bolognino of Torino, was so disposed of, as were Piero Fassio, Natale Marellò and Francesco Pasetti, all from around Asti. Along the same vein, there's a Piedmontese riddle that asks, "Chi la fa la fa për vendi, chi la cata la dòvra pa, chi la dòvra lo sa nen. Cò l'è?" The answer: "La cassia da mòrt!" The far-sighted Barba Stevu was an exception.

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## Dateline Tijuana, 1924

There's a typical Roman salad, *puntarelle con alici*, which combines a particular type of chicory, crunchy and curled, with an anchovy-based dressing. This circumstance has led some to assume that Caesar salad was concocted by a Roman chef.

Actually, it was a Piedmontese who invented it. He did it at Caesar's Restaurant in Tijuana in 1924—to be precise, according to his daughter Rosa, exactly on July 4, 1924. The perpetrator, Cesare Cardini, was born in Baveno on the western shore of Lago Maggiore in 1896. (Baveno is now in the new province of Verbano-Cusio-Ossola, but at the time it was in the province of Novara.) He emigrated in 1913, first to Canada and then to the U.S.

He became a serial restaurateur/hotelier, with eateries and inns in Sacramento, San Diego and later—after the Mexican interval—in Cardiff-by-the-Sea and Chula Vista. In Tijuana, Cesare and his brother Alessandro ran a restaurant which attracted Americans, including many Hollywood types, thirsty from Prohibition back home. The classic recipe (romaine lettuce, croutons, anchovies, raw eggs, etc.) might have been a hangover remedy. The repeal of Prohibition in the States and the Mexican government's ban on gambling ended Tijuana's cross-border attraction and signaled the demise of Caesar's Restaurant.

Cardini eventually trademarked his salad dressing in 1948, and it is currently owned and marketed by the T. Marzetti Company of Westerville, Ohio.

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## Fenestrelle Fortress, The Great Wall of the Alps

You probably haven't heard of it as it's not very well known, but the Fenestrelle Fortress in Piemonte is a colossal work created on a mountain ridge and consisting of an uninterrupted series of fortifications joined together by ramparts and stairs. Fenestrelle is one of the largest fortified structures in Europe. It consists of three major forts, covers 320 acres and rises some 2,500 feet on its way to the crest.

This part of Piemonte, the Val Chisone, belonged to France in the late 1600s under the rule of Louis XIV, who had a small fort built there in 1694. After the area was conquered by Savoy, it determined to build a bulwark against foreign invasions. Construction began in 1728 and wasn't completed until 1850.

The fortress was abandoned after World War Two and parts of it were plundered. In 1990, a group of volunteers spearheaded its redevelopment, and in 2007 the World Monuments Fund included it among the one hundred most important archeological sites of the world.

Nowadays, there are three separate tours you can take (lasting one, three or seven hours) depending on how much time you have and your fitness level. The longest route, called the *Passeggiata Reale*, has you climbing 4,000 steps up to an elevation of 2,500 feet at the top end of the fortress. To the right is a photo of the fortress and one I took at the entrance. I highly recommend the Forte di Fenestrelle as a sure way to get off the beaten track. Information on the tours can be found on the website [www.fortedifenestrelle.it/le-visite](http://www.fortedifenestrelle.it/le-visite). — Joseph Tonda

