



# La Voce

The Newsletter of the  
Italian American Club of Boise  
[www.iacboise.org](http://www.iacboise.org)

The Italian American Club of Boise

MAY 2020

## MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

### It's Primo Maggio !!! — from May Pole to May Day

Most ancient Italian traditions have their origin in the agricultural seasons and in the human reproductive cycle, all mixed together and reinforced over the centuries by calendars and feast days. I have talked about this in previous issues of *La Voce*, with respect to the origins of the Tarantella, the St. Joseph's Table, and most recently *La Befana*. The First of May, called *Primo Maggio* in Italian, is another example.



The Druids, Celts, and Italic tribes all marked the annual bridge between light and dark times as occurring halfway between the Spring Equinox (March 20) and the Summer Solstice (June 20). The Celts called it *Beltane* and thought it was the most important day of the entire year. Rituals and festivals included the use of flowers, fire, and references to fertility. Later, the Romans called it *Floralia*, after the Roman goddess Flora, which of course means “flowers”.

Later we see the tradition of the Maypole emerge, consisting of a wooden post with streamers of flowers held by eligible maidens who prance around it until they became dizzy. The Maypole is found all across the British Isles and other countries influenced by the Celts.

Today, in parts of southern Italy, we see remnants of those ancient festivals on May 1st, where a tree of flowers, hay, and fava beans (topped by a cross to make it seem less pagan), is marched through the town to the playing of ancient bagpipes and other music. Parading girls throw water on the “haystack”, called a *pagliara*, to revitalize it and make it grow again. Fava beans are hung amongst the greenery and hay, symbols of fertility and new life.



On May 1, 1886, 40,000 workers gathered in Chicago to protest industrial working conditions, and on May 3rd the so-called Haymarket Riot occurred when a bomb was thrown into the mob of police and protestors. Ever since, organized labor has identified May 1st as Industrial Workers Day, or simply May Day. Almost every government except the United States recognizes it as Workers Rights Day, as response to the Haymarket Riot set in motion widespread reforms for industrial workers including adoption of the eight hour day. The US, resisting association of a worker's day with Socialism and anti-democratic sentiments, moved its own Labor Day to the first Monday in September in 1894, and much later, in 1958, and in a similar vein, inaugurated May 1st as Law Day.

(continued on page 2)

## Primo Maggio (continued from page 1)



Those of our ancestors who arrived in America at the beginning of the last century looked forward to May Day as a day free from work and a time for family gathering, as the attached 1910 photo of Italian miners from Windber, Pennsylvania shows.

In its effort to reduce the influence of pagan festivals among its peasants, the Catholic Church in Italy associated the month of May with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the entire month was dedicated to her with at least four important Marian feast days occurring that month. The tradition of the May Crowning grew as a religious practice during the 19th century, and members of our club might recall that tradition in their own childhood churches, replete with flowers and the singing of hymns.

*Primo Maggio* is important throughout Italy today because of the twin origins of secular and religious holiday. It is an official civil holiday as well as a religious and even superstitious holiday celebrating rural and peasant traditions. *Primo Maggio* will be especially relevant in Italy this year, when a new kind of transition from dark to light is celebrated. It is a time when the isolation of the COVID-19 health crisis will begin to give way to some new, but yet normal, way of life.

Italians here in Boise should anticipate *Primo Maggio 2020* with a similar, traditional pride that blends the secular and religious roots just discussed. It is a good time for us to celebrate the solidarity we have for our family and community, anticipating a summer of hope and new beginnings. Thanks to the Italian tradition of *Primo Maggio* we can all look to our own futures with faith, determination, and optimism.



Paul Zelus, [president@iacboise.org](mailto:president@iacboise.org) or (208) 440-4047

## From Your Board of Directors

**Your Board of Directors met on April 20th and decided that it was in the best interest of the club to cancel all club activities through the month of May, and to withhold the advertising and promotion of all June and July activities until a phased plan for the resumption of ordinary life can be organized and coordinated by our governments and health leaders. Your Board wants our club to be flexible and ready to conform to the evolving standards and guidelines not yet in place. We feel it is best to not publicize dates and specific instructions for any event at this time.**

**We all yearn for the opportunity to meet at Municipal Park for our annual picnic, to play Bocce, and to participate in our favorite club activities. Yet even if scheduled, attendance at these events is likely to be reduced, at least initially, out of apprehension and concern for personal health and safety. Thank you all for understanding this difficult situation and for your continued support of the Italian American Club of Boise.**

## A Bit of Idaho Italian History

Unlike many other states where Italians settled in larger numbers, Idaho's Italian immigration experience has been much less noticeable but at the same time no less colorful and noteworthy. Over the next several issues of *La Voce* I will introduce you to a different cluster of Italian immigrants to Idaho, so that we may all better appreciate our state's rich but almost unknown Italian heritage.

In 1900 Idaho had 1,377 residents who reported being born in Italy. By 1910 that number more than doubled to 3,910, and after that the numbers have declined. In 1940 there were only 1,849 Italian-born residents of Idaho, and in more recent decades that number has continued to get smaller and smaller.

You might be surprised to learn, however, where the original immigrants of the last century had settled, and why. In this and the next few issues of *La Voce* we will profile Italian settlements in Priest River, Kellogg, Pocatello, and Potlatch to name a few.

In 1910 A reported 291 native-born Italians lived in Bonner County, centered around Priest River, and another 561 lived in Shoshone County to the east, centered around Kellogg. The Priest River immigrants arrived during the previous decade primarily from Grimaldi and adjacent villages located in Cosenza province in the Calabria region of Italy. Families included Naccarato, Lamanna, Bombino, Frascetti, Anselmo, Saccomanno, Falsetto, Perri, and Pachitte. Men worked either in logging associated with the railroad along the Priest River, or in the silver mines of Kellogg.

In 1985 Rose Lamanna Naccarato (1905-1991) recounted in an interview her memories of growing up in Priest River. When asked about special holidays and celebrations Rose immediately said May Day, when all the Italians used to get together outside, next to the church. Then she added that Christmas, Thanksgiving, and 4th of July were also special days, but no presents or gifts were exchanged like today, just lots of food.

The Italians lived about three miles from the village of Priest River, in their own enclave called 'Italyville'. Families staked out 80 acre subsistence farms and there was no general store.

Rose was the second of eight children, with extended Lamanna and Nacarrato relatives all living nearby. In 1925 her father went to Kellogg to seek work in the mines, when the logging work began to play out, and he was killed the first day on the job there. Rose stated that her father was one of six brothers who came to the area as young teenagers, and all lived in a single log house they built.

As each brother matured and married, all six pitched in to build a new log house for him and his growing family. This went on for nearly ten years until all six brothers had their own homes and 80 acre plots to live on. In-laws and married grandchildren then lived on the same property, and each log house was continually expanded and modernized. Rose married at age 15 and subsequently raised her own large family before moving to Spokane in 1976 when her husband died.

Those original 291 immigrants, with their large families, produced a legacy of more than a thousand descendants now in their fourth and fifth generations as Idahoans with Italian heritage.

— Next month: Pocatello Italians —

ANSWERS I am an Italian American: 1) Amerigo Vespucci 2) Enrico Fermi 3) Constantino Brumidi 4) Cristoforo Colombo 5) William Paca



## ZOOM ZOOM

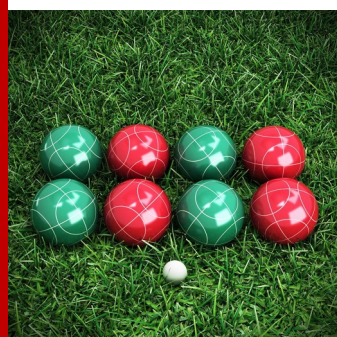
For the past several weeks our members have had the opportunity to join SOCIAL CHAT sessions over the internet, during which time each participant can be “seen” and “heard” by all the other people involved in the chat meeting. We are using Email to notify our membership of the login procedures and times to join these social chat sessions. Emails are usually sent out on Sunday afternoon, providing login information for the two chat sessions upcoming that week. Currently the sessions are available twice weekly: on Mondays from 2:00 — 4:00 PM and on Thursdays from 7:00 — 9:00 PM.

For security reasons you must know the Meeting Identification Number provided by the email invitation, and while the sessions are best viewed on a computer with camera and speakers, you can also join via your Ipad or other tablet, or just use your smart phone on an audio only basis.

You may drop in and out of a meeting at any time during the scheduled chat period, and currently there are no topics or other organized content for the sessions. That could change, however, as we get more comfortable with this type of communication. They are a way for members to see and hear one another in this time of restricted social activity, and so far the participants like the opportunity to exchange information about shopping, sanitizing supplies and methods, and, of course Italian food, wine, and recipes.

Contact Paul Zelus at 208-440-4047 if you need technical help in joining a zoom session for the first time, or if you have any suggestions or ideas for future sessions.

## BOCCE UPDATE



We're all waiting for the day when we can begin our 2020 Bocce season. Unfortunately City of Boise parks will be closed until at least May 31. Once the city reopens its parks we will schedule the Bocce Committee to meet and to prepare updates on how the season will be scheduled. Please be aware that there are several levels of government and different agencies involved. The State of Idaho as well as its cities and counties all have a say in the process of reopening, and we all need to be patient until a plan unfolds as to how our teams and spectators will interact, and how food and drink can be exchanged. In the meantime if you have comments or concerns about Bocce, contact Rich Goldston at

[boisebocceleague@gmail.com](mailto:boisebocceleague@gmail.com)

## ***I Am An Italian American Quiz ...***

- #1. I gave my name to the New World . I am ?***
- #2. I am the father of nuclear science in America. I am ?***
- #3. I created the dome of the US Capitol. I am ?***
- #4. I first spanned the seas to the New World. I am ?***
- #5. I signed the Declaration of Independence. I am ?***

***(Answers on bottom of page 3)***

## Nostalgia

