



Visiting Italian-American Ranchers in the West

Joey Skee (March 04, 2013)



Italian-American folklife.

Two weeks after returning to Brooklyn—where my notion of Italian Americans was long ago formed—my mind returns to northern Nevada where I met Italian-American ranchers. The Western



Folklife Center organized several events—a tour, an exhibit, and oral history sessions—to highlight local ranch history of Italian Americans as part of the Cowboy Poetry Gathering.

A panel on the exhibit featured a long list of Italian surnames of families who settled in the area. Many of these families have their roots in northern Italy, from regions such as Tuscany and Piedmont. Research on the Italian-American presence in the state and the West in general were featured in two important works of folklife from the 1990s: [Old Ties, New Attachments](#) [2] and [Paradise Valley, Nevada](#) [3]. My visit was a much appreciated opportunity to meet members of a community I had only read about.

Folklorists are especially attuned to oral histories and local knowledge of individuals and their communities, and in keeping with that intellectual position, special panels were organized that featured Italian-American men and women who lived and worked in northern Nevada. Gene Buzzetti, Nelo Mori, Tom Tomera, Kathi Buzzetti Wines, Susan Wines (née Tomera), and others spoke of their ancestors and of their everyday lives.

left to right: Gene Buzzetti, Tom Tomera, Nelo Mori.

The real treat was taking the tour bus from downtown Elko to the Tomera family ranch, where siblings Tom and Lucy told us about their family's origins in towns in the Lucca province.

Across the road, Tom's two married daughters Sabrina Reed and Susan Wines gave us firsthand accounts of daily lives as ranchers. They enthralled us with tales of safeguarding the herd from a fast approaching fire to dealing with a cougar on their property to being first responders in a remote area.

left to right: Susan Wines and Sabrina Reed.
Photographs by Luisa Del Giudice.

The afternoon ended with barbecued sausages, potato salad, and plenty of red wine, as the visiting musicians [Gianluca Zammarelli](#) [4] and Marco Rufo played a tarantella for all to enjoy.

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