



Notes on the Passing of Rudy Vecoli

Jerry Krase (June 27, 2008)



"The myth is that the old immigrants assimilated readily. That's balderdash. There's always been a tenacious effort to maintain native languages and cultures. Ethnicity provides a form of community."

—Rudy Vecoli, director of the Immigration History Research Center

The passing of Rudolph J. Vecoli is a great loss but his legacy is much greater

A few years ago I was asked to pen a "Note on the Retirement of Rudy Vecoli" when he announced that he was stepping down from his positions as Professor of History and Director of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. He led the IHRC for 38 years during which its research collections and outreach programs grew in both size and stature. At that time I thought it appropriate to write some words on my own behalf and that of the American Italian Historical Association. Today, I'll add a few more personal comments to those previously written. I have been in the business of Italian American Studies for three decades.

During that time, there has been only one constant; mention "Italian American History" to anyone in the know and the name "Vecoli" comes up. Rudolph J. Vecoli has been, is, and for a long time will be still the most recognized and respected scholar in the field of Italian American Historical Studies. He has made major contributions to other organizations like the Immigration History Research Center and the Ellis Island Foundation. He has ably served as a



consultant to public and private agencies. He is a sought after lecturer, researcher, writer and teacher. I should also mention photographer as after I gave him a tour of Brooklyn some years back he sent me photos of Bensonhurst He has been a mentor to many of the AIHA's best and brightest.

Rudy was a Founding Member of the AIHA and its first President 1967-1970. He was the Editor of two of our most important proceedings: Volume 5, Italian American Radicalism (1972) and Volume 14, Italian Immigrants in Rural and Small Town America (1987) and a frequent (often controversial) contributor to our general, business, and Executive Council meetings. Professor Vecoli has been, in my opinion, the most vigilant about the necessity of the highest scholarly quality standards for Italian American and AIHA scholarship. Proud of who he is, where he came from, and where he is now Rudy has ever been unwilling to accept second class, and rate, work or people. He never compromised his principles and cherished his independence even when others in the field sought popularity over scholarship. He and I have had many differences over these many years and he always prevailed as he's much more hard nosed than I will ever be. We all offer our congratulations and thanks for all he has done and all we are sure he will contribute to contribute to the Field of Italian American History.

When I saw Rudy at the AIHA Annual Meeting in Denver in November, while we were touring Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, he took me aside, gave me a hug and said he had some bad news. His illness did not diminish his love of life or the sense that he had the right to tell people what he actually thought. Some months later, with some newer sense of urgency I called him and talked about panels I and the current Director of IHRC, Donna R. Gabaccia, were putting together in his honor at the 41st Annual Conference AIHA, in New Haven. He, of course, talked about perhaps being there. I went along with him. Respect is an important part of the culture we share. The planned presentations will reflect on Rudy's spirited response to Oscar Handlin's "Uprooted" which had a great impact on all those who study the many different peoples who came and are still coming to America.

"Roots and Branches"

In Honor of Rudy Vecoli

Session I.

Chair: Mary Jo Bona, Stony Brook University SUNY

AIHA President



Donna R. Gabaccia, Director,
Immigration History Research Center,
University of
Minnesota

"Rudy Vecoli, the
Immigration History Research Center and the
Minnesota School of Immigration and Refugee Studies"

Fred Gardaphe, Distinguished Professor of Italian American Studies, CUNY

"The Meaning of a
Mentor: Rudy Vecoli's Impact on Italian American Studies"

Jerome Krase, Murray Koppelman and Emeritus Professor,
Brooklyn College CUNY

"The 'Authenticity' of Italian Americans"

Commentator/Discussant

Vincenza Scarpaci,
University of
Oregon

Session II.

Chair: Anthony J. Tamburri, Dean, John Calandra Italian American Institute CUNY

Dominic Candeloro, Italian Cultural Center at Casa Italia,
Chicago

"Rudolph Vecoli's Decision to Pursue Italians in
Chicago and How it Impacted My Life"



Madallena Tirabassi, Centro Altreitalie

“Investigators, social workers and Italian migrant women in United States urban settings.”

Salvatore J. LaGumina, Emeritus Professor,
Nassau Community College

"In the tradition of history leader: Italian Americans Rally in Behalf of Messina Earthquake survivors"

Commentator/Discussant

Angela D. Danzi,
Farmingdale State College

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