

## Italian-Americans in the Civil War



A “Garibaldino”

Between the Census of 1850 and the Census of 1860, the number of Italians immigrating to America jumped by 7,000, so that on the eve of the Civil War just over 11,000 Americans listed themselves as having been born in Italy. Many of them came to escape from stifling poverty, only to find it pursued them to the crowded cities of the East Coast of the United States. Most Italians were simply looking for peace, for their homeland was torn by wars of its own.

New York City was the destination of the majority of the Italian immigrants. There, they found many of their own people already established; the language was familiar and the old Roman Catholic religious practices were still being observed. They had their own schools, when they could afford them, and their own newspapers; Francesco Secchi de Casale, a political activist who escaped from Italian authorities, found refuge in New York and funded the publication of *L'Europee-Americano*, the first periodical to be printed both in English and Italian, the purpose of which was to keep people informed of events in Italy and Europe-and to make written attacks on the Catholic Church authorities, which got Casale in trouble. He felt so strongly about keeping his people informed, however, that when the first publication failed, he pawned his watch and some of his wife's jewelry to fund what is said to be the first important Italian language weekly newspaper published in the United States, *L'Eco d'Italia*, which remained in circulation until the end of the century.

Italians in New York had to deal with a number of social issues, including poor housing and schools, medical difficulties, and poverty. Again, their hero was Casale; he raised money to start an evening school for Italians in the Five Points slum, seeing to it the children were taught to read, write, do mathematics, and study the history of Italy and America. Casale failed to get widespread backing for a project dear to his heart, however; he very much wanted to find a way to move Italian immigrants out to the farmlands beyond the cities, since farming was what they had done in the Old Country. When he could not get the governments of Italy or the United States to back his plans, he turned to private businesses; finally by the 1880s Italian farmers were back on the land in a sense, when American businessman Charles Landis donated land near Vineland, New Jersey, to start a farming cooperative.

(over)

Italian involvement in the Civil War was intense and passionate. Their militant hero back home, Giuseppe Garibaldi, was their inspiration; his republican views led many Italians to back the Union cause, though they were represented in the Southern Confederate armies as well. Francesco Casale spearheaded the formation of an Italian Legion, and later the founding of the Italian Garibaldi Guard, and was joined by many like-minded Italians: Luigi Tinelli, a former consul to Portugal and an industrialist, had experience as a militia commander; Francesco Spinola recruited four regiments in New York, and was appointed by President Abraham Lincoln to be their general; and Count Luigi Palma di Cesnola, a veteran of the Crimean War, established a military academy in New York City, where many young Italians learned the art of war and later served in the Union army. Their stories are fascinating and colorful. Cesnola, for instance, was left wounded and pinned under his horse after fighting Jeb Stuart's Confederate cavalry at Aldie, Virginia, in June 1863; while a prisoner of war, he agitated for better treatment for prisoners, to the point that his captors put him in charge of the prison commissary at Belle Isle. Spinola, finding his men of the Spinola Empire Brigade outnumbered six to one in a battle, ordered them to fix bayonets-and they charged, scattering the amazed Southerners before them in disorder.

### **The Garibaldi Guard**

The Garibaldi Guard was the nickname of the 39th New York Infantry, a regiment of Italian-Americans recruited mostly from New York City under the auspices of Italian leaders in the North. Most of the members of this regiment, were “Garibaldini” who had fought under Giuseppe Garibaldi, the freedom fighter; they wore a distinctively styled red shirt as part of their uniform to show their connection to their countryman, whose partisans had worn such a shirt in Italy. They used the same flag used in the fight for Italian unification as their battle flag. If you look closely at the picture above, you will see that flag. Other Italian nationals joined the guard as well because they felt that the Union's cause matched their own ideals of freedom and equal justice. They also viewed the Northern ideology as closely allied with the aims of Garibaldi and felt such alliance lent credence to the great patriot's ideas, since they were clearly being adopted by other nations. Colonel, Fredrick D’Utassy, a Hungarian commanded the regiment. The Garibaldi Guard eventually consisted of many other European immigrants. Garibaldi’s name was well known all over Europe as a great General, due to his success in the Italian Unification Battles.

**The Italian Troops fought valiantly and remained loyal to the Union Army.  
We must all be proud of them.**

Adapted from the Civil War Society’s “Encyclopedia of The Civil War” and other sources.

Submitted by Salvatore J. Mangano, PNP

UNICO National Italian Heritage and Culture Chair, 2009-2010

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.  
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.