

impervious to national boundaries and continental distances. Argentine's film is illustrative of how working-class life moves across borders seamlessly and, more importantly, that the early experience of mass immigration to the United States continues to hold an important role in shaping the future of current Italian society. In this sense *Monongah Remembered* draws strong parallels between the past and present and the significance of not only remembering the past but learning from it as well.

In the aftermath of the disaster, even more telling than the fact that many of the bodies of the missing mineworkers were never recovered, was the chilling silence among the explosion's survivors. For years after the explosion, workers and their families refused to speak of the disaster. Some of those who survived even returned to the mines, only to die years later in subsequent accidents in the mines. The multiple ways in which workers and their families sought to deal with the loss of co-workers, family members, and neighbors on both continents makes a strong argument for a renewed approach to exploring the experience of working-class life in the United States in a global perspective.

Released in the United States in December 2007 and later in Italy under the title *Monongah Cent'Anni di Oblio*, the documentary leaves the viewer wanting more; it is too short for such a complex topic. *Monongah Remembered* is not only a reminder of the human cost of economic growth in the United States but that the brutality of industrial development experienced in America was likewise felt by workers and their families in continents across the globe.

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Watch the Pallino.

By Stephanie Foerster.

StepFilms, 2007.

43 minutes. DVD format, color.

Watch the Pallino, directed by Stephanie Foerster, documents the annual bocce tournament that takes place during the Labor Day celebration in Toluca, Illinois. Mixed in is just a bit of Italian-American history, ably narrated by Dominic Candeloro. A notable aspect of this film is the way in which Italian bocce has been adopted and adapted by Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans alike to the American context. The game becomes—despite its origins in a small-town immigrant milieu—fully integrated into an American Labor Day celebration, and it attracts a large number of players and teams and serves as a kind of homecoming for the entire region.

Although a powerful film at times, the viewer's attention is divided in three directions that never really seem to fold into one another as seamlessly as one might hope: a brief history of Toluca, a documentation of the annual bocce tournament (the decided bulk of the film), and some discussion of Italian immigrant history in the Toluca area and beyond. It makes sense that the film would offer an overview of the history of

Toluca given that it was sponsored in part by the Marshall County Historic Society, the county in which Toluca is situated. However, it seems peculiar—though probably unavoidably so—to hear the history of Toluca and the Bocce Tournament from the viewpoint of various townspeople and the Labor Day Bocce Tournament organizers Chuck “Coach” Rolinski and Aldo “Cap” Capponi while the discussion of local Italian immigrant history is offered by scholars of the subject. Perhaps the immigrant history of Toluca is too distant to be extensively narrated by the locals, whereas bocce and its communal significance is situated firmly within the lore of the community itself. And thus the bifurcated narrative is necessary. In addition, the camera work—mostly handheld, shaking from scene to scene, and concentrating on the expressions of the bocce players to the occasional exclusion of their form or style of play—is at moments distracting.

The film, even with minor deficits, successfully evokes a palpable sense of longing for a bygone way of community life. In fact, one of the film’s notable strengths is the way in which it depicts the characters and the immediacy of the activities in which they are involved, rendering them strikingly recognizable to those familiar with life in “small-town” America. The landscape is radiant and speckled with images of working-class occupations based in railroad, mining, and small-scale factories including one—proudly displayed—manufacturer of ravioli, notably pronounced *raviola* by one of the film’s narrators. (Indeed, the variable pronunciation of Italian words in Toluca, like the bocce tournament itself, seems to aptly reflect the process of adoption and adaptation of Italian culture to the American landscape that so characterizes this film.) These scenes serve to remind us of how easily a community can grow together when everyone living there shares a common goal or, in this case, a hobby—although we are almost hesitant to use the term hobby here because the participants in this tournament see bocce as a serious and, in fact, crucial part of their community, so much so that bocce is included in Toluca schools’ gym classes.

Although the film shifts abruptly at times from the region’s Italian immigrant history to the community bocce tournament in Toluca, the long-term presence of numerous bocce courts and bocce playing connected to local taverns, family reunions, and holiday parties point to the ways in which the game, a ludic practice, cuts through many layers of Italian-American history. While the film is evocative of an Italian-American past, it successfully avoids a syrupy nostalgia for the “old days”—bringing instead an immediacy to the game of bocce, its place in the construction of Italian identity, and its role in the cultural life of Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans alike in Toluca and its surroundings.

In the vignettes of the various players, the film’s decided strength, the director does not shy away from slightly racy material: When Shirley Hartley (clearly one of the most colorful narrators and players in the film) is being teased for being a *prima donna* at the office, she deadpans: “Yes, and if bull shit was music you’d be a brass band.” Another player—unnamed—describes bocce as a metaphor for life. Everything is going fine, then someone hits the *pallino*, knocking it to another position, and everything is suddenly changed. The game is up for grabs: “Everything’s going good in your life,” he analogizes, “you know; you get a letter; someone’s had a car crash or your kid gets arrested. Suddenly it’s all changed!” Here, perhaps, what initially seems like loose ends are tied up nicely as the director offers a reason for the persistence of bocce in

what might have initially seemed the most unlikely of places: the significance that the people of Toluca attach to the game.

The film could be profitably included in a number of courses: First, a course on the Italian-American experience would benefit from a film on bocce—especially inasmuch as many students might know of the game but not understand the rules of play, how scores are calculated, or the contextualization of the game within a network of community social relations, all lessons the film ably offers. Second, it would make sense in a course on American folklore and folklife where games are often discussed but not regularly enough illustrated ethnographically. Finally, courses in American or Cultural Studies could profit by its depiction of community celebrations. In each case, the course would benefit from how the film showcases not only Italian-American but also small-town American life in the often neglected arena of play, an arena that not only offers us a pleasant pastime but also serves the powerful function of social integration especially when it occurs, as it does in Toluca, in the context of communal celebrations.

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