

By presenting the collective memories of Italian Americans in visual and aural forms, both *Our Story* and *Famiglia Italiana* constitute important interventions in the dominant historical record. In so doing, these media productions also engage the general public, provide a needed counterbalance to fictional and nonfictional accounts in books and cinema, and have the potential to inspire how Italian Americans recount their histories.

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*Monongah Remembered.*

By Peter Argentine.

Argentine Productions, 2007.

25 minutes. DVD format, color.

An explosion at the Monongah coal mines in Fairmont, West Virginia, on December 6, 1907, was the worst mining disaster in American history. As a result of the explosion, 362 mine workers, both men and boys, working in mine numbers 6 and 8 of the Fairmont Coal Company were killed. Among those who perished, 178 were Italian immigrants, mainly from the regions of Molise and Calabria. It is estimated that the blast left approximately 1,000 widows and orphans in both the United States and in Italy. In December 2007, in remembrance of the hundredth anniversary of the Monongah mine explosion, Argentine Productions, in collaboration with the Heinz History Center and the American Italian Cultural Institute (AMICI), produced the documentary *Monongah Remembered*. The film, although only 25 minutes long, provides a fresh take on the world of work through the eyes of Italian immigrant workers and their families, both in the United States and in their hometowns in Italy.

The force of the explosion reverberated throughout Fairmount County, destroying buildings and houses in proximity to the mines, but the explosion also rocked many towns and villages in Italy, where news of the tragedy and the deaths of the workers quickly spread among family members and town residents who anxiously sought information. With massive working-class immigration to the United States at the onset of the twentieth century as the story's backdrop, Peter Argentine's documentary goes beyond recounting the journey of immigrant Italian workers. The film examines the transition from the misery of life in the rural regions of Italy to the precarious and perilous existence in the industrial United States by exploring the impact that the explosion would leave on the lives of workers and their families in both countries.

The film draws on interviews of surviving family members and Italian political authorities responsible for collecting support for the construction of a memorial to honor the victims of the explosion. The series of interviews realized in Italy and the United States provide an important perspective of how influential such far-reaching events continue to be over time and that the world of work is in many ways

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