



Fratelli d'Italia

by Ken Borelli

These are the opening words to the Italian National Anthem. Since we are fast approaching the June 2nd date of the founding of the Italian Republic or Festa della Repubblica, it is worth reflecting on the Hymn of the Poet Goffredo Mameli. His words and the music by Michele Novaro became the National Anthem of Italy when the Republic was declared in 1948.

The words and music are actually part of the historic struggles about the unification of Italy in the 1840's. I recall a fascinating lecture I attended about the lyrics of the Italian National Anthem. Space does not permit a detailed annotated explanation of them. Suffice to say, the words are quite significant. It also explains why this music was selected to be the National Anthem for the Republic although they were written in 1847.

During the struggle for Italian unification during 1840-1850, two opposite forms of government were being thrashed out, a monarchy or a republic. Initially the monarchy, under the Kingdom of Savoy, won out. Fast forward to when a defeated nation in World War II voted to establish a republic, which was just about 80 years ago. The dream from Roman days of a modern unified Italy is centuries old.

The stirring words of the first line of the Anthem are well worth noting. The hymn is addressed to "Fratelli d'Italia" and declares "brothers and sisters of Italy"; not "Kings, counts, clergy or royalty" of Italy; this is followed by "L'Italia s'è Destra," which means Italy has arisen (during the national revolts of the 1840's).

The poem goes on to cite the epic struggles to come together and form a common union that took place throughout the peninsula from the Alps to Sicily. The hymn concludes with Italy is calling you or "Italia chiamo!" It is addressed to all and tries to appeal to the common dream of the many people who were living under fragmented forms of government during those turbulent times.

The hymn was a very popular song. Even with the monarchy in control, there was no way to suppress the sentiments found in the lyrics. It is interesting to note the California connection with the Italian immigrants who were primarily from Liguria with their role in the goldfields of California!

The history of California excludes more than it includes, such as those Ligurian immigrants in the mother

lode who sent back gold to the Italian revolution of the day to help bankroll the Unification movement. Funds were sent to the revolution occurring in Italy via Masonic Lodges. This is a little-known fascinating part of both Italian and California history because many of the 49er immigrants were Italian revolutionaries in exile. When gold was discovered in California, they went there from the eastern seaboard and even Argentina and South America. Revolutionary experiences were not forgotten. Those who were able found a way to send gold to their “fratelli” in the unification movement in Italy.

On your next visit to the California Gold Country, you can easily visit many of these historic sights. One is the Romaggi Adobe, built in the 1850’s outside of Angel’s Camp. The Fratelli d’ Italia never forgot the call from Italia, and it’s a part of our California history that should not be forgotten. It is something of which to be proud when celebrating the unification of Italy. -- *Ken Borelli* 🍷



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