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Home Is Where You Hang Your Hat: Finding Garibaldi on Staten Island

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Abstract

Giuseppe Garibaldi's stay on Staten Island, New York in the humble home of Antonio Meucci is a little-known turning point in Garibaldi's life, which invites a reconsideration of the Italian Risorgimento. The materiality of Meucci's home and the objects it houses form the basis for exploring Garibaldi's connection to the Italian American narrative. While historians lament that there is little which is new to say about Garibaldi, this episode on the margins of Garibaldi's life, offers a richer portrait of a well-known figure during one of the most difficult periods of his life. The relationship between Garibaldi and Meucci remains a subject to investigate. When examining Garibaldi's experience on Staten Island he still appears heroic, but he also emerges as being far more humanized.

Keywords: Antonio Meucci, Giuseppe Garibaldi, historical memory, Sons of Italy, Staten Island

Ev Şapkanızı Astığınız Yerdir: Staten Island'da Garibaldi'yi Aramak

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Öz

Giuseppe Garibaldi'nin, Antonio Meucci'nin Staten Island'daki (New York) mütevazı evinde geçirdiği günler, Garibaldi'nin hayatında az bilinen ve Risorgimento'yu farklı bir açıdan değerlendirmeye olanak tanıyan bir dönüm noktasıdır. Meucci'nin evi ve bu evdeki eşyalar, Garibaldi'nin İtalyan Amerikalı anlatısıyla bağlantısının da temelini oluşturur. Tarihçiler Garibaldi hakkında söylenecek yeni bir şey kalmadığından yakınsalar da, Garibaldi'nin hayatındaki en zor dönemlerden birine denk gelen Staten Island günleri, bu tarihi figürün daha kapsamlı bir portresini sunmaktadır. Garibaldi ile Meucci arasındaki ilişki araştırılmayı bekleyen bir konudur. Staten Island'daki günleri incelendiğinde, bir kahramanın yanı sıra, insani özellikleriyle öne çıkan bir Garibaldi görüyoruz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antonio Meucci, Giuseppe Garibaldi, tarihsel hafıza, Sons of Italy, Staten Island

Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi's cylindrical velvet hats are the most iconic and identifying aspect of his material legacy. Those on display in Bologna's Museo Civico del Risorgimento, Museo della Repubblica Romana e della Memoria Garibaldina in Rome's Porta San Pancrazio, Museo Centrale del Risorgimento in the Altare della Patria in Rome, and Museo Risorgimento in Turin are presented in glass display cases set into museum spaces dominated by military artifacts. They represent a sharp contrast to the nature of the display in the Garibaldi Meucci Museum on Staten Island, New York.[1] There, one of Garibaldi's hats which is constructed of exquisite purple velvet embroidered ornately with gold thread rests, in excellent condition, directly on a small bed in what was Garibaldi's bedroom in the home of Antonio Meucci. Like this hat, Garibaldi is accessible in this intimate space. Here, he is not a larger-than-life figure casting a shadow over the

Risorgimento including all of its foibles, and perceived failures. Here, the man is as exposed as the hat he once wore. Meucci's home allows historians to more easily take Garibaldi's sojourn in New York off the periphery of the narrative. Doing so illuminates the shift in Garibaldi's thinking which would allow the Risorgimento to move forward past the fall of the Roman Republic in 1849. The home and the objects collected inside do not challenge what we know about Garibaldi. Rather, the objects woven together with the textual record provide a much richer portrait of an intense and complex figure.

With materiality in focus, it is clear that the globally recognized Garibaldi also identified with his global status. Garibaldi's consistent donning of a Victorian smoking hat and a South American poncho in tandem was a purposeful combination. Those material artifacts have also become synonymous with Garibaldi's likeness on manufactured objects. Biographies of Garibaldi often introduce him in the same breath as describing the proliferation of souvenirs, medals, wine labels, blouses, and biscuits, to name only a few, successfully marketing themselves using his name. There is a clear and lasting desire to own his image or to connect with an item he owned, or a place that he occupied. There is a gray area between what we label as *stuff* versus *heritage* (Macdonald and Morgan 155-68). The heritage entails how the mystique of the nation is not only built on a common history, folk traditions, and language but also the cult of the hero who built the nation (Huggins 15-33). The nation builders often embody virtue in times of great suffering, Garibaldi's exile to a location as distant as Staten Island feeds that narrative.

Much of what has been written about Garibaldi has an overtly pro-Garibaldi bias. George Macaulay Trevelyan's early twentieth century trilogy is an influential example of this tone of hero worship.[2] Denis Mack Smith's 1956 biography, which remains a standard overview of his life, salutes Garibaldi's character as well (Smith). This is not to suggest that Garibaldi is infallible in these accounts. Smith offers criticisms saying that Garibaldi dressed like a clown and that he was prone to being exceedingly moody. Trevelyan pointed out that Garibaldi was too hotheaded to be politically savvy. Despite these critiques, the common theme across Garibaldi's biographies is that he is presented as an ambitious and independent spirit with charisma and tenacity, perhaps even to a fault because it consumed him. Lucy Riall has made a clear departure from the narrative by arguing that Garibaldi's

persona was not his identity. Rather, it was the product of a carefully calculated propaganda exercise (Riall). Does it matter that his eyes were brown, but people were convinced they were blue? Yes, because it was a tiny part of a manufactured image that was orchestrated and staged by Garibaldi to cast himself as a hero. Garibaldi's behavior on Staten Island stands in contrast to Riall's argument. He did not simply withdraw from public view, as he was active in the local community in a manner that was not seemingly staged to play a nationalistic martyr in exile card which would have been easy to do and in keeping with the precedence of Giuseppe Mazzini's behavior in exile. While Riall presented a case that Garibaldi was too good to be true, Alfonso Scirocco continued to argue in a reconsidered biography that Garibaldi was nothing if not admirable and genuine (Scirocco). The historiography is becoming more polarized although it still leans toward presenting Garibaldi as a laudable figure despite a more pronounced aversion to the Great Man Theory.[3]

On Staten Island, Garibaldi was a very big fish in a very small pond. The setting for an exploration of Meucci's home and the objects it houses is significant for cultural clarity. If Manhattan is historically the epicenter of New York City, the borough of Staten Island is its boisterous red-headed stepchild. Thought of as the outer borough (read beyond Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx), the island is perceived as far on the margins of New York City much like Northern New Jersey. Culturally, Staten Island is unique. It remains more suburban than the majority of New York City, and there is a long history of the inhabitants being politically ostracized because it is more conservative than much of downstate New York. Notable exceptions include Italian neighborhoods in Queens, Whitestone, Middle Village, and Howard Beach which are also conservative enclaves.

Today, the island is home to 500,000 residents spread out over 60 square miles. Close to 40% of Staten Islanders identify as having Italian ancestry and Richmond County now has the highest reported proportion of Italian Americans in the United States.[4] The island has the lowest population concentration in New York City (although it still has a population larger than Miami or Saint Louis). The Italian American community expanded exponentially following a wave of migration from Brooklyn after the completion of the Verrazzano Bridge which connected Staten Island to Long Island in 1964. The migration was a shift of second and third-generation Italians to the suburbs in search of

the *American Dream*. This move west matched the pattern of Italian Americans heading east to the white picket fences in Suffolk and Nassau Counties on Long Island. Most historical exploration of Italian migration frames itself around the history of the nations that received the immigrants. However, Donna Gabaccia challenged this approach with an Italy-outward framework to grapple with the diaspora of 26 million Italians leaving Italy. The problem with the historiography in the United States, as she saw it, was that it was relentlessly focused on incorporating the story of Italian immigrants into the mainstream American narrative. This massive wave of Italian immigrants around the turn of the twentieth century was not part of the victim diaspora. Most of these Italians chose to leave Italy in the decades following unification to improve their economic situation. This is distinct from the Italian community that Garibaldi interacted with on Staten Island. They were part of a victim diaspora as many were exiles who had fled life-threatening political persecution (Gabaccia xxi-6).

In sharp contrast to a large and vibrant community of Italian immigrants being a dominant part of the cultural fabric of Staten Island, when Garibaldi arrived in Staten Island in 1850 from Gibraltar, by way of Liverpool, England, there were very few Italians living there. These political refugees, like Garibaldi, had fought to push foreign powers out of Italy. Many of these immigrants had been tortured by the Bourbons or the Austrians. They were the lucky ones that had managed to escape death in exile. It is a significant distinction that the Italian immigrants that Garibaldi had contact with in New York were distinct from the tidal wave of immigrants who would flee Italy by the turn of the twentieth century when it was clear that the promise of the Risorgimento to lift the *Mezzogiorno* would not come to fruition. Lack of economic opportunity due to lack of industrialization, lack of education, famine, malaria, and a lack of infrastructure was only the tip of the iceberg. Garibaldi, unlike many of the immigrants to follow for economic opportunity, never had an intention to stay. Garibaldi was transient on Staten Island. He would come to the Island intermittently in the early 1850s. Despite the ephemeral nature of his time there, he did enthusiastically join the local Masonic Lodge which marked a deep connection to the local community despite the impermanent nature of his time on the island.

Garibaldi had arrived in New York at the age of 43 in poor physical and mental health. He was suffering from debilitating

rheumatism that was so severe he had to be carried off the ship to the infirmary where the tricolore flag of the Italian Republic was hung to greet him. He was also struggling with the death of his 27-year-old wife Anita who had perished at the end of an arduous journey across Italy with enemy troops at their heels. A Brazilian freedom fighter who was also his comrade-in-arms, she was carrying their fifth child when she died of malaria in the wake of his July 1849 defeat in Rome and the collapse of the Roman Republic. His militia of 7,000 had valiantly attempted to hold the Gianicolo hill against 30,000 heavily armed French soldiers. The Garibaldini, who did not flee for their lives, followed him across Italy toward San Marino and the Adriatic. They zig-zagged across the Apennines in the heat of summer in a game of cat and mouse as the French and Austrian troops tried to kill them. In the end, Garibaldi carried his heavily pregnant wife to a farmhouse just north of Ravenna where she succumbed to fever.

With his life in shambles, his time in Staten Island can be constructed as a turning point. It marked a transition from the first part of his life as it is bound to the Risorgimento where he is perceived as more of a loose cannon of a passionate freedom fighter with lofty ideals, to a more mature, focused, and successful general. The historiography around Garibaldi gives very little attention to his time in New York.[5] Because of that trend, his residency in Staten Island might appear to be a lull, a silence, or even a disappearing act. However, he regrouped relatively quickly for the apex of the Risorgimento and victory. In a sense, he stepped off the stage into this house for the second act. Garibaldi's time in the house pushes the traditional narrative of the Risorgimento toward an often-overlooked episode in Garibaldi's life between the defeat of the Roman Republic and the Invasion of the Two Sicilies. Most thought this invasion was an impossible feat. Perhaps Garibaldi was in New York long enough for the attitude that *anything is possible* to rub off on him. Knowing what is to come, it is clear that a significant episode in the narrative of the Risorgimento has been reduced to local lore about a modest, now out of place, house.

The humble home was built in the Gothic Revival style. It was moved by the Sons of Italy to 420 Tompkins Avenue, where it still stands, in 1913. This civic organization intervened when the house was in a serious state of disrepair. It was recognized as an arch connecting Italian and Italian American culture in its infancy that should be preserved. The house is utilitarian, while the objects it contains are

symbolic. Few Italian Americans know about the existence of the home, in part because the community does not generally have a strong cultural connection to the Risorgimento. The home is not an example of material culture that was lost and found, but rather it went through long phases of being severely undervalued and ignored. The house is a historical curiosity because it is unexpected to find a founding father of modern Italy this far afield. Despite that and the sensationalism of how close it came to being destroyed (if the Sons of Italy had not intervened), it fell quickly into obscurity. Staten Island was a ferry ride and a world away.

The precarious survival of this home is not only due to geography, it is because it was the home of Antonio Meucci. Meucci has not been drawn into the narrative of the Italian American success story. The home survives because Garibaldi lived in it. Meucci is not well-known to the contemporary Italian American community. Meucci's unfortunate economic circumstances have been framed as anti-Italian discrimination in both the historical narrative and in popular culture.[6] In the wildly popular but deeply controversial (because of the stereotypes of Italian Americans that it presents) HBO series *The Sopranos*, Meucci was featured in a memorable scene in the first season of the series.[7] Anthony Jr. tells his father at dinner that he learned in school that Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. Tony, his father, irately laments that his teacher is wrong and that Antonio Meucci did not get the credit because of discrimination against Italians. Despite this appearance in popular culture, Meucci remains a footnote in the history of the second stage of the Industrial Revolution while Garibaldi drives a revolution. Because of Meucci's connection, historical memory around this home is certainly entrenched in marginalization as is Staten Island and its particular Italian American community.

Meucci's story is marked by far more tragedy than triumph. Antonio Meucci was born in Florence in 1808. He showed a clear aptitude for mechanical engineering and worked as a mechanic at La Pergola Theater. It was there that he met Ester Mochi. They married and moved to Havana, Cuba, to work in a theater after he had served time in prison in Florence for his political views. When the theater burned down, they moved to Staten Island in 1850 not long before Garibaldi's arrival. Meucci was impoverished and looking for economic opportunity. Despite his best efforts, he was down on his luck constantly. He was able to purchase a modest Gothic revival home built in the 1840s. It consisted of four symmetrical bedrooms over four

symmetrical rooms on the main floor with a lab in the basement for his work.

Necessity is the mother of invention. Esther grew increasingly incapacitated from severe arthritis and that was the impetus for Meucci to build the first telephone using a copper wire to connect her room to his workspace. Despite his entrepreneurial spirit, Meucci remained poor. He almost lost his home after he was badly burned in an engine fire on the ferry and unable to work. Great minds do not always have economic fortune.

His economic troubles stemmed in large part from the fact that he could not secure a patent for his phone because he was poor, was not well-connected socially, spoke little English, and faced systemic anti-Italian discrimination in the courts. Down but not out, he sought out Garibaldi at a dinner party and convinced him to rent a room in his house. Garibaldi worked for him making candles using a smokeless wick that Meucci invented, and they were able to scrape by. The two men met by geographical happenstance, but they became friends and shared a passion for liberating Italy from foreign control.

Writers of *The Sopranos* choose to mention Meucci and not Garibaldi. This speaks to the larger point that the Risorgimento is not a dominant contributor to Italian American identity even though it was the failures of the Risorgimento that directly drove Italian emigration. The Risorgimento is a sore spot in Italy for many regardless of whether they stayed or left to find opportunities overseas. Rather, the successes of the Roman Empire, and the cultural production of the Renaissance serve as sources of pride among Italian Americans because they point to more familiar moments of vitality and success. Garibaldi is also exceedingly complicated, especially to an unfamiliar audience. It is particularly difficult to separate the man from the larger-than-life heroic persona that he crafted. He is quite controversial in terms of his role in the failure of the Italian nation-state to lift the South because he handed off southern Italy to the new Kingdom of Italy without sticking around long enough to push for the South's interests in the construction of the union. He is not an easily understood patriot. Garibaldi is wrapped in the dense fog of the mythology of nineteenth century nationalism and Romanticism that is both foreign and arcane to contemporary Italian Americans. While there are many Italians who still blame Garibaldi for abandoning the South to what would prove to be empty promises of Cavour and the North, there is no palatable bitterness toward him in the

Italian American community. There are many in places like Naples who still blame Garibaldi for their economic troubles, any circumstantial blame in the Italian American community does not fall on Garibaldi. For Italian Americans, the failures of the Risorgimento are distant in terms of time and space.

It was not always so. There was palatable excitement when General Giuseppe Garibaldi arrived in New York in what The New York Tribute described as a spirited occasion to celebrate his arrival in New York. The Beatles weren't the only thing to come out of Liverpool that would make men cheer and women faint. But Garibaldi had no mop top, rather he was the image of a new messiah bearded with long hair. Ironically, this vision of Jesus was an enemy of the Catholic Church in New York as he was in Rome which explains, in part, why he left Manhattan so quickly. He was not described as typically handsome, but there was something about him, despite being easily flattered with little evidence of a sense of humor (Hibbert 7).

When Garibaldi arrived in New York, Meucci sought out the like-minded and admired patriot to rent a room in his house. Garibaldi spent almost a year in the modest Staten Island home of the Florentine-born inventor Antonio Meucci. As described earlier, Garibaldi arrived reeling from both the untimely death of his wife Anita and the 1849 defeat of the republic in Rome. Garibaldi, under duress or not, can display the polarities and extreme self-fashioning in which he purposefully projected heroism, sacrifice, and humility. Garibaldi's extended stay in Meucci's home on Staten Island invites conversation around the problematic nature of psychological biography. Garibaldi's mental state on Staten Island is something to tread into with extreme care. The tone of his autobiography which was finished there certainly shows evidence of his difficulties (Garibaldi). Situationally, it was a time mired by sadness and difficulty, and we know he declined far more luxurious accommodations and fanfare in rapidly industrializing Manhattan. He even refused a ticker tape parade. Instead, Garibaldi spent his days hunting and fishing in a remote corner of the city on an island removed. His struggle for a basic existence lends itself to the motif of exile, which is difficult to conceptualize through a twenty-first century lens. Exile is pushed to the forefront of conversation in this remote locus. His friend Meucci recognized Garibaldi's love of the sea and his homesickness. The two rigged up a little boat painted like the tricolore for them to sail across the Narrows to Long Island to fish. Despite the sense of exile, Garibaldi liked the United States, writing

"this nation is certainly living up to its reputation and will soon become the first among great nations" (Marraro 185).

Out of the spotlight, Garibaldi reveals himself. Never one to avoid getting his hands dirty, he worked beside Meucci making candles in a backyard kiln. The remains of the kiln point to a narrative that Garibaldi used to project his humility. Meucci's home was not just a refuge, it was a place of employment which was necessary for survival. The kiln is a symbol of suffering as it was work that overwhelmed Garibaldi, who was not in good health, with extreme heat and putrid smells. When looking at the kiln, moved along with the house, one can understand that this was not a time of leisure. Meucci was a kind friend who treated him like family, but it was not always easy to live there. Beyond longing to return to Italy, Garibaldi disliked the cold New York winter, and he desperately wanted to buy a proper fishing boat. Garibaldi was not a recluse in the house, nor was he miserable. Those that Garibaldi met around his neighborhood on the shores of the narrows at the market, at the bocci court, and on the dock commented that he was kind, unassuming, and friendly (Marraro 179-203).

We also know that he appeared in court in Staten Island at least twice. Charges were dropped when he was arrested for hunting on private property, and he testified to help a victim of an assault on the Staten Island ferry. These *local matters* highlight, perhaps, his desire for a simpler rural life along with his sense of community and civic duty. After a consideration of his decision to live on Staten Island, it is no surprise that after Italian unification he stepped away from it all on the tiny island of Caprera.

While Garibaldi is buried in Caprera, Meucci is buried in Staten Island in a grave that is far more monumental than Garibaldi's. Grave sites tend to draw the curious because of their materiality. Garibaldi was a man who unrepentantly did not want to be buried in a way that would draw such attention. He wanted to be quietly cremated on an open-air pyre of wood with his face positioned toward the sun on his beloved island, lest his body be hauled off to Rome, and placed in the Pantheon in an ornate tomb next to kings and Renaissance giants. A compromise seems to have been reached with his remains being placed in a marked grave near his home on the island. On Staten Island, Garibaldi is no longer present, but his colossal ghost is the one that seems most present in the memory of the house due to the orchestrated

collection of material artifacts that have been curated to allow visitors to make connections to Garibaldi.

While we have considered the house itself, we have yet to consider its contents. It contains limited but well-curated items seemingly selected to introduce Italian Americans to someone they presumably should know. A lock of hair, a hat, a walking stick – the things that have been collected in the house like those that might have been left behind in a hotel room. These objects are not the military artifacts that most Risorgimento museums display.

The ground floor of the house consists of a museum space focused on the Risorgimento. Far less intimate in tone, it is an educational space adorned with maps. One of the first items that one sees upon entering is a piano that Meucci had a hand in building. There is also a death mask of Meucci that is dwarfed by an over-sided metal bust of Garibaldi which presents his title as a Grand Master of the Masons of Italy. The dwarfing of Meucci seems to be the dominant trend. The more exceptional artifacts are located up a narrow staircase on the second level. In what was Garibaldi's bedroom, there is a hand-held shaving mirror used by Garibaldi along with a wooden chair that carried him off the field during the Battle of Monte Suello (east of Bergamo) in 1866 when he was too injured to walk. It surprisingly unceremoniously holds open the door of the bedroom. While the window looks onto the narrows, today the view is dominated by the Verrazzano bridge, Garibaldi would have only seen the inlet. Meucci's well-worn rocking chair in the space invites the visitors to think about the long conversation that built a friendship between the two men.

A display of clothing lends itself to the domestic nature of the space. The clothing found here includes a rare ceremonial red shirt worn by Garibaldi, along with the earlier-mentioned trademark velvet hat. The hat is iconic in photos of Garibaldi, but there are not many of them. It is rare. Beyond these material artifacts, the style of the shirt bearing his name has had a transatlantic impact on men's and women's fashion. It was pervasive in the uniforms of the American Civil War. Also on the bed, sans display case, is a finely carved, albeit simple, wooden cane, a reminder that, despite his larger-than-life legacy, Garibaldi wasn't larger than life in terms of his stature. It also reminds us that he was not invincible. He did not escape injury in battle. Many of these gifts came from Garibaldi's family. Almost everything in the

house was sold off so, without these gifts, it would be bare and the effect of being in the space would be significantly different as it would put all the focus on the materiality of the house itself.

The presentation of material culture to illuminate the life of Garibaldi is a difficult curation. Garibaldi was a man who, even when he wasn't in exile, lived a Spartan existence. His propensity toward frugality means that he leaves little in his wake in terms of material possessions. Anita, his wife, left almost nothing. Anita, often described as an Amazon warrior, was truly nomadic. She didn't live long enough to settle into Sardinia with Garibaldi which also explains why she leaves so little. Even her corporal remains, buried in haste as Garibaldi was still running for his life, were dug up by dogs. Her bones would be moved by Mussolini to Rome and interred in a bronze equestrian statue to commemorate her on the Gianicolo hill. Too much the Amazon for some, Mussolini saw here as an embodiment of maternal virtue. Anita's presence is not highlighted in the cultural artifacts in Meucci's home. Her obvious absence highlights the mourning Garibaldi likely experienced during his tenure in the home. Material goods that become valuable can be described by Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism (Marx). Because Garibaldi owned little, what we do have lends itself to the trope of rarity.

The house is small and inviting, almost cottage-like to our contemporary gaze. Garibaldi's stay on Staten Island is also defined by an approachable story of friendship forged during incredibly difficult circumstances. The friendship between them is a remarkable intersection of lives. Despite being from very different circumstances, they both had personalities that were exceedingly defiant in the face of extreme hardship. These men were down on their luck, but together they showed incredible perseverance in the face of financial and emotional hardship. Rooting for the underdogs comes naturally and easily. In times of tremendous adversity, Garibaldi called Meucci his kind Florentine friend and noted that Meucci treated him like family. Meucci had his own struggles. Despite severe economic hardship, they were able to survive.

This materiality of the home is a sharp contrast to a monumental equestrian monument in a massive square overlooking Rome or a sweeping bronze statue in Washington Square Park in Manhattan. This home is not monumental. It, like its former inhabitants, is an underdog.

Remarkably, the house survived at all, as very little has from mid-nineteenth century New York. That alone should draw a crowd but, like many, New Yorkers are rarely tourists in their own city. However, guests from all over the world visit this inconvenient corner of Staten Island. Because of the location, the house is not a place you will stumble upon as a tourist. Yet, despite the logistics, motivated guests manage to visit the home. The inconvenient trip from Manhattan becomes a pilgrimage, and it can be an emotional one at that. University students from Italy have shown up with tears in their eyes looking into the shaving mirror. A Brazilian nonagenarian could barely climb the stairs but did so with great determination before sitting down to cradle Garibaldi's cane and weep. Even Garibaldi's grandson appeared at the door resembling his grandfather to the extent that, as the story is told by staff, it was like seeing a ghost. And yes, ghost hunters do come to the home as well. The common denominator is that this home is a place to connect to the men who occupied it.

You leave the home with a sense that in reality, Garibaldi's time on Staten Island was far from quiet. And it does the historical narrative a disservice by pushing it to the margins of historical curiosities. As rumors swept Europe that he was raising funds and planning his return, he did plan aspects of the tactical invasion of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. It was that seemingly impossible invasion that caused the collapse of the Bourbon monarchy and Papal control over central Italy. This planning is what made it possible for Garibaldi to hand over southern Italy to the new nation-state.

Staten Island is not the end of the story because Garibaldi did not stay. Despite even receiving written requests from President Lincoln asking him to lead the Union army, he remained unequivocally focused on Italy. Had Garibaldi not lived in this home, albeit briefly, it most likely would be gone, and the memory of it all but lost. Meucci seems doomed to play second fiddle due to the continued impact of the out-of-fashion, but continually lurking, Great Man Theory (Harrold). This house invites us to step away from the heavily curated narrative of Garibaldi's greatness as the valiant guerilla fighter with a cult-like following. Here it is easier to look behind the romanticism and nationalism to ask if he was an opportunist or a man of the people. This material legacy exists on Staten Island without smoke and mirrors.

Beyond Staten Island, popular culture's fascination with Garibaldi can be seen in the consumerism that exploded around Garibaldi's likeness. It was both immediate and long-lasting. As the 2022-2023 exhibition *Hero: Garibaldi Icona Pop* in Turin's National Risorgimento Museum illustrated, there was a purposeful construction of the myth of Garibaldi through 100s of objects spanning the 140 years since Garibaldi's death that bare and sell his likeness. He proved to be a trustworthy brand. From toys to banknotes, if a cigar is good enough for Garibaldi it is good enough for you! Garibaldi's appeal was directed at both the masculine and the feminine. Men want to be him, and women want to be near him. Many of these goods reflect common everyday purchases so they were not cost prohibitive. Items like Giuseppe Garibaldi Brand Macaroni (United States, 1910-1915) or a chewing gum card in a *Men of Courage* series (England, 1958) could be purchased by anyone. Also noteworthy is that although Garibaldi can be used to market nostalgia, his likeness markets to contemporary youth culture as well. This is evidence from a Swatch campaign showing him in his red shirt smiling over a raised wrist bearing a watch with a leopard print band. A comic book printed in 2022 with the title *Garibaldi vs Zombie* has a cover image that is a graphic drawing of Garibaldi, clad in red complete with a hat and brown tunic, at the top of a rocky mountain planting an Italian navy flag (with no ocean in sight) while fighting off zombies in nineteenth century uniforms. All fantasy, but Garibaldi was first and foremost a man of the sea, so the seemingly misplaced flag aptly points to his identity.

Overall, the volume and scope (both chronological and geographical) of these material artifacts present Garibaldi's popular legacy globally. There was a clear mention of Staten Island in this exhibition. In 1960 the Postal Service in the United States issued a stamp to commemorate Garibaldi as an "Italian Revolutionary and Liberator." The design of the stamp shows his face on a gold medal. It includes that he is a "Champion of Liberty." Interestingly, the post office used red and blue for the design rather than the colors of the Italian flag. The information card with the stamps says that he became a freemason at the Tompkinsville Lodge on Staten Island, New York while in exile from Italy in the 1850s. Thus, managing to highlight his connection to the red, white, and blue.

Biographers and historians have long lamented that there is not much new to say about Garibaldi; even trivial details of his life have

been published (Hibbert). However, the connection between Garibaldi and the Italian American community has been given little attention. In more recent decades that community has made a more concerted effort to distance itself from the stereotype that Italian Americans are by proxy connected to the mafia. This pushback to redefine popular impressions of the community away from the *Godfather stereotype* coincides with a growing narrative about the contributions of the Italian community to the building of the modern United States through food, family, and patriotism. To negate the negative perception of Italian American immigrants before the end of WWII, many distanced themselves from their Italian identity by speaking English to their children and embracing American holidays and its history. Second and third-generation Italians are more eager, in what is now a more globalized perception of identity, to embrace their Italian-ness. Garibaldi's sojourn in Staten Island is a homegrown connection to Italy's foundation myth. In an Odyssey/ Aeneid-like narrative the hero, bouncing around the sea at the mercy of fate and yet to return home, comes to the shores of Staten Island for an episode.

Also given far too little focus in the historiography around Garibaldi is the relationship between Meucci and Garibaldi. This house frames a very human story. Their circumstantial cohabitation bridged the gap between one man on the margins of history and the other at center stage. Far from Italy, there they were equals. A small research library in one of the bedrooms reminds us that there is more work to be done in this intriguing albeit under-utilized space. Through things, we see the construction of collective historical memory.

While this sojourn in Garibaldi's life is barely a blip on Risorgimento's complex historiographical radar, it makes a larger-than-life founding father figure more accessible. This micro view of Garibaldi is particularly useful because his legacy is so controversial. His identity can be difficult to understand, especially if it is a surface-level introduction embedded into the larger cast of characters who built nation-states. The house presents Garibaldi in a way that mirrors his self-fashioning. While it does not change the narrative, it helps us to understand his motivations. He is a man of the people and one who projects humility, heroism, and sacrifice even when no one is looking because he is not at center stage.

When the narrative is shifted toward Staten Island, it runs off the well-worn track of revolution with a sharp diversion toward localism

and material culture. Although 1850 was a low point in Garibaldi's struggle, it doesn't derail the train. Garibaldi still emerges as heroic, but far more human. The pandemic's closer-to-home mindset served as an impetus to look in our own backyards with curiosity. Even in a city as well-traversed as New York, there are overlooked corners. Material culture is indispensable to understanding Garibaldi's time in New York. Garibaldi's global renown allows for his likeness to permeate domestic interiors across the world. His image was an idol, something to be venerated. His legacy was so powerful it was manipulated into representations across the political spectrum from the fascists and the partisans to Italy's 1948 postwar political campaign.

On Staten Island, we do not have such an idol. 1850 was a low point in Garibaldi's struggle so it does not fit the *hero* narrative easily. Of the numerous accounts of Garibaldi's life, many of which were written during and just after his lifetime by people who knew him, few discuss his time in Staten Island. If they do, it is an aside.[8] As we have seen, it is not an upsetting episode and, there is more to say about Garibaldi. As historians explore methodological questions around how material objects connect to text, it is important to stress that reading *things* is more complex because the use of those things and the meanings ascribed to those material objects vary so much more widely than meanings from interpreting language (Auslander et al. 1354-5). The chair that carried Garibaldi's bleeding body out of battle before making its way thousands of miles to Staten Island is not just a chair.

Notes

[1] The Garibaldi Meucci Museum is a nonprofit organization which has been run by the Sons of Italy Foundation since 1919.

[2] While Trevelyan's trilogy, although an idealized portrait written more than a century ago, remains foundational in terms of our understanding of the myth crafted around Garibaldi (Trevelyan, *Defense*; *Garibaldi and the Making*; *Garibaldi and the Thousand*).

[3] The scholarship that has been published on Garibaldi is vast. For a sense of the size of the literature in Italian see Anthony P. Campanella, *Giuseppe Garibaldi e la tradizione garibaldina: una bibliografia dal 1807 al 1970*, Comitato dell'Istituto Internazionale di Studi Garibaldini, 1971.

[4] Macaulay Honors College at CUNY has compiled Staten Island's demographics which includes this data about Italian Americans.

[5] Hibbert's biography is typical of the common trend to mention Garibaldi's trip to Staten Island as an aside in passing (Hibbert).

[6] There has not been a tremendous amount of historical inquiry around Meucci's life, but the bicentenary of his birth was marked with more interest in his circumstances. In particular, his scientific achievement has come more clearly into focus (Respighi).

[7] "The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti." *The Sopranos*, created by David Chase, season 1, episode 8, HBO, February 28, 1999.

[8] Scirocco's book uses these detailed accounts of his life extensively to revisit Garibaldi's life.

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