

DEDICATO A USTICA

Babes at sea**A new life of freedom awaited these 28 sons**

By Shirley Barbara Nichols

It is with great pleasure that we publish not only the original draft but also the Italian version of this written piece by Shirley Barbara Nichols. It can be considered a work suspended between a dream and a historical reconstruction. Shirley is an American citizen with three children and seven grandchildren. She is a descendent of the Usticesi people who emigrated from the island to America in the middle of the 1800's. As a teenager Shirley lived on a small farm surrounded by other families from Ustica. As Shirley writes in a letter to Vito Ailara: "It was only after I had grown up and had time to remember all I had learned as a child did I feel a great urge to find out where I came from. For ten years I have read about Sicily, Ustica, Lipari and other places in Italy, the Italian lifestyle and I have found more than I ever hoped to. A great people and a great nation. A family in a far away place that I feel connected to even though I have never been there." Inspired by this strong sentiment, the brief novel "Babes at Sea" is an almost poetical work. Our readers can find many other works at the Shirley homepage: <http://www.eatel.net/~wicket/index.html>.

The Study Center of the Island of Ustica hopes to be able to examine thoroughly, with the help of the overseas readers, some of the historical points brought up by the author. For example, the emigration of many young men from South Italy with the introduction of obligatory military service, or their participation in the American Civil War.

This research is dedicated to the brave fathers and mothers who sent their sons from harm by tearing them from the bosom of Italy Sunday, February 14, 1861.

The darkest night hid the departing ships and the stars were dimmed by a winter mist and a half-moon snuggled behind clouds drifting over the dark blue sea.

Silently, but swiftly two weather-seasoned deck hands with calloused but adept fingers, released the huge ropes securing two tiny sailing vessels tied fast. Then as though sensing the urgency for haste, the ships slowly rocked free from their berths and on the risen tide, coincidentally backed away. All on board watched as the Isle de Ustica slipped away into a background of dark-

ness and only the sea sounds pounding its shores gave evidence of its presence. If not for the tiny flashes from the mariner's signal seeming suspended in flight, no life existed.

Then with care, but fleet as they could with the winds favorable, the ships sailed towards a future of mystery, possibly greater dangers and absolute uncertainty for these babes, there may not be any tomorrows. Two schooners, the 'Empire Paradise' and the 'Pilgrim' snuggled within sight for safety and when secured in a blanket of total darkness, their sails quickly spread to full. Greedily, the large sails gathered in lusty northeast winds pushing the ships a favored route toward the Straits of Gibraltar. Slapping and straining, testing the ship's rigging, evidenced by the creaking

network of rigging supporting sails, spars and barrel-width hand-hewn masts. Captain and crew held their thoughts silent.

An arrogant captain at the helm of the Pilgrim and his untested crew of twenty-eight young boys prayed they make the strait long before dawn's first light. Military boots, at that very moment were pounding the cold granite pathways of the small island searching each home for the young sons of Italy, the fruit of every mother's womb to gather to the bosom of Garibaldi, self proclaimed leader, patriot and hopeful redeemer of the great nation of Italian people. But this day, few would be found, and silence was the door plate except for mourning and lamentations muffled in the folds of every mother's apron.

Yet, in the throes of sorrow there was exhilaration in triumph knowing a new life of freedom and opportunity awaited these twenty-eight sons at the end of a journey. A new country, offered them freedom and limitless opportunities, but unbeknownst to the families, even then the first shot had been fired proclaiming the beginning of a war to obtain personal freedom or possibly enslavement to another kind of hell. Could death, destruction and slavery so well known by the Usticesi be the one who would greet them at the end of a long journey?

The small schooners, one carrying the babes and the second only an empty shadow for sure protection their cargo would survive, playfully huddled together along the southern coast of North America bathed in the clear blue waters of the 'Gulf of Mexico'. And at first light on the seventh day of March, 1861, they tacked a sure course headed for the mouth of the Mississippi Delta.

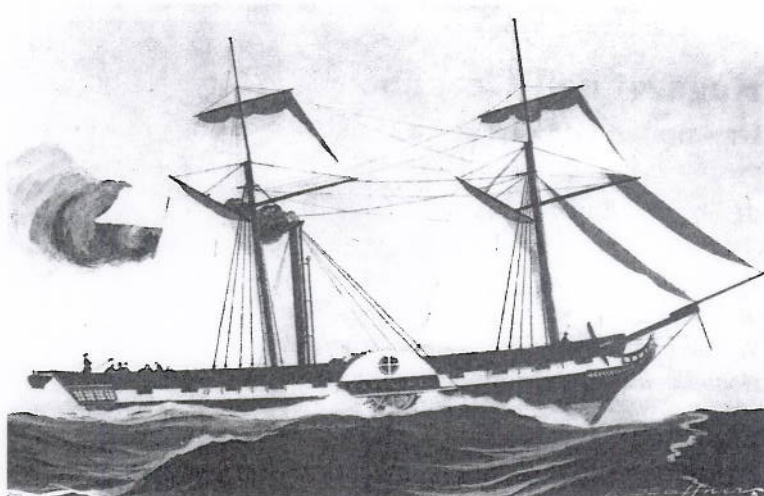
A well traveled passage since the discovery of the continent, captain and crew hoped to enter the port at New Orleans, Loui-

siana without incident of kind as the trip had been of good faith and the crew weary, but quick to revive as land was sighted by the brave captain who had traveled these waters many times before. Proud and well prepared was the crew with the 'colors of Italy', flying more brightly then before and on the deck of the *Pilgrim* stood twenty-eight young boys more men, now the journey was over, facing the bow straining to hide the gleeful excitement they were feeling. Unbeknownst to them the heavens had opened a path for the tiny vessel, as it would be the last ship allowed to enter the mouth of the Mississippi River as a blockage had already been laid to hinder any other entries.

When they entered port, the celebration of triumph and what they had accomplished wasn't overshadowed by what lay ahead but what they had left behind. Each youngster would be the bright hope of every family who would one day follow the same course and make their way to a new land, a new life and to welcome them would be the ones they had so bravely sacrificed for future generations such as myself would one day sit down and contemplate what a great people they were.

And if not for their bravery, first and second generation Italian-Americans would not be here in America. America is a great country and it is great because it is immigrants sharing this land with native Americans. If it were not so, the country would not be so great. With their passage long ago came greatness, its compliment is roots growing in another land. Italy. The place we are drawn to.

It was nearly ten years later that the young boys, grown into great men who served the new country for north or south, and they served well, would open their arms and welcome the families who followed. Most all



would meet once again the parents they left, though somewhat older and a bit more bent and brothers and sisters they had never known. Some were taller and some more handsome but each young brother would wear a cocky smile and every sister would flaunt a flowing black mane, the pride of every young romantic girl. Their cheeks were rosy from the trip over and their language a bit different, but the language of love would never change.

What you have just read is imagination but the facts are truth. Those boys did sail the high seas and they were thirteen to seventeen or a year or two more. But they did come from Ustica and they were the last ship to enter the port of New Orleans, LA. on March 7, 1861.

Only in my imagination can I see the evidence of that voyage so long ago. I only hope, and pray the story as close to truth as my mind can imagine it.

Name of the vessel from Palermo Italy and list of passengers and the captain.

List of passengers taken on board the Bark *Elisabetta*, where of Franti is the Master of the Port of Palermo and bound for N. Orleans, Louisiana U.S.A.

All merchants from Sicily to New Orleans, La. U.S.A.

G. FAMULARO 18 male
G. LAROSA 25 male
G. RANDO 23 male
S. PITTERI 18 male
F. MAGGIORE 21 male
G. BONJAMINO 13 male
F. FALLO 21 male
G. MAGGIORE 21 male
F. FALLO 17 male
F. PALMISANO 20 male
P. MANCUSA 17 male
G. MANCUSA 24 male
G. MANCUSA 20 male
P. MANCUSA 24 male
G. BARBARA 16 male
G. BARBARA 15 male
A. PALMISANO 14 male
A. CRISTINA 15 male
A. OLIVARI 17 male
G. MANCUSA 24 male
G. MANCUSA 20 male
A. LUSA 20 male
A. SCARINTINA 27 male
V. CRISTINA 16 male
A. LAGANI 18 male
M. CUSIMELLERIA 33 male
N. BONGIAVARNI 55 male
G. PAFIA 15 male

The captain of the Brig *Elisabetta* signs that all 28 souls taken on board at the Port of Palermo are safe.

Dated: March 7, 1861
Signed and witnessed by the Collector at the Port of New Orleans, Louisiana in America.

SHIRLEY BARBARA NICHOLS