

## La Storia della Società Lombarda

### Introduzione

La Big Muddy Coal Company ebbe un ruolo chiave nell'industria mineraria del carbone nella parte meridionale dell'Illinois. Inizialmente gli italiani soprattutto i cuggionesi furono ingaggiati per l'estrazione del minerale a Murphysboro, contea di Jackson dove fondarono pure una società di mutuo soccorso lombarda il 1 novembre 1892 – Società Braciante.

Con il tempo il vicino centro minerario di Herrin crebbe di importanza e i cuggionesi vi si stabilirono in massa, e ad un certo punto la filiale di mutuo soccorso di Herrin, fondata nel 1898, ebbe il sopravvento su quella di Murphysboro che fu sciolta e amalgamata con quella di Herrin.

Nel 1903 questa nuova organizzazione decise di aprire un negozio comunitario, la Lombard Society cui nel 1912 fu affiancata una macelleria. Una società di mutuo soccorso e un negozio che fino al 1971 rappresentarono il modo migliore per acculturarsi nel Paese di adozione. I due articoli seguenti raccontano la storia della Lombard Society attraverso un redazionale dell'*Herrin Daily Journal* del 30 agosto 1937 e un articolo di fondo di Linda Rush del *Southern Illinissan* del 27 settembre 1998.



Durante le ricerche per questi articoli è emersa la tragica vicenda di Angelo Pessina nato a Cuggiono nel 1881, ed emigrato a 17 anni nel 1898 a Murphysboro. La lapide che lo ricorda nel cimitero San Carlo di Herrin non spiega i motivi della sua scomparsa ma è lecito pensare che data la giovane età sia morto in miniera lasciando la moglie Luigia Calcaterra e la figlia in fasce Sandrina Pessina.



## Storia della Società Lombarda

*Articolo della redazione dell'Herrin Daily Journal del 30 agosto 1937.*

*Traduzione di Ernesto R Milani – 1 agosto 2025*

Nell'anno 1892 un gruppo di italiani residenti nella città di Murphysboro, Illinois contribuirono finanziariamente alla celebrazione del quarto centenario della scoperta dell'America da parte di Cristoforo Colombo. Dopo la riuscita del Columbus Day di quell'anno il comitato si riunì per decidere che cosa fare con i fondi rimasti dopo il pagamento di tutte le spese. In questa assemblea si deliberò la costituzione di una organizzazione i cui membri dovevano essere lombardi con l'ammissione estendibile ai loro figli. Il risultato di questo accordo fu la creazione della Lombard Society cui andò il denaro rimasto dopo il pagamento delle spese per la celebrazione del Columbus Day.

Lo scopo della società è di emancipare i suoi soci, dar loro assistenza e attraverso gli sforzi comuni far sì che i soci diventino cittadini americani migliori.

Nel 1892 l'organizzazione fu definita e chiamata "Lombard Society of Mutual Assistance" (Società Lombarda di Mutua Assistenza) con sede a Murphysboro, Illinois. I primi funzionari eletti furono: Enrico Taveggia, presidente; Manuel (Emanuele) Puricelli, segretario e Charles (Carlo) Ruggioli, tesoriere. Interessante notare che Charles Ruggioli fu il primo italiano a stabilirsi a Murphysboro.

Nel 1898 una filiale di questa società fu organizzata a Herrin, due anni prima che Herrin fosse incorporata città. La società di Herrin crebbe rapidamente e in poco tempo superò in numero quella originale di Murphysboro. Inoltre, la società di Murphysboro cominciò a declinare e per questo motivo la sede dell'organizzazione fu spostata a Herrin. Infine la società di Murphysboro chiuse i battenti e i suoi soci furono trasferiti a Herrin.

Nel 1903 la società decise di aprire un negozio che si sarebbe chiamato Lombard Society Store (Negozio della Società Lombarda). Questo fu fatto

e il primo sito fu un edificio nell'area ora occupata dalla First National Bank. Il negozio rimase in questo posto fino al 1906. Quell'anno fu deliberato di spostarsi al numero 110 North 14 Street dove si trova tuttora (NdT. 1937) il reparto i generi non deperibili della società. Quel medesimo anno il negozio fu distrutto da un incendio ma subito dopo l'edificio fu ricostruito e il negozio tornò operativo nel medesimo posto.

Nel 1912 la società decise di espandere l'attività ed aprì una macelleria. Il primo sito della macelleria fu una piccola struttura a nord del Rome Club, attualmente occupato dal McNeill Electric Shop (Elettricista McNeill). Fino ad allora i locali commerciali erano stati in affitto, nel 1916 la società fu finalmente in grado di acquistare il proprio immobile, e il medesimo anno acquisì non solo l'edificio a un piano che aveva occupato sinora ma anche l'edificio a due piani confinante, creando una facciata totale lunga 23 metri.

Questi acquisti immobiliari consentirono alla società di gestire contemporaneamente e con successo sia il negozio sia la macelleria. Dal 1916 ad oggi (1937 NdT.) la società ha fatto affari in questa struttura. Il piano superiore di questa struttura a due piani viene usata come loggia e sala club per i soci della società.

Il Lombard Society Store (Il negozio della Lombard Society) è stato il primo negozio di Herrin ad avere un assortimento completo di generi alimentari d'importazione. Per quanto ne sappiamo, è la sola cooperativa di Herrin che nel corso degli anni ha avuto successo in questo genere di attività.

Rendiamo omaggio agli organizzatori che hanno lavorato così fedelmente nei primi anni nell'attuare e far rispettare lo statuto onde garantire un solido esercizio aziendale.

Le sue modalità operative sono interessanti. La società è gestita da un gruppo di consiglieri e il negozio da un altro gruppo di consiglieri. Ogni giorno, al momento della chiusura, un comitato eletto a questo scopo controlla le ricevute assieme al manager del negozio. Una volta al mese tutti i consiglieri del negozio si incontrano e ricontrrollano tutte le

transazioni del mese. In questi incontri si discute e delibera la futura politica dell’impresa.

Ad intervalli regolari, gli amministratori fiduciari del negozio controllano i libri contabili e riferiscono durante le assemblee regolari. Ogni tre mesi i consiglieri del negozio si incontrano con i consiglieri della loggia e riferiscono la situazione dell’attività e discutono di importanti questioni al riguardo. A loro volta i consiglieri della società riferiscono a tutti i soci della società. In questo modo tutti i soci sono al corrente della situazione economica. E dei s

La società ha un buon motivo di essere orgogliosa dei risultati del passato e del contributo alla città di Herrin in quanto dà lavoro a sette persone nel negozio e nella macelleria. Non dichiara dividendi ma assiste invece i soci che per disgrazia non sono in grado di lavorare. La società non è organizzata per il profitto ma per il beneficio di tutti i suoi membri.

Qui sopra una fotografia dei soci fondatori della società ancora in vita e residenti a Herrin (anno 1937). Senza il loro instancabile impegno e sacrificio, la società non avrebbe prosperato.

A causa della distruzione dei registri durante l’incendio del 1906 non è stato possibile determinare accuratamente i nomi dei soci fondatori. Per ottenere questa informazione è stato necessario fare affidamento alla memoria dei soci più anziani della società. Uno dei soci fondatori ancora in vita e residente a Herrin è stato omesso involontariamente. Il suo nome è Enrico Brusati.

In questo numero, la Lombard Society si unisce all’Herrin Daily Journal nell’esprimere fiducia sul futuro di Herrin. Il loro investimento immobiliare a Herrin lo dimostra.

**Vedi fotografie nel testo originale in inglese allegato.**

**Foto in alto: Funzionari e comitato**

Fila in basso, da sinistra a destra: Charles Calcaterra, amministratore; Pete Piantanida, amministratore; Frank Branca, tesoriere; Louis Merlo, vice-presidente; Frank Spezia, presidente; Angelo Venegoni, segretario; August Puricelli, capo del comitato; John Barni, comitato; Dan A. Miriani, manager.

Fila in alto: da sinistra a destra: Chas Marlow (Charles Merlo), amministratore; Paul Calcaterra, comitato; Joe Piantanida, comitato; Joe R. Calcaterra, comitato; Joe Puricelli, comitato.

### **Fondatori della Lombard Society**

Fila in basso: da sinistra a destra: Natale Carnaghi, Charles Ruggiroli, Joe P. Calcaterra, Louis Carnaghi.

Fila in alto, da sinistra a destra: John Garavaglia, Pete Garavaglia, Louis Calcaterra.

### **Foto in basso**

Interno del negozio della Lombard Society – generi alimentari/vari e macelleria.

# EARLY HAPPENINGS IN HISTORY OF HERRIN

(Continued from page 4 E)

copying the west end of the saloon will move in a few days into the French Cutlery saloon, and this room which has been used for a short time will be thrown open of a new proprietor, which will measure 50x70. The staircase will lead to the upstairs from the Monroe street entrance. Mr. Dell'Orto will use the new addition for a wholesale house which he will conduct.

"The French and French Cutlery will be the best part of the tourist district in the east part of the city, and by mid summer the business portion of Herrin will present a very different appearance to what it does now."

June 15, 1898. "BRUSH MINE IS BUILT." The only two Non-Union Mine in Williamson County Comes into Union. Brush Mine Co. mines, which for a long time have been abandoned, will now be managed with water rollers. This they please into the control of the Marion Coal Company, a New Jersey corporation. The price reported to have been paid for the property is \$400,000.

"Brush mine has employed negro miners and has been non-union. It is reported that when Brush sold all of his 'interests' Monday that it was a pathetic scene."

"Well, Master Brush, I guess we've got no job any more now?" "No," replied Brush, "not unless you join me."

Brush got up and addressed all of his men and was followed by the new manager who told the men that he was going to unsilence the mine and that he would pay for the charter himself and that not a man could work at the mines that did not have a union card.

"With his rattling gun, he dashed down from his mounting and his crew of office men Brush made his departure from a place that has in time witnessed a fierce clash between union and non-union labor, but finally witnessing the triumph of us

guilty labor."

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July 10, 1898. "MUCH BUILDING IN PROGRESS." New Business Houses Going Up and Many Residential Buildings Are Planned. With all they say about the place, Herrin continues to grow. Business buildings are being completed and others are just being started. This week work began on a brick structure for Park Avenue, adjoining the Bremner Bakery on the north. James Jeffreys is building it. The structure will be 25x100, a single story and a business location. The Treese & Griffin tile and brick on Jackson street is receiving the finishing touches this week and will be completed in a few days with their decorations. The Riddle and Mayor Martin buildings are about finished. The Quayle building on West Cherry street is going up as fast as the available labor can work. Within a short time good business locations will be plentiful in this city.

"Ole" is the residential district of Herrin, and it is just as busy. The new Presbyterian church is fast assuming the form of a neat structure. Down in the southwest portion of the city, L. V. Cline is building a handsome residence that is going to be among the city's finest homes.

"The post office and town are being gradually filled to with houses, and these are unfailing signs that Herrin is marching along, keeping pace with the strenuous progress it has always set."

August 24, 1908. "ANOTHER STREET RAILWAY COMING. INDICATIONS OF THE CARTERVILLE AND MURPHYSBORO LINE REACHING THE CITY." When George Heckel in the interest of eastern capitalists purchased the Herrin Light & Power Co.'s plant in this city last week, the Car-

## YOUNG MEN ABOUT TOWN



Way back when they used gas lights on automobiles, these two were young men about town. They are Dr. Wade Baker and George K. Crichton.

bondale Electric Light plant and entered into negotiations for the purchase of the plant at Carterville, the appearance of the ownership of lighting systems by a syndicate was in evidence. Mr. Heckel was representing capitalists in the name of Newcomer & Co.

"The prime interest of Newcomer & Co. in this part of the state is in building a street car line from Murphysboro northward through the coal field. The survey is expected to start this week at Murphysboro. At Murphysboro a fund of \$1,000 is being raised for the purpose of assisting in making a survey of the proposed line. Carterville is raising a like fund among its citizens."

"The fact that the home lighting plant was purchased for the syndicate evidences that a new street car line proposes to start at Carterville but to come on farther. And as Herrin is the goal to which all railroads reach, there is little doubt but that the new line will be extended from Carterville to this city.

"There is some assurance of good strong street lights when a well established plant is installed and a big electric power house will furnish the power. The cost of a big plant comes from the fact that our company with any great running resources would be without a duplicate plant. So when the main plant or part is out of working order the street cars and lights are furnished with power just the same."

"Another street car line into Herrin means another industrial center. Herrin is the goal of the coal field and the nucleus from which all lines radiate. As it is not likely that the new line would come in the same direction of the Coal Belt, but instead would attempt to reach towns west of this city yet untapped by railroads carrying passengers. So the new line will likely pass through the villages of Lauder, Colpitts and Densham, and other small towns in closer touch with the big markets of Herrin."

September 2, 1908. "WILL LAY CORNER STONE." Presbyterians planning for ceremonies at corner stone laying next Tuesday. The corner stone of the new Presbyterian church in Herrin will be formally laid Tuesday afternoon at three o'clock. The members of the congregation who have been looking forward to the time with no small interest have everything ready for the exercise which will begin promptly at three o'clock.

"Rev. Dr. E. C. Tavel, president of the Illinois Presbytery Synod, will be present and deliver the principal address. Other prominent ministers and church workers are expected to be here from the neighboring towns.

## POST OFFICE FORCE IN 1913



The post office and the postal force in 1913 when Alonso Boren was postmaster. Left to right: Edd Mayer, John Genesio, Frank Jenkins, Wm. Mayer, Adrie Jones, Milah Motsinger, Pearl Radcliff and Alonso Boren, postmaster.

of this city.

"In December, 1904, this church was organized here in the opera house with thirty-five members. Today it has a membership of over seventy-five."

September 28, 1906. "WILL BUILD IN NORTH HERRIN." North Herrin will start to grow this fall. The foundation of a new permanent building will be put up in a few weeks. F. J. Riddle is going to erect a building with three large store rooms as soon as he can draw up his plans a little more definitely.

"It is expected that the other business lots will be sold out this fall or early in the spring. The north end promises to be a lively part of the city before many more months."

October 12, 1906. "WILL HAVE GOOD LIGHTS." City makes ten year contract with electric light company — increases are rights.

"Twenty-seven new lamps to be added to the city's street lights, the corner of the plant's property to

fifty arc lamps within six months, to 100 arc lamps before the year is out, to provide incandescent lights of sixteen candle power at a maximum charge of seventy-five cents and entering into a contract with the city for ten years.

"The ordinance that passed the city council Monday night after very little discussion. The master of providing better and more lights for the city and patrons has been before the city council for many months. It was settled seemingly to the satisfaction of everybody interested."

"A deal has been made, a location between the Herrin Light & Power Company and the eastern syndicate which will now take over the property, upon the company being successful in making this contract with the city. It is understood that the new company will begin at once to rebuild and completely overhaul the old plant."

"The Herrin Trust and Savings Bank

trucks and all of the machinery moved from the old plant to the new building. Fred Richard, who was head of the old plant went to Chicago Tuesday to help the new company in the organization and purchase of a lot of new machinery."

"To prove that they mean business, the new company will give a \$50,000 bond to the city within two weeks."

"The new contract the city entered into with the company will be twice as many as lamps as they now have. It installs a meter system for private consumers of electricity and the street lamps are to be turned on one hour after sunset and burned all night."

January 1, 1907. "OPEN DOORS FOR BUSINESS BY NEXT SPRING." With a capital of \$50,000 made up solely of Herrin stockholders, more of them among the city's more well-to-do, will open its doors for several months

beginning of spring. A charter for the organization of the bank was granted by State Secretary Rose last week. The trustees named in the application for a charter were E. H. Ford, H. A. Karr, Fred Stoltz, Paul Herrin and Louis Dell'Orto.

"Applicants for stock are now being listed. One of the promoters stated to The News this week that it was not going to be easy to sell all of the 1,000 shares of stock.

"It is expected that there are a lot of the more wealthy Italians taking stock. There has been a run off for several months about the proposed plan to start an Italian banking institution, and it is believed that many Italians are becoming interested in this new institution."

"The location of the new banking institution has not been decided on. There is some talk about buying a lot and erecting a building. It is most likely that the institution will be located in the city and a new building, in that they will be ready

to open its doors for the general banking business by then. (Continued on Page 4 F)

# HISTORY OF LOMBARD SOCIETY

In the year 1892, a group of Italians, residents of the City of Murphysboro, Illinois, contributed money toward the celebration of the fourth centennial of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. After a very successful celebration on Columbus day of that year, the committee in charge of the celebration met to decide what was to be done with the money remaining after the payment of all expenses. At this meeting it was decided that an organization be formed whose object was to form a brotherhood of Italians coming from the Province of Italy known as Lombardy and some of men coming from Lombardy to be also eligible for membership. As a result of this agreement that the money remaining after paying the expense of the celebration go to the newly organized society, the Lombard Society was created.

The society has as its purpose the promotion of the welfare of its members, to render assistance and benefits to the poor and through their united effort working as a family cause their members to become better American citizens.

In November, 1892, the organiza-

tion was completed and was named "Lombard Society of Mutual Assistance," headquarters being in Murphysboro, Illinois. The following were elected as its first officers: Ettore Tavel, President; Matteo Paricello, Secretary; and Charles Ruggiroll, Treasurer. It is interesting to note that Charles Ruggiroll was the first Italian to come to Murphysboro to make that his home.

In 1893, a branch of this society was organized in Herrin. This was two years before Herrin was incorporated as a city. The society in Herrin grew rapidly and within a short time the society of Herrin was larger than the society in Murphysboro. It also developed that the society in Murphysboro began to decline and because of this fact, headquarters of the organization were moved to Herrin. Finally the organization ceased to function in Murphysboro and its members transferred to Herrin. Since 1898 the society has prospered in Herrin.

In 1903, the society decided to open a store to be known as the Lombard Society Store. The west end of the present location was in a frame building on the lot where the First National Bank Building now stands. The store remained in this location until 1906. In that year it was decided to move to what is now 110 North 14th street, the place where the dry goods department of the society is now located.

That year, the Lombard Society moved to the new building.

After the fire, the building was reconstructed and the store was again in operation on the same

Finally in 1916 the society was in a position to buy its own property, and in that year it purchased not only the one story building that it had theretofore occupied but also the adjoining two-story building, making a total frontage of seventy-five feet. These purchases of real estate enabled the society to operate both the store and the meat market in conjunction with each other which has been very successful. From 1916 until the present time the society has operated its business in this location acquired at a low price. The upper two-story building is used as a lodge and club room for the members of the society.

The Lombard Society Store was the first in Herrin to carry a complete line of imported foods. It is the only cooperative store to our knowledge in Herrin that has been successful in its operation throughout the years. We pay tribute to the members of the society who worked so hard to establish and to maintain the society.

In this manner every member is privy to the condition of the business.

The society has just cause to be proud of its accomplishments in the past and of its contribution to the city of assisting in furnishing

employment to seven persons who work in the store and meat market. It does not declare dividends, but instead assists its members who because of misfortune are unable to work. It is a corporation organized not for profit but for the benefit of all of its members in a fraternal sense.

The above is a photograph of the surviving members of the society residing in Herrin, who are charter members. But for their untiring efforts and sacrifice the society would not have thrived as it has.

Because of the destruction of the records by the fire of 1906 the names of the charter members could not be accurately determined. To get this information it was necessary to rely upon the memory of the older members of the society. The surviving resident charter member was inadvertently omitted. His name is Ettore Tavel.

Lombard Society joins with The Herrin Daily Journal on this issue, expressing confidence in the future of Herrin. Their investments in real estate on Herrin prove this.



FOUNDERS OF LOMBARD SOCIETY: Bottom row, left to right: Natole Carnaghi, Chas. Ruggiroll, Joe P. Calcaterra, Louis Carnaghi. Top row, left to right: John Garavaglia, Pete Garavaglia, Louis Calcaterra.

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Interior view of Lombard's Meat and Grocery Department.

## La Società Lombarda di Mutua Assistenza

A cura di Linda Rush, The Southern Illinoisan, 27 settembre 1998

### The Lombard Society of Mutual Assistance

By Linda Rush  
The Southern Illinoisan

**I**talian immigrants to Southern Illinois, many of them speaking little or no English, found both comfort and credit by joining groups such as the Lombard Society, which was founded in 1892 in Murphysboro and organized a Herrin branch in 1898 — two years before Herrin was incorporated as a city.

The majority of Herrin's Italians came from Lombardy; the society was named after their homeland.

The Lombard Society of Mutual Assistance disbanded in 1971, but left behind a rich legacy, its 89 years of providing fellowship, mutual assistance and (through its grocery, meat market and general store that operated for more than 50 years) a source of genuine Italian foodstuffs for families who missed their homeland. At the Lombard stores, customers could speak Italian and be understood; they could purchase food, dry goods, mining supplies. The lodge and store were set up as separate corporations, both owned by the same membership.

Charles Spezia, 84, of Herrin, recalls the group well; he was treasurer when the Lombard Society disbanded. The retired

carpenter and cabinetmaker had been an officer "since 1946 or 1947," he said. "They saw fit to put me there and I stayed until it eventually dissolved." Older members didn't want the organization to be dissolved, so wrote bylaws that "said one dissenting vote could keep them from killing it," Spezia said. "I was one of the reprobates" who voted to keep the lodge going, he added.

"It was strictly a man's organization," he said, but women and non-members of the society could shop at the stores. The \$12 a year membership fee was never increased.

The lodge provided personal and financial help for its members, including society-paid illness and death benefits. The Lombard Society Store opened in 1903 and closed in February 1954. It provided credit during long mine strikes and personal tragedies.

"They had about \$100,000 on the books that they never collected" when the store closed, Spezia said. "People helped others. They would have raffles and fundraisers to help guys who got sick and couldn't work. There was no government help then. If you couldn't get help from neighbors and friends you couldn't get help."

He recalls being elated as a cabinetmaker "when our wages went up to three bucks an hour."

I was making real money. I got \$10 an hour when I retired."

Spezia said he knows of just seven other members who are still around: Herman Berra, Joseph Calcaterra, Bennie Calcaterra, Frank Calcaterra, Charlie Crespi, Charlie Vansaghi and Emil Crespi. Charlie Crespi is in Chicago, the others still in Herrin, he said.

The Lombard Society, in addition to its buildings on 14th Street in Herrin, also owned about 40 acres north of Herrin, which it sold to the Herrin Eagles in 1962; the site became Eagles Park.

From a membership of more than 500 in the 1920s, its heyday, the Lombard Society waned. "As the old people died off, it seemed the younger people wanted no part of it," Spezia said. In 1922, the Lombard store had a manager and 13 clerks. When it closed, it had a manager, one full-time clerk and a deliveryman.

Spezia inherited his love of the Lombard Society. His father, Frank Spezia, served 25 years as president of the store corporation and vice president of the lodge. (The president of the lodge also was vice president of the store corporation.)

"My dad came here from Italy in 1901, when he was 17 years old," Spezia said. "He left a family construction company in Italy. He learned to read, write

and speak the English language without going to school. He had his own business, then worked in the coal mines, then became a cabinetmaker."

The immigrants, Spezia said, "were hard working men but they had a lot of fun, too — more so than young people now." The social club used to hold dances and "three or four times a year throw a wingding," he said. "Once a year we held a picnic out at the farm."

"One year at the picnic, a woman came up and said her husband had had too much to drink and asked me to take him home. I took him home and took three or four others home, then drove back to the grounds. By the time I got there the first guy had woken up and gone back to the picnic."

Spezia's son, Carl, who teaches at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, said he can remember visiting the lodge hall when he was a youngster. "There was a large ballroom with a bar on one side. It smelled just like a spittoon," Carl recalled. "And they had two safes. There was a large, modern safe and an old, unlocked one. The fancy one was a decoy; they kept the money in the old one."

Charles Spezia said that was true, but added that the unlocked safe didn't have all that much money in it, "just enough to make change the next day."

Gli immigrati italiani residenti nell'Illinois meridionale, molti dei quali parlavano a malapena l'inglese, trovarono conforto e credito diventando soci di gruppi come la Lombard Society, fondata a Murphysboro nel 1892 e organizzata nella filiale di Herrin nel 1898 — due anni prima che Herrin fosse riconosciuta come città.

PRINTED IN ITALIAN & ENGLISH

**COSTITUZIONE**  
— DELLA —  
**Societa' Lombarda**  
DI MUTUO SOCCORSO  
— FRA —  
BRACCianti



Fondata il 1 Novembre, 1892,  
in Murphysboro, Illinois, e ri-  
modificata il 1 Gennaio, 1927,  
alla sede di Herrin, Illinois.

Incorporata sotto le leggi dello  
Stato di Illinois, il 1 Ottobre, 1916.

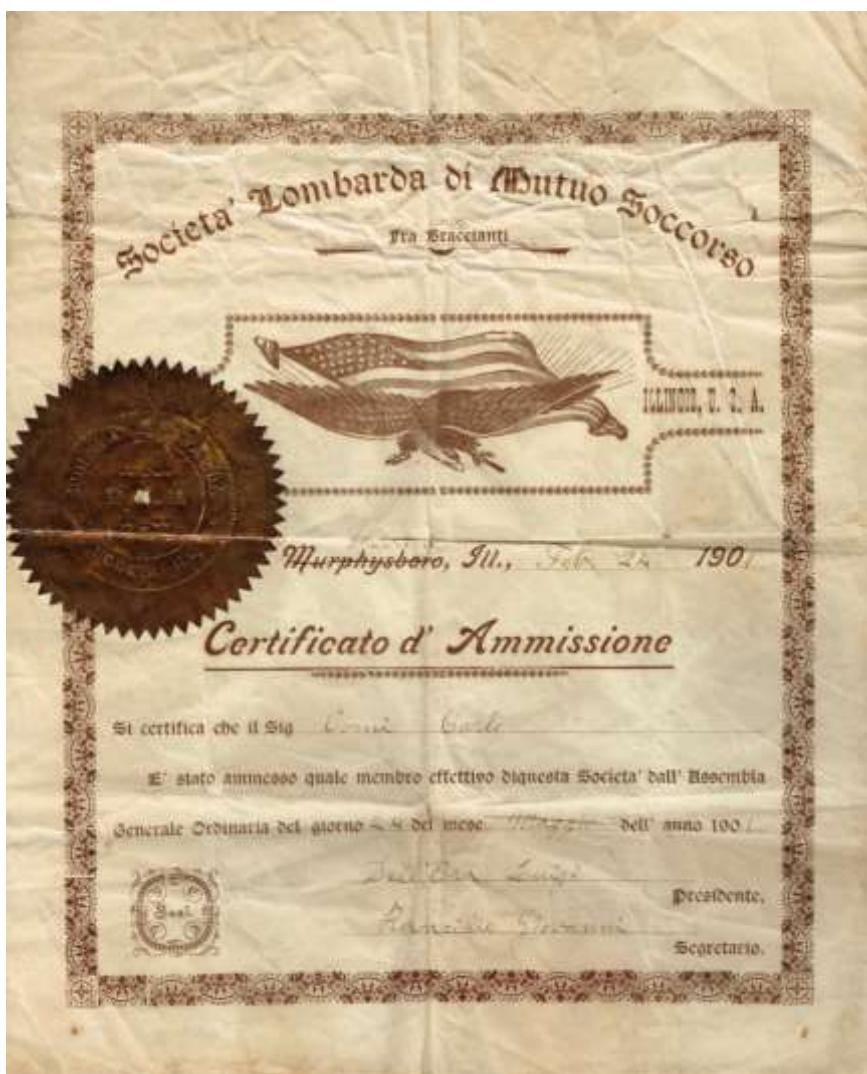






La maggior parte degli italiani di Herrin proviene dalla Lombardia; la società prende il nome dalla loro regione.

La Lombard Society of Mutual Assistance (La Società Lombarda di Mutua Assistenza) fu sciolta nel 1971 ma ha lasciato una ricca eredità poiché nei suoi 89 anni di attività ha promosso fratellanza, mutua assistenza e (attraverso il suo negozio di alimentari, la macelleria e l'emporio che hanno funzionato per oltre 50 anni) è stata una fonte di prodotti genuini italiani per le famiglie cui mancava il paese natio. Nei negozi lombardi, i clienti potevano parlare in italiano ed essere capiti; potevano comprare generi alimentari, generi vari e attrezzature per la miniera. La loggia e il negozio erano impostate come entità separate entrambe appartenenti agli stessi soci.



Charles Spezia, un 84enne di Herrin, si ricorda benissimo del gruppo, era il tesoriere al momento dello scioglimento della Lombard Society.

Falegname ed ebanista in pensione, Spezia è stato un funzionario dal 1946 o 1947. “Hanno ritenuto opportuno darmi quell’incarico e l’ho tenuto fino alla dissoluzione della società.” I soci anziani non volevano la fine dell’organizzazione, così “scrissero nello statuto che un voto di dissenso l’avrebbe impedito.” Spezia aggiunge, “io sono uno dei reprobi che ha votato per mantenere la loggia. Era un’organizzazione strettamente



Detroit, Michigan : Società lombarda di Mutuo Soccorso

Iron Mountain, Michigan : Società Mutuo Soccorso Lega Piemonte-Lombardia fondata il 2 maggio 1910, è composta prevalentemente da minatori piemontesi e lombardi dell’Alto Milanese.  
(ARCHIVIO MILANI)

maschile” continua Spezia, ma le donne e i non membri della società potevano fare la spesa nei negozi. La quota associativa annuale di \$12 dollari non fu mai aumentata.”

La loggia forniva sia aiuto personale sia finanziario ai propri soci comprese le indennità di malattia e di morte. Il negozio della Lombard Society fu aperto nel 1903 e chiuso nel febbraio del 1954. Forniva credito durante i lunghi scioperi nelle miniere e nelle tragedie personali.

Spezia ha pure detto, "quando hanno chiuso il negozio, c'erano circa 100,000 dollari sui libretti individuali che non erano stati riscossi. Le persone si aiutavano reciprocamente. Si organizzavano lotterie e raccolte fondi per aiutare chi era malato e non era in grado di lavorare. Allora non esisteva l'assistenza governativa. Se non ti aiutavano i vicini di casa o gli amici, non ti aiutava nessuno."

Ricorda l'entusiasmo quando da ebanista "il salario aumentò a tre dollari l'ora. Guadagnavo molto bene. Quando sono andato in pensione guadagnavo 10 dollari l'ora."

Spezia dice di conoscere altri sette soci ancora in vita: Herman Berra, Joseph Calcaterra, Bennie Calcaterra, Frank Calcaterra, Charlie Crespi, Charlie Vansaghi ed Emil Crespi. Charlie Crespi vive a Chicago, gli altri sono rimasti a Herrin.

La Lombard Society oltre ai suoi edifici sulla 14th Street di Herrin, possedeva pure 16 ettari (40 acri) a nord di Herrin, venduti nel 1962 agli Herrin Eagles (NdT: *Gli Eagles sono un'associazione fraterna ovvero un'organizzazione sociale che offre servizi alla comunità*). Il posto divenne poi Eagles Park, poscia Oak Wood Park.

Da un'adesione di oltre 500 soci nel 1920, il periodo d'oro, la Lombard Society cominciò a declinare. Secondo Spezia, "quando cominciarono a morire i soci anziani, i giovani non ne vollero sapere." Nel 1922 il negozio



aveva un manager e 13 dipendenti. Quando abbassò la saracinesca aveva un manager, un dipendente a tempo indeterminato e un fattorino.

Spezia ereditò l'amore per la Lombard Society. Suo padre, Frank Spezia fu presidente della società del negozio e vice-presidente della loggia. (Il presidente della loggia era pure il vice-presidente della società del negozio).

“Mio papà arrivò dall'Italia nel 1901, quando aveva 17 anni,” racconta Spezia. “In Italia lasciò un’impresa familiare di costruzioni. Imparò a leggere, scrivere e parlare inglese senza andare a scuola. Lavorava per conto proprio, poi lavorò in miniera, infine divenne ebanista.”

Gli immigrati, prosegue Spezia” erano dei gran lavoratori ma si divertivano anche molto, più dei giovani d’oggi.” Il circolo sociale organizzava balli, e “tre o quattro volte l’anno un *wingding* (*serata con festa chiassosa*). ” Una volta all’anno organizzavamo un picnic fuori in campagna.”

“Un anno, durante il picnic, una donna si avvicinò dicendo che suo marito aveva bevuto troppo e mi chiese di portarlo a casa. Lo portai a casa, e feci lo stesso con altri tre o quattro, poi ritornai in auto al picnic. Quando arrivai, il primo tizio si era svegliato ed era tornato al picnic.”

Carl, il figlio di Charles Spezia, che insegna alla Southern Illinois University a Carbondale, ricorda le visite alla sede della loggia quando era ragazzo. “C’era una grande sala da ballo con un bar nell’angolo. Puzzava di sputacchiera. “Avevano pure due casseforti: una grande, moderna e una vecchia, non chiusa a chiave. Quella bella era una replica, i soldi li tenevano in quella vecchia.”

Charles Spezia disse che era vero ma aggiunse che la vecchia cassaforte, non chiusa a chiave, conteneva poco denaro, “appena il contante per poter dare il resto il giorno dopo.”

*Introduzione e traduzione a cura di Ernesto R Milani*

7 luglio 2025

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