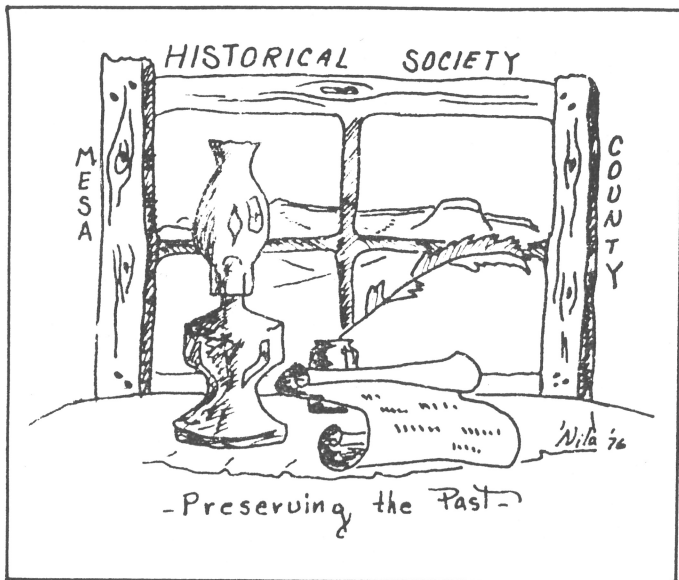


MESA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Story of Luisa Durante Landini

A Remarkable Woman

by
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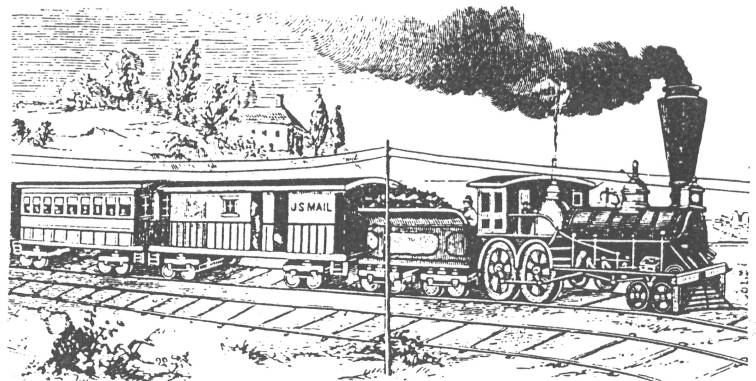
Luisa Durante Landini's life has been filled with many challenges and much hard work. In 1921 she left her Italian homeland to come to America to marry a man she hardly knew. Her first years here, on a farm near Fruita, were hard indeed. Tears would often swell in her eyes when she heard the whistle of the passing trains. She would think back to the frightening train ride from Boston and to the distance between Fruita and her family home in Italy. But Luisa Landini was strong, determined and hard working. She raised a wonderful family, made friends easily and now as she looks back over her sixty years in America she admits, ". . . I was content."

The story of this remarkable woman, Luisa Durante Landini, begins with an explanation of her three different birthdays. Born in Montale, Italy in 1900, her age is easy to remember, because as Luisa puts it, she ". . . goes with the year." During the time, the celebration of birthdays was not a common tradition.

"They didn't say Happy Birthday . . . it was just another day." The date of her birth as printed on her passport to America was May 15, and her birthday as printed on the citizenship papers was May 7. Curious about the date, Luisa decided to write back to her sister in Italy to obtain a copy of her baptismal certificate from their village church. The certificate arrived with the same year, same month but this time the day was listed as the sixth! Being born three times certainly matches the uniqueness of her personality and she notes, with a twinkle in her eye, that when someone tells her "Happy Birthday" on the 15th her reply is, "Oh, but my birthday past a long time ago."

As if that weren't confusing enough, there are two more important dates for Luisa to remember in May. The third marks the date of her arrival in America, and May 14, 1921 is the anniversary of her marriage to Peter Landini.

The marriage proposal began when Peter, already an American citizen, wrote home to his oldest brother in Italy "to find him a girl." The brother, Vittorio, with the help and persuasion from his wife, Carolina, convinced Luisa to make the trip to America and to marry Peter. For Luisa, much of the fifteen-day boat ride from Italy was spent in caring for Vittorio, Carolina and many others who became seasick.



Arriving at the immigration office in Boston, Luisa was somehow separated from Vit and Carolina. The officials wanted to make sure that someone was waiting for her at her destination in Fruita, Colorado. Vit and Carolina were sent on to Colorado and the anguish which young Luisa felt, unable to speak any English, unfamiliar with her surroundings and about to marry someone she barely knew, was tremendous.

The reason that her future husband was unable to meet her at the depot was that he was in St. Mary's Hospital having an appendectomy. Peter's doctor, Dr. Ryan, called the immigration office to explain the situation and told the officials that if Peter didn't marry her--he would! So after the long train ride Luisa finally arrived in Colorado and was married several days later. During the train ride Luisa had many second thoughts about her decision to come to America. She was a very frightened young woman and often prayed that God would give her wings so she could fly back home. She was extremely homesick.

Her husband's brother, Narchiso, and sister-in-law, Carolina, who lived on a nearby homestead greatly helped Luisa in her adjustment to the new land and the new life. Pete and Luisa homesteaded eighty acres near Fruita. During the winter months of the early years Peter worked as a coal miner thus Luisa had to fast learn the various chores expected of a farm wife. She cared for the garden, helped with the planting and harvest, as well as raising a family and providing them a comfortable home.

As a child in Northern Italy, Luisa had grown up in a farming village and well remembers her early chores of fertilizing the fields with animal manures. Even then, the days were filled with "work, work, work," but Sundays were always reserved for church, rest and entertainment. Her arrival in America had meant, however, more work and less rest. On the farm the work never stopped or slowed, not even on Sunday.

Luisa remembers the third Sun-

day in September as being one of the largest celebrations in her childhood village. It was the "Madonna Dolorata" or the celebration of the Madonna. Each home prepared a special feast and celebrated with song and dance. Chestnuts were a main food of Luisa's village with "atonas," a pancake made of chestnut flour a common dish, and "venela" a kind of wine pudding--a special Christmas Eve treat.

Transition to the Landini homestead near Fruita not only brought major changes in culture and tradition but in family life as well. On their farm, the Landinis grew corn, potatoes and pinto beans. They had about 150 sheep, around ten dairy cows and a horse. Among other things Luisa remembers that her arrival in America marked the first time she had ever seen a horse or an automobile.

Luisa's wedding dress of brown satin with embroidery was purchased at Manuel's Store in Grand Junction. The ride to catch the Interurban was her first experience in a horse-drawn buggy. During the wedding ceremony, Luisa, who knew no English, had to be prompted by her brother-in-law to answer "yes" to each of the ministers questions. A dinner and dance followed the wedding and it was then that Luisa saw her first automobile. The car belonged to a neighbor, Gene Zucca, who piled in the entire wedding party and took them for a ride along the canal. It was indeed a special treat for a special day!

The year the Landini's were married, 1921, was the last year in which those from other countries could acquire citizenship automatically through marriage to an American. Pete had earlier obtained his citizenship as he had been in the area for several years, having come to America with an older brother. Together Pete and Luisa had three children. The first was a daughter, Mary, born on February 13, 1923 in the family home. At 10:00 pm on the evening before the birth Mr. Landini rode his horse to a neighbor's, Mr. Burke's, to call the doctor for his expectant wife. Dr. Munro arrived

from Grand Junction within the hour but it turned out to be a false labor. The doctor stayed at the Landini home overnight, just in case. In the morning Luisa arose early and prepared coffee for the doctor before seeing him leave for some other calls in town and apologized for the false alarm. The doctor returned later in the day and delivered little Mary at about 6:00 pm.

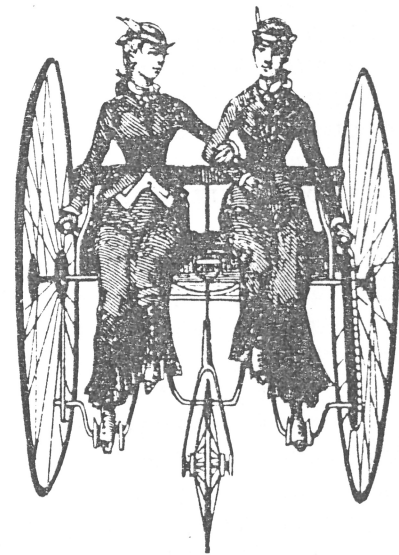
Another daughter, Carmel, was also born in the family home, on August 4, 1924. Luisa remembers that they were digging potatoes that day, and the day before she had been out running the hay mowing rig. For hardworking Luisa this was not uncommon, for if there was work that needed to be done - one did it! As Luisa put it, "that's the life" and you really didn't think anything of it!

The Landini son, Carlo, was born February 17, 1936. This time however Luisa went to the hospital in Fruita.

All three Landini children attended the Enterprise School, a country school which also served as the rural community recreation and social center. Picnics, school programs, dances and political meetings all made the Enterprise school a special part of the farming community. Through this community interaction and her own determination, Luisa taught herself to speak and write English. Early on the family subscribed to the Italian newspaper from San Francisco but later decided that they needed to take the Fruita paper. The Landini's both taught themselves to read the paper and became interested in local politics. Luisa remembers how she and Pete attended many political speeches and meetings to determine the best candidate. Pete always obtained a sample ballot so that they could study it and decide how they were going to vote before going to the polls. Through their involvement the Landini's became close personal friends and supporters of longtime political leader, Wayne Aspinall.

Just as she learned to read and write, Luisa also learned to drive an automobile. This she did secretly, without her husband's or children's knowledge. She practiced while Pete was away and while the children were at school. When she felt confident of her new skill Luisa drove to Fruita to take her driver's exam. She was however at a loss when the instructor asked her to make a U-turn on main street. Asking for an explanation of the turn Luisa completed the test and obtained her license - all on her own!

Looking back over her life in Mesa County Luisa Landini is content. Pete is gone now, but Luisa has many fond memories of him and describes the man that she came to America for as, "wonderful, wonderful." Today Luisa enjoys many happy hours spent with her children, grandchildren and numerous friends. Just having celebrated her three different birthdays for age 84 this 5 foot - 3 inch Mesa County pioneer says the Lord made her "out of gooda stuff." And indeed he did!



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of 200 Members!!!**

Membership in the Historical Society recently reached the 185 mark. We would greatly like to reach the magic 200 number by the time of our annual meeting in July.