

The Raffetto Mausoleum



James Oberting

November 10, 2023

## Part I: The Mausoleum

The Raffetto family mausoleum rests under a large tulip tree at the Whitewood plot of Woodlawn Cemetery. The blockish Barre granite exterior is totemic in appearance and faces westward towards the setting sun. The mausoleum is designed for twelve separate catacombs. Currently, nine have been filled and their names have been permanently inscribed one inch thick into the thin light Italian marble interior walls: Evelyn Loretta Raffetto, Giovanni Battista Raffetto, Gwendolyn Velente, John Louis Tribuno, Joseph Louis Raffetto, Louis Velente, Mario Placido Tribuno, Louise Raffetto Tribuno, and Nicoletta Raffetto.<sup>1</sup>

Records indicate that the architect of the Raffetto Mausoleum was Robert R. Catella Inc., a retail and memorialist firm founded in 1916 New York City. His Bronx based firm presided over dozens of projects including marble monuments, statuary, and mausoleums.<sup>2</sup> Robert Catella's prominent architectural work was recognized widely across the commercial sector and the firm quickly joined the elite ranks of fellow "Hornets' Nest" memorialists in the inaugural "Woodlawn Memorial Dealer's Association."<sup>3</sup>

The mausoleum's massing is uniform in height and density, except for the nonsecular front façade which features an iconographic cross frame and central bronze doorway imitating a tree of life theme. Furthermore, two classical Tuscan columns flank the entryway and are comprised of hammer chased granite. The overall building envelop shows minimal signs of conditional wear, despite visible evidence of biological growth

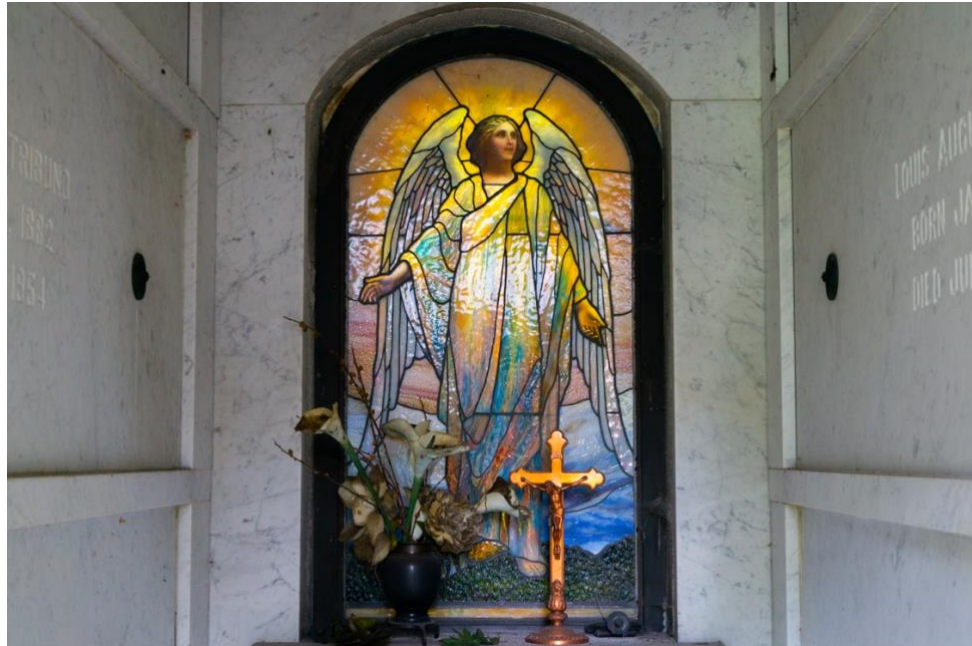
---

<sup>1</sup> Raffetto, Giovanni B. major monuments folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architectural Library Columbia University, Box MM 14, Folder 81.

<sup>2</sup> "Stone", vol. 37, *Stone Magazine Review Publishing Company*, January 1916: p. 538.

<sup>3</sup> "Granite Marble & Bronze", vol. 33, no. 8," *A.M. Hunt Co*, August 14-17, 1923: p. 39-40.

on the rear and eastern elevations. The mausoleum's station under heavy foliage means that it is virtually shielded from direct sunlight, except for evenings. Inasmuch, this affects accelerated moss growth. Instances of mortar deterioration are infrequent but also present on the rear elevation and around the eastern column.



(Figure 1. Stained glass)

The archival record reveals the plan for a bronze framed vestibule to be infilled by a tastefully chosen piece of art glass that “shall be covered with a memorial window of stained and leaded glass of design selected by the owner at five (\$5.00) dollars a square foot.”<sup>4</sup> Evidently, the heirs of Raffetto chose to contrast the austere external building with a stained-glass angel. Another religious artifact that is present and likely added at some unknown later date is a miniature crucifix.

---

<sup>4</sup> Raffetto, Giovanni B. Major Monuments folder 81, Avery Architectural Library Columbia University.

Complimentary to the master craftsmanship of the Raffetto Mausoleum is an elaborate and technically sophisticated interior engineering, particularly a series of air vents. In the original plans the architect prescribes the following ventilation system: “a complete system of ventilation to be provided by openings in granite walls. Ducts shall be left in the foundation walls, under catacombs. The ceiling ventilation shall be perfected.”<sup>5</sup> The form of the Raffetto mausoleums is intentionally designed to be airtight to prevent external atmospheric conditions: rain, sleet, waste, from entering and wreaking havoc inside. However, the vent system serves a particularly useful and unique role for this mausoleum, which not only comprises twelve individual catacombs, but also a subterranean crypt. In the event that the contents within start to age into dust, it is vital that a ventilation (and drainage) system is conceived before construction begins. This design decision exemplifies the expertise and craftsmanship to the architect’s credit. The Raffetto mausoleum is a fascinating study into the function of a special category of building within architecture.

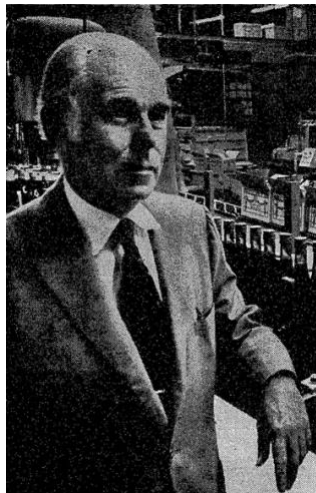
## Part II: The Family

John Louis Tribuno was born on March 13, 1911, to Mario Placido Tribuno (b. 1882 – d. 1954) and Louise Raffetto Tribuno (b. 1885 – d. 1983). He is the grandson of Giovanni Raffetto, the patriarch and namesake of the Raffetto Mausoleum. John attended Phillips Exeter Academy and graduated from Yale University in 1934. Afterwards, he began working for the Fidelity and Casualty Insurance Company of New

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

York.<sup>6</sup> In 1935, his father Mario Tribuno started a new business, Vermouth Industries of America, right as the supply of imported Italian vermouth brands like Martini & Rossi began to dry up ahead of WW2.<sup>7</sup> The secret recipe to Mario's wildly popular sweet vermouth was known only by himself and his successor, John, who joined the company as treasurer in 1938.<sup>8</sup> After his father's passing in 1955, John (figure. 1) took over as president of the company.<sup>9</sup> He was credited with updating the recipe to "cater to the American taste,"<sup>10</sup> and eventually sold the family company to Coca Cola for a reported \$17 million dollars.<sup>11</sup>



(Figure 2. John Tribuno).<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> "Marriage Announcement 1 -- no Title." 1935. *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)*, Nov 25, 17. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/marriage-announcement-1-no-title/docview/1330108550/se-2>.

<sup>7</sup> Prial, Frank J., "Wine Talk," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1973. <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/09/29/archives/he-makes-vermouth-lighter-less-sweet-for-americans-wine-talk-a.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *The New Yorker*, October 6, 1951, p. 27-28.

<sup>9</sup> "Elected to Presidency of Vermouth Industries," *The New York Times*, June 2, 1955.

<sup>10</sup> Prial, Frank J., "Wine Talk."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

In memory of his late father's contributions to the spirits industry, John established the Mario P. Tribuno Memorial Fund.<sup>13</sup> The active fund, administered by the University of California Davis 'Mario Tribuno Memorial Fellowship,' memorializes the entrepreneur as a "pioneer in the vermouth industry in America," and currently supports, "the studies of an undergraduate or graduate student interested in the vermouth industry... research on grape and wine aroma and flavors as affected by vineyard or winery treatments."<sup>14</sup> At the age of 65, John Tribuno died from lung cancer.<sup>15</sup> He is the sole family relative interned in the Raffetto mausoleum crypt, catacomb no. 9, therefore, his epitaph is present below the vestibule.

Evelyn Loretta Raffetto was born on June 10, 1898, the youngest daughter of Giovanni Battista Raffetto (b. Ognio, Italy 1856 – d. New York 1919) and Nicolette Raffetto (b. Neirone, Italy - d. New York 1918). She attained privileges during her lifetime that opposed societal expectations among many first-generation immigrant women in the New York City Italian American community likely because she never married. According to the historian Elizabeth Zanoni G.B. Raffetto's factory, "hired almost exclusively female laborers," outlining a trend of immigrant labor exploitation among *tipo italiano* New York confectionary businesses.<sup>16</sup> It is unknown whether Evelyn's life at 13 W 112 St, was in part spent supporting the success and daily

---

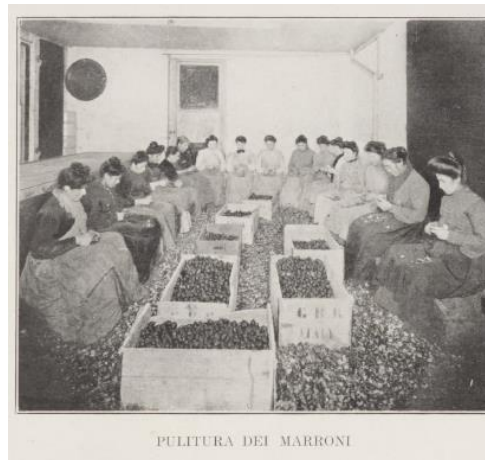
<sup>13</sup> Amerine, Maynard, "Vermouth: an annotated bibliography." *University of California (System). Division of Agricultural Sciences*, 1974.pg. 1.

<sup>14</sup> University of California Viticulture & Enology, n.d., "Scholarships and Endowments: Mario Tribuno Memorial Fellowship," Accessed October 9, 2023. <https://wineserver.ucdavis.edu/giving/scholarhips-endowments/mario-tribuno-memorial-fellowship>.

<sup>15</sup> "OBITUARIES." *Newsday (1940-)*, Oct 01, 1976:43, Nassau ed. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/obituaries/docview/922604650/se-2>.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Zanoni. 2018. "Migrant Marketplaces: Food and Italians in North and South America." Urbana, Chicago: *University of Illinois Press*, pg. 79.

operations of the family business (figure 1), but it is evident from census records that at 16 her sister Gwendolyn began lending a hand as a ‘bookkeeper.’<sup>17</sup> Orphaned at the age of 21, Evelyn moved in with her sister and brother-in-law Gwendolyn and Louis Valente at 254 West 98<sup>th</sup> St. Apt. 501.<sup>18</sup>



(Figure 3. “Cleaning the Chestnuts, G.B. Raffetto Company”).<sup>19</sup>

On June 18, 1921, Evelyn secured a United States passport (figure 2) with the aid of her brother Joseph and arranged a six-month recreational tour of Europe planning stops at Belgium, France Italy, Holland, Switzerland, and the British Isles.<sup>20</sup> Her application states that she sailed aboard the SS Dante Alighieri.<sup>21</sup> The transatlantic ship, docked at Pier 25 in New York harbor, held a departure date of June 21, making two

---

<sup>17</sup> 1900; Census Place: *Manhattan, New York, New York*; Roll: 1087; Page: 21; Enumeration District: 0148.

<sup>18</sup> 1920; Census Place: *Manhattan Assembly District 9, New York, New York*; Roll: T625\_1202; Page: 21A; Enumeration District: 694.

<sup>19</sup> Aldrovandi, Luigi, 1906. *Gli Italiani Negli Stati Uniti D'America*. New York: Italian American Directory Co., pg. 399.

<sup>20</sup> 1900; Census Place: *Manhattan, New York, New York*; Roll: 1087; Page: 21; Enumeration District: 0148.

<sup>21</sup> The SS Dante Alighieri should not be mistaken for the *Dante Alighieri* which was a different Royal Italian Navy dreadnaught in operation during the same time in history which you can read about here: Guy P. "Battleship Dante Alighieri (1908–1928)." *Dante Studies* 138 (2020): pg. 49-69.

stops at Naples and Genoa.<sup>22</sup> The year 1921 marked the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Florentine poet, Dante Alighieri, and ceremonial arrangements were made between the United States government and Italy to send American students to Italy to attend a ceremony. However, it is likely that if she went alone on her trip she intended to sail for Genoa. Furthermore, her name reappears, alone, on a passenger manifest of the RMS Carmania in October of 1921 returning from Liverpool, England to the port of New York.<sup>23</sup>



(Figure 4. Evelyn's Passport Photo).<sup>24</sup>

Her support and identity within the Italian American immigrant community strengthened thereafter. In 1928, Evelyn was even credited with organizing a fundraiser as the chairperson for the junior committee of the Italian Welfare League.<sup>25</sup> The Italian

---

<sup>22</sup> "Cheese-Loving Pied Piper Rids Ship of Tough Rats: Sailor Whose Food had been Stolen by Rodents that Defied Fumigation Lures them to Death with Flute." *New York Tribune* (1911-1922), New York, NY, June 1921:20.

<sup>23</sup> The National Archives and Records Administration; Washington, D.C.; *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at and Departing from Ogdensburg, New York, 5/27/1948 - 11/28/1972*; Microfilm Serial or NAID: T715, 1897-1957.

<sup>24</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington D.C.; NARA Series: *Passport Applications, January 2, 1906 - March 31, 1925*; Roll #: 1641; Volume #: Roll 1641 - Certificates: 46876-47249, 04 Jun 1921-04 Jun 1921.

<sup>25</sup> "Opera Star to Sing at Italian Welfare Concert and Dance: Miss Nina..." *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962); Nov 11, 1928; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Tribune / Herald Tribune pg. E14.



Welfare League's history recalls the group's altruistic formation during a wave of immigration from continental Europe to the United States via food and clothing donations and leavening of hostilities by providing postwar assistance within the Italian diasporic community at sites like Ellis Island.<sup>26</sup>

Evelyn passed away on April 25, 1951, at the age of 52. She is interred in catacomb no. 1 of the Raffetto Mausoleum.

---

<sup>26</sup> The Italian Welfare League, n.d. "About Us: Our History," Accessed October 9, 2023. <https://www.italianwelfareleague.org/our-history>.

## Bibliography

"Cheese-Loving Pied Piper Rids Ship of Tough Rats: Sailor Whose Food had been Stolen by Rodents that Defied Fumigation Lures them to Death with Flute." *New York Tribune (1911-1922)*, New York, NY, June 1921:20.

"Obituary 1 -- No Title." 1983. *New York Times (1923-2019)*, Jun 17, 1983, pg. D17.

"Elected to Presidency of Vermouth Industries," *The New York Times*, June 2, 1955.

"Granite Marble & Bronze Vol. 33 No. 8," August 14-17, 1923, *A.M. Hunt Co.*

"Opera Star to Sing at Italian Welfare Concert and Dance: Miss Nina..." *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)*; Nov 11, 1928; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Tribune / Herald Tribune pg. E14.

"Stone Vol. 37," January 1916, *Stone Magazine Review Publishing Company*. 1900; Census Place: *Manhattan, New York, New York*; Roll: 1087; Page: 21; Enumeration District: 0148.

1920; Census Place: *Manhattan Assembly District 9, New York, New York*; Roll: T625\_1202; Page: 21A; Enumeration District: 694.

Aldrovandi, Luigi, 1906. *Gli Italiani Negli Stati Uniti D'America*. New York: Italian American Directory Co.

Elizabeth Zaroni. 2018. *Migrant Marketplaces: Food and Italians in North and South America*. Urbana, Chicago: *University of Illinois Press*.

Guy P. "Battleship Dante Alighieri (1908–1928)." *Dante Studies* 138 (2020): pg. 49-69.

Marriage Announcement 1 -- no Title." 1935. *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)*, Nov 25, 17.

"OBITUARIES." *Newsday (1940-)*, Oct 01, 1976:43, Nassau ed.

Prial, Frank J., "Wine Talk," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1973.

Raffa, Guy P. "Battleship Dante Alighieri (1908–1928)." *Dante Studies* 138 (2020): 49-69.

Raffetto, Giovanni B. Major Monuments folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architectural Library Columbia University, Box MM 14, Folder 81.

University of California Viticulture & Enology, n.d., “Scholarships and Endowments: Mario Tribuno Memorial Fellowship,” Accessed October 9, 2023.