The Founding of the
ORDER SONS OF ITALY IN AMERICA

Inaugural Address by OSIA Founder Vincenzo Sellaro, M.D.

The following is a translation from Italian of the inaugural address given by Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro, founder of the Order of the Sons of Italy in America. OSIA thanks Professor Frank P. Oliveri of Rochester, New York. Lost since 1935, the Sellaro speech was discovered recently after a three-year search by Professor Oliveri, who also translated it.

Today is the 22nd of June 1905! Today we are blessed with such a magnificent day of sunshine. Today the Almighty has brought us all together for a purpose. With all of you, and with my most intimate compatriots, let's say our brothers and their wives, our sisters, who represent every corner of Italy. All of us are Italians!

No matter what part of Italy we came from, we are first and foremost Italians. I, Vincenzo Sellaro, happen to be from Sicily; our pharmacist, Ludovico Ferrari is from Piedmont; our attorney, Antonio Marzullo is from Campania; Giuseppe Carlino, sculptor, from Lazio; and our barbers, Pietro Viscardi from Calabria, and Roberto Merlo from Tuscany.

We cannot continue to see each other and treat each other as sub-nationalities of the Italian peninsula. By continuing this way we will not only remain weak as a nationality within the larger American society, but will also continue to find it ever difficult to achieve our rightful place of influence and respect in the role we must take in making this country greater than ever before. This wonderful country can only become the richer and more cultured as a result of it.

Today we are gathered together for one main purpose, that I want to believe someday will become a very important part of American history. We are the newest of the immigrants to this great country, and because of the fierce and undeserved prejudice and discrimination that we have had to suffer for nearly two decades, we must begin to work together, for our common good. We must educate ourselves, and insist that our children receive the best and highest education possible. Only through this education will we understand the ways and beliefs of this marvelous adopted country of ours, and be treated as equal and worthy American citizens.

We left our native land for a new life, in order to survive. Our former country with its government demonstrated after so many years of trying, that it was simply not capable of providing for us the life we deserved—a decent life, a respectable life.

The majority of us have come to these shores as the poorest of all Italians, and the least educated of most of Europe. But today I must also share with you that we are also the most courageous for having made the decision to come here, to have left behind our motherland and our families, in the hope, not to *find* a new life, but to *earn* a better one. Where only a few of us, before leaving Italy were fortunate enough to have received an education, many of you-us, have reached these shores as common laborers, tenant farmers, field workers and shepherds, gardeners, fishermen, but just as many as artisans, such as masons, carpenters, stonecutters, bakers, tailors and miners. Second to none has been our contribution of tradesmen, lawyers, teachers, accountants, entrepreneurs, pharmacists, and yes, doctors as well.

One of our most important objectives should be to reclaim the rest of our family members left behind, and as soon as possible. The other objective that all of us must keep in mind at all times is that our presence in this great country, who has received so many of us, in whatever we do and say, must enhance its greatness at all times. We ask only for the opportunity to earn a living! We are not here to be a burden. By staying united and helping one another we will realize everything and anything we wish to achieve.

Some say that history has dealt us a lousy hand, being that we are the last to come to America. After all, wasn't it one of our own who discovered America? I say to them that the others, for the most part, came here with masters, came as slaves in many cases. We, on the other hand, have come of our own accord. We are a free people.

It is because of this that today I have a dream, and hope that someday, even if it takes a hundred more years before we are fully accepted, our children and their children's children, even if they carry a single drop of Italian blood will be able and proud to continue to carry on our traditions, our culture and our language. It is up to us, and what we do today!