



Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America Founding Father Vincenzo Sellaro

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Vincenzo Sellaro was born April 24, 1868, in Polizzi Generosa in the province of Palermo. He received his medical degree in 1895 from the University of Naples and soon after immigrated to New York City in 1897. The following year, he completed post-graduate courses at the Cornell Medical School and obtained a license to practice medicine in New York State.

In hospitals, Dr. Sellaro saw many Italian immigrants were often placed in life threatening situations because of the language barrier between them and their doctors and nurses. To address the problem, Sellaro headed an ad hoc committee of physicians who were bilingual in Italian and English. He subsequently founded the Columbus Italian Hospital where Italian could be spoken.

In 1904 Dr. Sellaro became a naturalized U.S. citizen and conceived the idea of uniting all Italian Americans into one large fraternal organization. On June 7, 1905, he held an organizational meeting at his home. Present were Antonio Marzullo, a lawyer; Ludovico Ferrari, a pharmacist; Giuseppe Carlino, a sculptor; and Pietro Viscardi and Roberto Merlo, two barbers. The first formal meeting of the Order was held three weeks later. At that meeting, Sellaro was elected Supreme Venerable now known as National President.

The name of the group was changed to L'Ordine Figli d'Italia in America, or the Order Sons of Italy in America®. Sellaro wrote the Order's national constitution and founded the first local OSIA lodge, Mario Rapisardi Lodge #1, on August 31, 1905.

In 1922, Sellaro was knighted by the Italian government for his aid to the Italian American community. Sellaro later became interested in the Masons and was elected by the Garibaldi Masonic Lodge as a Grand Master. When questioned about this affiliation, he would later write in "The OSDIA News" that he joined "in order to emancipate [Italians] from every prejudice." In 1928, Governor Alfred E. Smith gave Sellaro the key to New York State in recognition of the medical and social contributions he made to the community.

On September 18, 1932, Sellaro was admitted as a patient to the Columbus Italian Hospital he had founded, suffering from kidney failure, heart disease, diabetes and arteriosclerosis. After 72 days, he lapsed into a coma and died at the age of 64 on November 28, 1932.