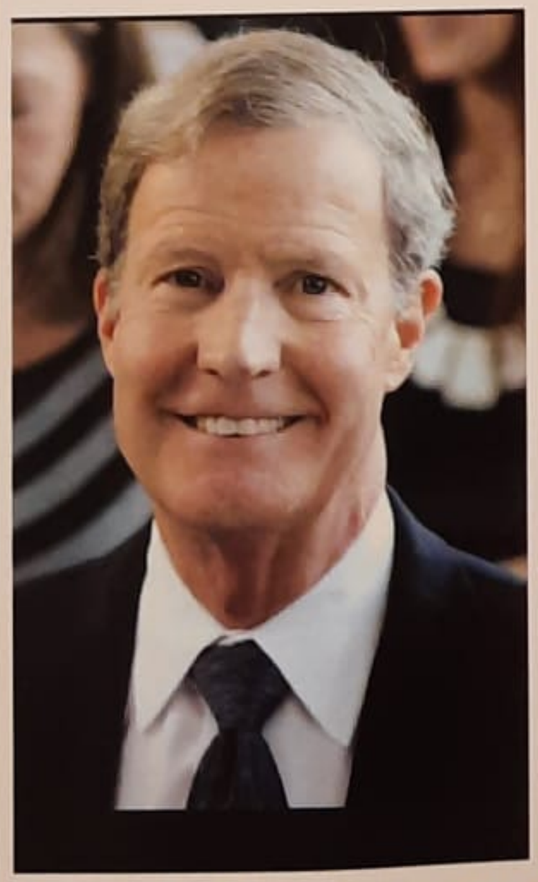
History of the Getto Family

Written by Charles A. Getto



Dedicated to the memory of Charles, the finest gentleman, historian, son, husband, father, brother and cousin.

December 2020

Editor's Note: This history was written by Charles Getto and edited by Elissa Getto. The only additions were maps, pictures and some additional details factual in nature derived from further research.

"Charles and I talked often that we wished we could talk just one more time to our fathers, my mother, our Aunt Ann (whose stories were amazingly accurate) and regretted that we never met Ernestina. The questions we would have had. I find the same sadness today about wanting to pick up the phone and call Charles, experience the excitement of discovery, the camaraderie of family and the embrace of family, emotionally and intellectually. Charles sent this history to me from the hospital with the request to finish it. To all of you reading this including your children and grandchildren. the history of the famiglia Getto is not complete and will hopefully continue to portray a vital and loving family, the family that Charles loved." Elissa

Getto Family History

On March 2, 1898, **Anna Gaudi**, a widow, age 40, and her seventeen-year-old daughter **Ernestina** boarded the steamship Burgundia in Naples and left Italy for America, never to return. After a six-week voyage, mother and daughter arrived at Ellis Island, New York. The ship's "List or Manifest of Alien Immigrants for the Commissioner of Immigration" recorded Anna's surname not as "Gaudi" - the name of her late husband, **Gio Domenico Gaudi** (1848-1878) - but as "Galasso," her maiden name. Daughter Ernestina's name was listed as "Ernesta"; a last name was written for her, but then written over with "daughter" so that the name is not legible.

We may never know for certain why mother and daughter left Italy for the United States; they left no writings explaining their departure, but almost certainly it was related to the death five years earlier in 1893 of **Michelangelo Nigra (1833-1893)**, a physician, mayor and member of a prominent Piedmontese family, who was Ernestina's biological father.

Anna Galasso Gaudi's Life in Italy Before the Birth of her Daughter Ernestina

Anna Candida Marchello Gallasso [Footnote: Although many documents spell her last name with a single L, her birth certificate spells Gallasso with a double L – as shall we in this history.] was born and baptized on July 23, 1857 in Castellamonte, in the province of Turin (Torino) in the Piedmont region of northwest Italy. [Footnote: In 2015, Italy's provinces were renamed as "Metropolitan cities." The province of Turin is now known as the Metropolitan City of Turin. But since we are considering events which took place in the 19th century, we will refer to it as a province.]

Castellamonte is about 22 miles north of the city of Turin, the capital of both the Piedmont region and the province of Turin. Castellamonte lies at the foot of a hill on which a fourteenth century castle was built, hence the name. Today, Castellamonte is a town of about 10,000, but when Anna was born it was probably much smaller.

Canavese

Castellamonte is in Canavese, a subalpine geographical and historical area which is part of the province of Turin. Interestingly, Canavese does not include the city of Turin itself, which lies to the south. Canavese's largest city is Ivrea, about 30 miles north of Turin. Canavese is a scenic area lying at the foot of the Alps with lakes, rolling forested hills and many medieval castles, some restored and others in ruin.

The first recorded inhabitants of Canavese were the Salassi, a Celtic or Celticized Ligurian tribe. The Salassi were one of the last groups in the Mediterranean basin to be conquered by the Romans, in 22 BC. After the Western Roman Empire fell in the 5th century AD, Canavese was dominated for the next 900 years by a series of Germanic groups including the Ostrogoths, the Lombards, the Franks under Charlemagne and the Anscarids, also known as the House of Ivrea, a Frankish dynasty that became prominent in Italy in the 10th century, having originated 100 years earlier in the historical Burgundy region centered around the borderlands of France, Switzerland and Italy.

In the 14th century, the House of Savoy, a royal dynasty established in 1003 in the alpine region between what is now France and Italy, expanded into Canavese and ruled for the next 200 years.

Beginning with the 16th century, Canavese was dominated by the French, followed by the Spanish, and then the French again. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, Canavese was returned to the House of Savoy. The last ruler of the House of Savoy was Victor Emmanuel II, who became the first king of a united Italy in 1861.

Anna's Gallasso's father, **Guglielmo Domenico Marchello Galasso**, was born in Castellamonte about 1833 and died there on December 10, 1900. Anna's mother, **Antonia Carlevato**, was born about 1835 in Colleretto Castelnuovo, a village in Canavese approximately five miles from Castellamonte and 25 miles north of the city of Turin. Colleretto Castelnuovo is much smaller than Castellamonte. Its population in 2017 was fewer than 400, and it was probably even smaller at the time Anna's mother was born. In fact, Colleretto Castelnuovo is less than five miles from Castellamonte and only three miles from Castelnuovo Nigra.

Three maps follow of the Province of Torino, Canavese, and a detailed map of the proximity of Castellamonte, Castelnuovo Nigra and Ivrea in particular.



The Province of Torino – Castellamonte is indicated by the blue dot.



MAP OF AREA OF CANAVESE

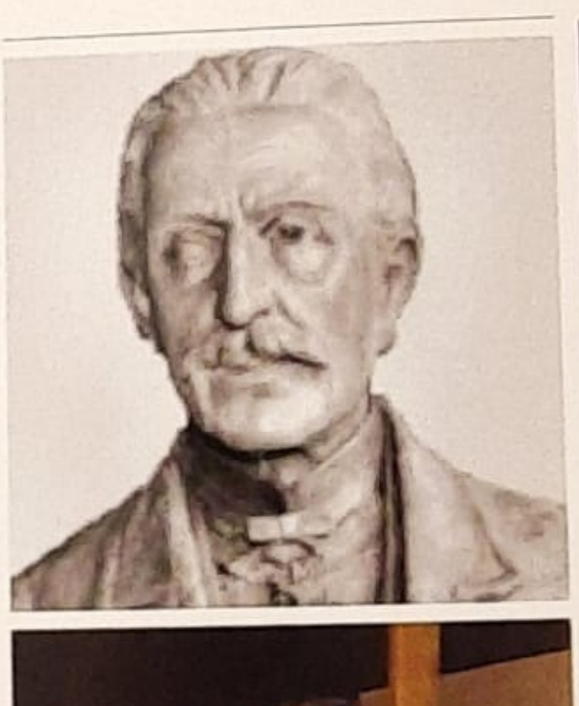


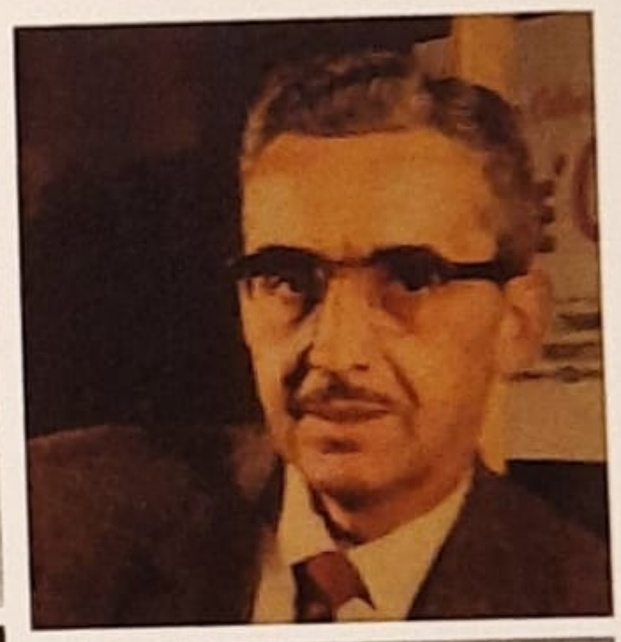
DETAIL OF AREA HIGHLIGHTING PROXIMITY OF IVREA, CASTELLAMONTE AND CASTELNUOVO NIGRA

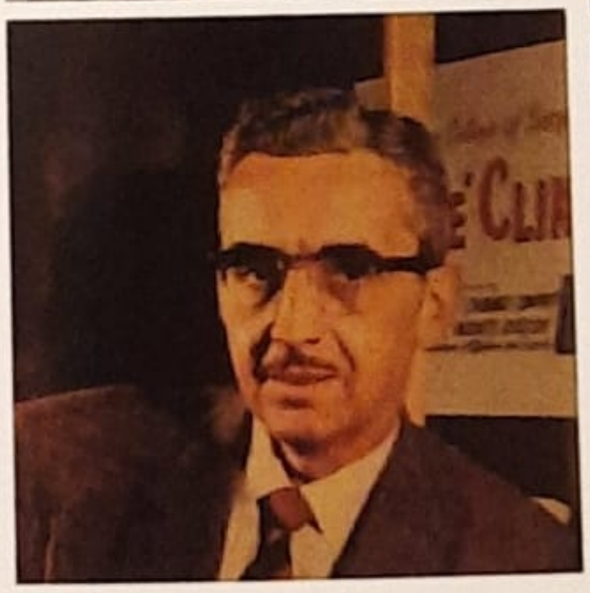
A word about "Turin." When Aunt Ann and Aunt Olga separately had told me that Anna and Ernestina went to live with a doctor "in Turin," I had assumed they were referring to Turin the *city*; I realize now that they meant the *province* of Turin. The family history that my aunts shared with me must have originally come from Anna and/or Ernestina themselves; no one else would have had firsthand knowledge of their life in Italy. Anna and Ernestina may well have never even been to the big city of Turin. When they talked of Turin, they meant the *province* of Turin, which encompassed the villages where they were born and lived - Castellamonte and Coleretto – as well as Castelnuovo Nigra, the home of Michelangelo Nigra and the Nigra family.

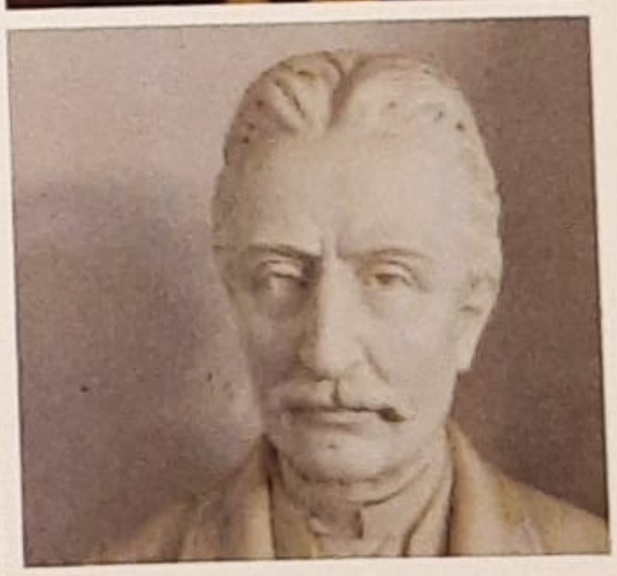
Any reasonable doubt that Dr. Michelangelo Nigra was Ernestina's father vanished after Elissa located on the internet a photograph of his bust by an unknown sculptor. Michelangelo's features bear a striking resemblance not only to Ernestina but to one of her sons, Elissa's father Ernest Getto, who also was a doctor).











Michelangelo Nigra

Ernest F. Getto

Ernestine Gallasso Getto

The Nigra Family

Michelangelo Nigra (1833-1893) was from a distinguished and accomplished family that had lived in the province of Turin and the Piedmont region of northwest Italy for at least several hundred years. The official records George Ott's researchers reviewed revealed generations of doctors, notaries (lawyers whose function is akin to English solicitors, rather than to American notary publics) and other educated individuals.

Michelangelo's father, **Lodovico Giovanni Bautisto Nigra** (1785-1865), was a surgeon who was born in Castelnuovo Nigra in 1865. He was the oldest of nine children born to **Giovanni Lorenzo Nigra (1745-1801)** and **Francesca Maria DeRossi** (died 1801). Michelangelo's mother, **Caterina Revello** (1794-1866), was the daughter of a notary. Her family, like that of her husband Lodovico, was distinguished and included many doctors and notaries. Lodovico and Caterina had 7 children, 5 of whom survived infancy.

The most illustrious member of the Nigra family was Michelangelo's older brother **Costantino Nigra** (1828-1907), who was famous during his lifetime and remains so to this day, especially in the Piedmont region.

Costantino was a diplomat who played important roles in the unification of Italy and in Italian and European political affairs from the 1850s until his retirement in 1904, three years before his death. He served in diplomatic missions to Paris, London, Vienna and St. Petersburg, among other European capitals, and was named a count in 1882 and a senator in 1890.

Costantino was a close friend of and advisor to an older and even more famous Piemontese, Camillo Paolo Filippo Giulio Benso, Count of **Cavour** (1810-1861). [Footnote – John Julius Norwich book.] Cavour, as he is known, was a statesman and leading figure in the Italian unification movement, the principal advisor to Victor Emmanuel, and the first prime minister of a unified Italy. Countless cities and towns all over Italy – from the Piedmont to Sicily – have major streets bearing his name.

Although associated with Cavour during the older man's lifetime, Costantino's diplomatic career continued for more than 40 years after Cavour's death in 1861. His surviving letters to his brother Michelangelo and other family members, posted from Paris, London, St. Petersburg, Vienna and cities, reflect the peripatetic life of a diplomat who kept in contact with his family and his Piedmontese homeland. Costantino Nigra, in addition to his long and distinguished diplomatic career, was a cultured man. He was a classical scholar who published translations and commentary on Greek and Latin poems. He was also a musician, a poet and the author of several works of folklore and popular poetry, including *Canti popolari del Piemonte (Popular Songs of the Piedmont)*.

There is a vast array of information on the internet about him, much of it celebratory. A recent Google search for "Costantino Nigra" returned "about 317,000 results," including biographies, articles, anecdotes, recollections, photographs, paintings, caricatures (including one displayed on the cover of the March 6, 1886 cover of *Vanity Fair*), and even gossip. In addition, his life as a diplomat was featured in at least one film. Costantino, as played by Renato Cialente, a debonair Italian actor of the period who appeared in 40 films, was a principal character in *The Countess of Castiglione (La contessa Castiglione)*, a 1942 Italian historical film about the life of Italian aristocrat Virginia Oldoini, a pioneering woman photographer, who was a mistress of Napoleon III and a cousin of Cavour.

Costantino and Michelangelo Nigra were born in Canavese in Castelnuovo Nigra ("New Castle Nigra"), about 25 miles north of the city of Turin. Their father had started work on what was to become Villa Nigra, creating a home in the old ruins of the monastery. Villa Nigra became the primary home of Costantino, the building of which was overseen by Michelangelo probably in the 1880's. The Villa Nigra is now in ruins, but was once an immense, palatial home with priceless European treasures. Costantino, who was five years older than Michelangelo, accidentally blinded his brother in his right eye during play when they were young. Perhaps partially through a feeling of guilt, Costantino remained close to his younger brother throughout their lives, as indicated by the numerous letters they exchanged. Few of Michelangelo's survive, but Costantino's extant correspondence to "mio carissimo Fratello" (my dearest brother) did survive.

The Adult Lives of Ernestina's Three Half Siblings

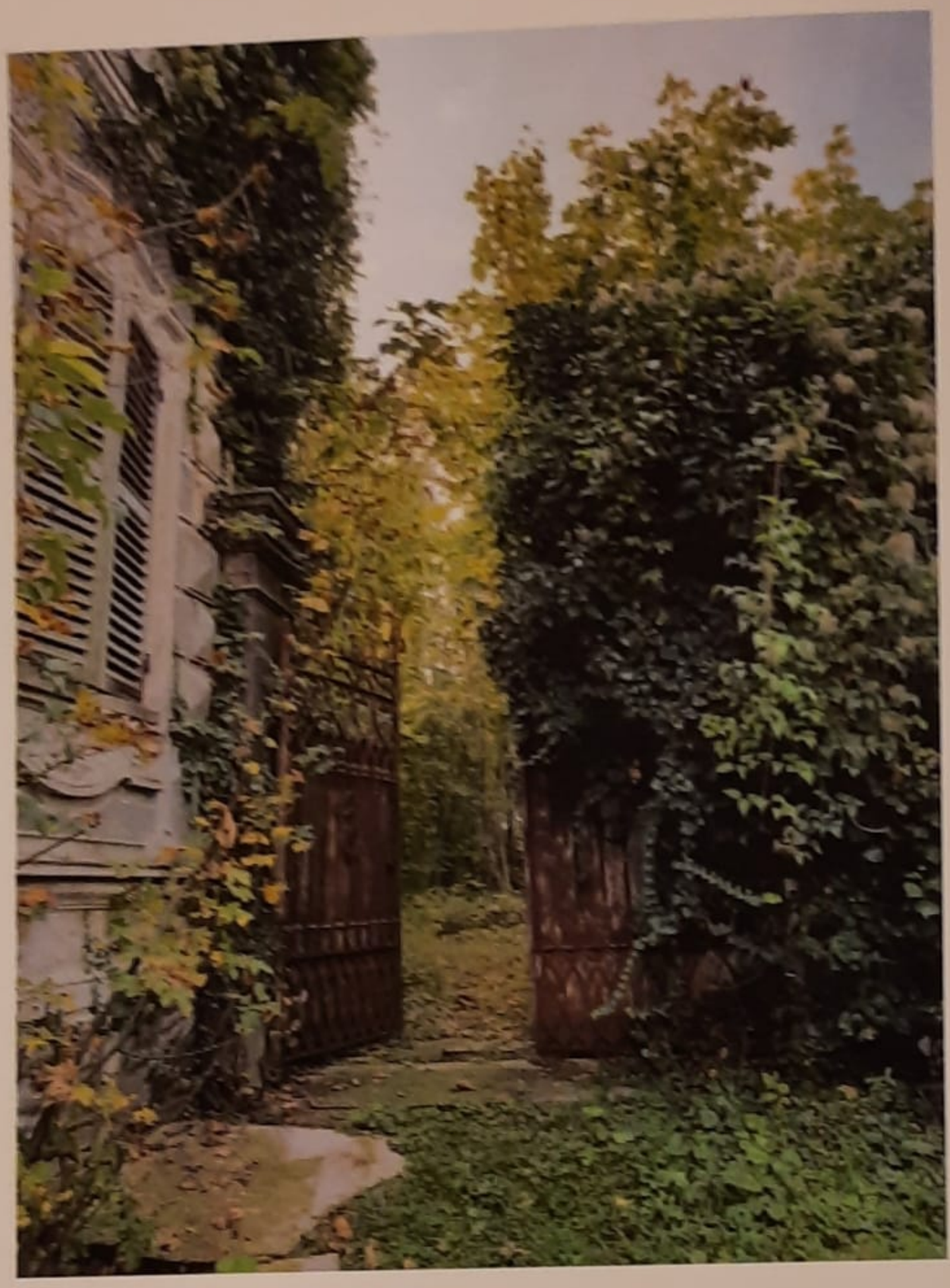
Aunt Ann had said that following her husband's death Anna and her daughter Ernestina went to live with the doctor whom we have identified as Michelangelo Nigra, and that Anna worked as a housekeeper for him. When her husband Paolo died in 1878, Anna's three children by him - Paolo, Marta and Domenica - were, respectively, four years, two years and nine months old. [Footnote: Paolo did not actually turn four until two days after his father's death.] Presumably these three young children continued to be raised by Anna following her husband's death. When Ernestina, their half -sister, was born two years later, on November 10, 1880, the three children were still very young. Paolo was six, Marta four and Domenica not quite three. We do not know if they lived in Dr. Nigra's house with Anna prior to and/or after the birth of Ernestina in 1880. (For that matter, we do not know whether Anna and Ernestina actually lived with the doctor either. We have no documents to verify the history related by Ann Wilps.) It is certainly possible that one or more of these three "older" children were raised by, or lived with, Anna's parents, or some other relative. Anna's father and mother were 47 and 45, respectively, when Ernestina was born, and both lived another 20 years, dying in 1900. However, it is not likely that they all lived with Michelangelo, as being a bachelor, he most probably lived with his sister and her husband, also a doctor in the family home in Castellamonte.

Although we have no information, apart from their dates of birth, about their childhoods in Italy, we know quite a bit about the adult lives of two of Anna Gallasso Gaudi's first three children.

Paolo Domenico Fernando Gaudi (1874 -1929), Anna's oldest child and only son, married in Italy, probably in about 1893 when he was 19. His grandson, **Bob White** of St. Augustine, Florida, told me that Paolo "was in seminary until he met" Mary "Theresa" Chintaretta (1874-1958), who became his wife. In 1902 when he was 27 Paolo immigrated to the United States. He apparently left his wife and their four children, ranging in age from about eight to one, behind in Italy. Paolo sailed from Le Havre on France's Normandy coast on the ship *La Gascogne* and arrived in New York on May 27, 1902. This was four years after his mother and half-sister Ernestina had immigrated to the U.S. The ship's manifest showed him as married, his occupation as "workman" and his "last residence" as Castellamonte *and* Ivrea. His final destination in the United States was listed as Irwin, Pennsylvania where he was to join "his mother Gaudi." A few years later, Paolo's wife and children left Italy and reunited with him in Pennsylvania. The 1910 and 1920 U.S. Census show Paolo and Theresa living in Westmoreland County with their eleven children, four of them born in Italy and seven in Pennsylvania.

Bob White, Paolo and Theresa Gaudi's grandson and Anna Gallasso Gaudi's great grandson, told me that Paolo "had some education" and worked as a chemist for McKee Glass in Jeannette. Paolo died in 1929 in Jeannette. His death certificate showed his father as "Dominick Gaudi" and his mother "Anna Gallasso."After Paolo died, his widow, Theresa Chintaretta, lived with her daughter, Theresa Gaudi White (1916-2001), Theresa's husband, and their children, including young Bob White, in the Whites' home in Jeannette until grandma Theresa died in 1958 at the age of 83. Grandma Theresa spoke no English, but Bob learned to speak Piedmontese.

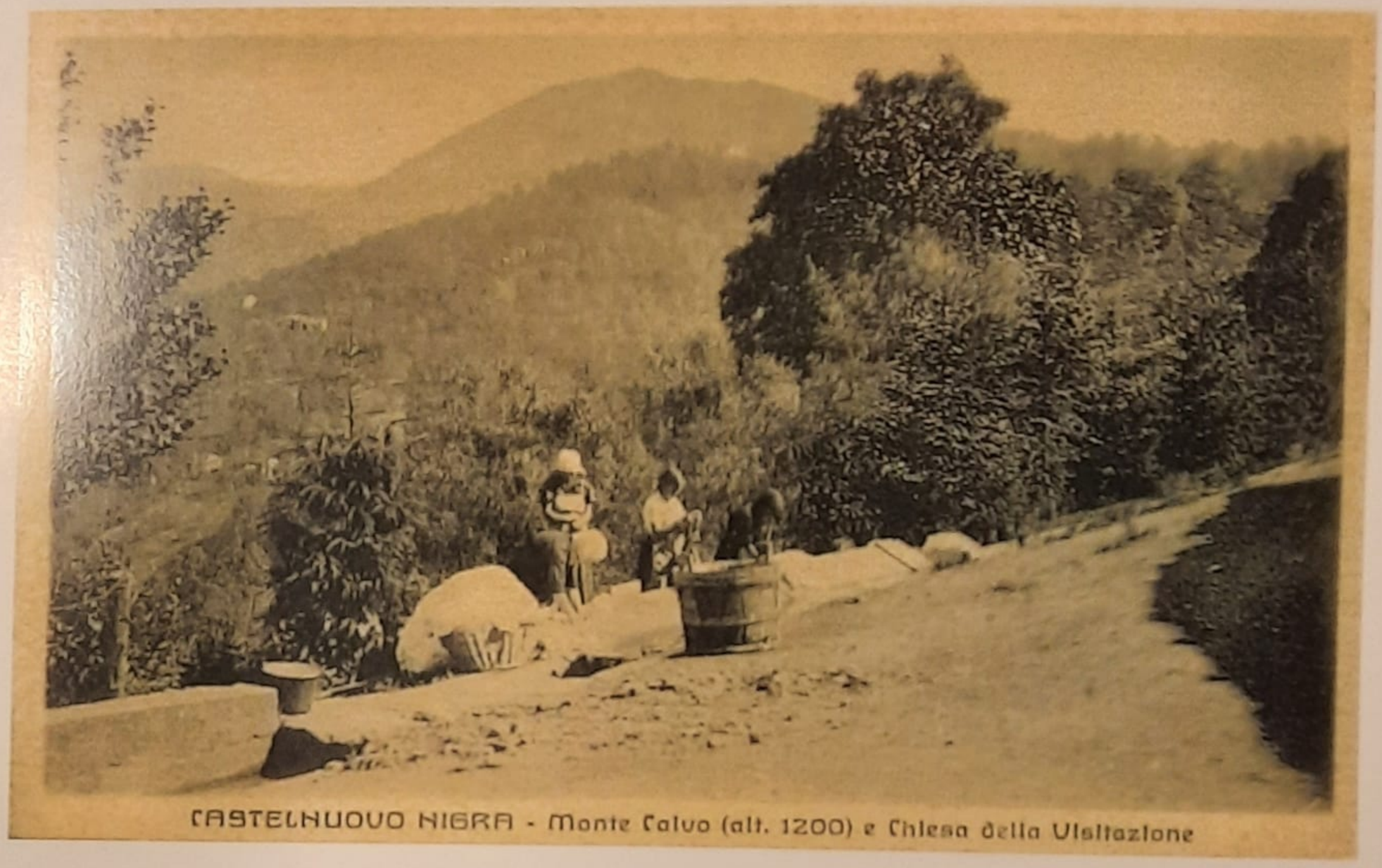
Bob, who attended the University of Pittsburgh, had careers in the U.S. Air Force and as a military consultant. He provided some fascinating details that suggests that the relationship between Anna Gallasso Gaudi and her children by Gio Gaudi was not close. Bob said that although he "knew of the Gettos, who lived in West Jeannette," he was unaware that his great grandmother Anna Gallasso Gaudi also lived in West Jeannette, only minutes away from the Whites. In fact, Bob said he was unaware that Anna Gallasso Gaudi even existed until he joined Ancestry.com in May 2019 and contacted me after a DNA test identified us as cousins. Neither Bob's grandmother Theresa Chintaretta Gaudi, nor Bob's mother, Theresa Gaudi White, ever mentioned Anna to Bob, even though they all lived in the same small town. This is extraordinary given that Theresa Chintaretta was Anna Gallasso Gaudi's daughter-in-law and Theresa Gaudi White was Anna Gallasso Gaudi's granddaughter! When Bob told me this, I was reminded of my late father, Paul H. Getto, telling me not long before he passed away in December 2011 at age 94 that his grandmother Anna Gallasso Gaudi "seemed to favor" his mother, Ernestina, over her other children.



Gates to entrance of Villa Nigra today



Nigra family crest at Villa Nigra - Only remaining fresco



Private and singular road leading to Villa Nigra.



Villa Nigra in its prime, built on old ruins and with its church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