

"Fish and Chips" all'Italiana. A Succesful Story of Immigration

Andrea Riccio (September 24, 2009)



Is Fish and Chips an Italian dish? No of course, but it helped Italians' integration in Ireland. Nino Tropicano recounts their story in his documentary "Chippers", screened at the Calandra Institute

Did you know that the Italians were those who first introduced the famous dish "Fish & Chips" to the Irish? Well, we know, it might seem strange but it is true! And we have evidences to prove it...

We found them in "[Chippers](#) [2]", the latest documentary by director [Nino Tropicano](#) [3], an Italian settled in Ireland: through his movie, he offers us an attentive reconstruction of what happened in the "green isle" about a century ago or so.



We had the opportunity to watch the documentary during a screening at the [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) [4], a research center committed to the studying and preservation of old and new Italian cultures and traditions in America.

Researches in this particular field can often lead to unexpected discoveries of fascinating stories born from fortuitous intercultural "encounters".

In this case, it was an employee of the Institute, Bill, who brought the documentary to his colleagues' attention. "Chippers" was in fact part of the Dublin Documentary Festival, the city where his girlfriend lives.

"Chippers" is the story of an Italian community of 4500 people that moved from Casalattico, a small town in the Ciociaria region, to Dublin at the beginning of the 20th century. Their settlement brought unexpected consequences for the local inhabitants: these Italians imported to Ireland the typical English dish "Fish & Chips" which became one of the symbols of the Irish culture.

In Casalattico people are still very affectionate to this traditional English dish, that guaranteed to many of their co citizens a full integration in their new country, Ireland. As Anthony Tamburri, Dean of the Calandra Institute told us, "in this little town in the Ciociaria region you can find what maybe is the only "Fish and Chips" store in Italy. I discovered it when I visited the town where my family came from, Settefrati, in occasion of the celebrations in honor of the "local" Madonna.

As the Associate Director of Academic and Cultural Programs at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute Jospeh Sciorra explained during the debate following the projection "the most interesting thing I learned from this documentary is that migrating Italians encountered as many different destinies as the countries were they moved.

The other speaker that participated to the debate, Cara De Silva, a journalist specialized in food and ethnicity, told the public about the origins of "Fish & Chips", taking it as an example of how culture can influence food, and vice versa.

Even if Nino Tropicano was not present at the event, we managed to reach him: "I think that the Italian/Irish tried to imitate their more famous 'cousins', the Italian/American. The story recounted in "Chippers" testifies their successful integration with their new society, they found their America in Ireland."

"Yet, I noticed a big difference between these two groups: the Italian/Irish still feel a strong bond with their country of origin, they go back to Italy pretty often and maintain many Italian customs. On the other hand, the Italian/American usually go to Italy rarely (this happens also because of the distance between the two countries) and just during the holidays. So they actually look more American with Italian origins."

There is always a lot to learn from stories like the one reported in "Chippers", wherever they happen, because the story of our migrants is often the story of our forgotten past. At the same time it might become the story of our future: since nowadays Italy is a country of immigration, we have to look at the historical examples offered by the US and Ireland to imagine a new efficient model of integration for the "new Italians".



Links

[1] <http://newsite.iltality.org/files/fishandchipsed1253814084jpg>

[2] <http://www.rte.ie/tv/theview/archive/20080923.html>

[3] <http://www.italiandoc.it/scheda/1346.htm>

[4] <http://qcpages.qc.edu/calandra>