

Searching for Treasure

Giulia Madron (September 19, 2013)



Produced by Awen Films, an independent documentary film production company based in New York City, *Treasure - The Story of Marcus Hook* examines the efforts of a town that is determined to survive the shutdown of the local oil refinery. This is what young filmmaker Valerio Ciriaci has done in his most recent short documentary film

People have great stories to tell... and other people treasure these stories. This is what young filmmaker Valerio Ciriaci has done in his most recent short documentary film entitled, in fact, [Treasure - The Story of Marcus Hook](#). [2] The premiere screening will take place on September 20 at the [FirstGlance Film Festival](#) [3] in Philadelphia, at 7:15pm at the Franklin Institute.

Produced by [Awen Films](#) [4], an independent documentary film production company based in New York City, *Treasure - The Story of Marcus Hook* examines the efforts of a town that is determined to survive the shutdown of the local oil refinery. In doing so, it presents a tale that will be familiar to many who live in the towns and cities of the Rust Belt and who, in the wake of the departure of



heavy industry from their communities, have been struggling with economic depression for years. Marcus Hook is a small refinery town near Philadelphia. For decades the oil business was the community's bread and butter, but in December 2011 the local Sunoco refinery suddenly shut down, leaving the town on the brink of an unprecedented economic crisis. In the middle of this daunting situation, ex-refinery worker Michael Manerchia found the remains of a plank house dating back to the 1700s. According to local lore it belonged to the mistress of the famous pirate Blackbeard, who may not have hidden a secret chest of gold but certainly helped Manerchia find a treasure of a different sort. In fact this unexpected discovery gave Michael the inspiration to create an annual pirate festival in order to bring business back to the town and people back on the streets. Treasure -The Story of Marcus Hook is a story of rebirth, of communal help and of courage, reflecting the greater the issues of a nation.

Valerio Ciriaci is a Brooklyn based documentary filmmaker. Born in Rome in 1988, he graduated with a major in Communication Sciences from La Sapienza University in Rome. He moved to New York in 2011 where he continued his filmmaking career. Treasure -The Story of Marcus Hook is his second short documentary film. In 2012 he directed [Melodico](#) [5], featuring Tony Maiorino, barber and singer from the Bronx's Little Italy. We met Valerio because we were curious about this adventure.

How did you come up with this story?

It was a bit of a lucky coincidence, to be honest. I was interested in making a film about historical re-enactors, an activity that here in the US is very popular, and that's how I came across the Marcus Hook Pirate Festival. However, as soon as I visited Marcus Hook to meet Michael, I realized that I had found a story bigger than the one I had initially envisioned. Michael explained to me how heavily the shutdown of the refinery had affected the town's economy, and he also told me about the efforts that were being made to revive Marcus Hook's historic past and the community's struggle to find an identity for a town that is no longer an oil town. I was struck by the love he had for his town, and that is when I realized that making a documentary about the upcoming Marcus Hook Pirate Festival could have been a small way of helping the town.

What were the difficulties in creating the film?

The biggest challenge probably was to cover the production costs. As you know, when it comes to independent film projects this is always a large obstacle. At first, our budget allowed us to film for four days in Marcus Hook, but we knew we would have to figure out a way to fund a second trip to film the festival and continue with interviews. So my co-producer, Isaak Liptzin, and I had the idea of starting a Kickstarter campaign. It was the first time we had tried our hand at crowdfunding, therefore, after less than two weeks we reached and exceeded our funding goal. We were then surprised and excited by the outcome. The people of Marcus Hook helped us a great deal during this campaign, spreading the word and making the project their own. The money we raised allowed us to spend five more days in Marcus Hook, documenting the festival in its entirety.

How has this experience impacted you or others?

I don't know how it will affect the town — perhaps it is still too early to tell. The reaction to the film in Marcus Hook was very good and we can't wait for the premiere in Philly. Personally, it was a very important project. It was a fantastic experience from a human perspective, a way to get to know this country and its people in a way I hadn't been able to do previously.

To see the trailer and get more information about the film, visit www.treasurethefilm.com [2].

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Links

[1] <http://newsite.iitaly.org/files/treasurethefilmofmarcushookvaleriociriaci1379622174.jpg>



[2] <http://treasurethefilm.com/>

[3] <http://firstglancefilms.com/>

[4] <http://awenfilms.net/>

[5] <http://awenfilms.net/melodico-2012/>