

VANNI. One Eye to the Past, the Other to the Future

I. I. (January 06, 2015)

*S.F. Vanni at 548 West Broadway
1884*



*S.F. 135 Bleecker Street
1930*



Ragusa Family Archive

*SF Vanni at 30 12th Street
1940*



A singular event: in January at 30 West 12th street, S.F. VANNI, the first Italian bookstore in America, in business from 1884 to 2004, will reopen as a pop-up bookstore and cultural space, under the auspices of Centro Primo Levi

The goal is not to revive the old traditional bookstore, but to re-imagine it for today.

The tradition of Italian books in New York begins with Mozart's librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, who first brought Italian books to NY in 1805. S.F. VANNI, opened the store (at 548 West Broadway)

at the end of the 19th century; bookseller and publisher Andrea Ragusa, brought it into the 20th century on Bleecker Street and then to its present address.

Now, CPL EDTIONS- Centro Primo Levi's e-book and print-on-demand publishing venture—a niche independent publishing initiative dedicated to the history of Italian Jews- will operate out of S.F. VANNI, in 21st century America.



For decades, thousands of dusty Italian books sat on metal shelves in the two rooms beyond the old-fashioned pale blue curtains of S.F.VANNI's storefront. Revisited with advice from architect.

Bonnie Roche and designer Jonathan Wajskol, the first room has become a multifunctional space for book presentations, lectures, and film screenings. The second room —with the original books sold and published by S.F. VANNI, many of them rare editions, will be preserved as 'urban archeology'. Board member Stella Levi imagines it as something between a beit midrash and a salon, a living space where a variety of events will take place. CPL's director Alessandro

Cassin envisions it as tribute to a long tradition of Italian and Jewish family-based publishers that strongly impacted the surrounding culture.

Andrea Ragusa, bookseller and publisher, arrived in the US in 1931, on a mission: to sell the newly compiled Italian Encyclopedia (Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani), and create —through books— a bridge between Italy and the United States. Within a decade his bookstore became the main supplier of Italian books and periodicals, not only to New York City, but also to libraries and universities throughout the United States and Canada.

Photos and slide shows will highlight S.F. VANNI and the life of Andrea Ragusa, over the course of the store's century-long history.

CPL thanks Olga Ragusa for her enthusiasm, generosity and love for books.

The CPL @ S.F. VANNI's initiative is made possible through a generous grant from Peter S. Kalikow and the ongoing support of Jeff Keil, Danielle Pinet and Lice Ghilardi.

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