

Sant'Agata de' Goti and Bill de Blasio

N. L. (September 16, 2013)



Carmine Valentino, the town's mayor said that "Our city is proud to be the hometown of Bill de Blasio's family. We are supportive of his campaign to become New York City's first citizen and we are proud to be a part of his life. We are happy his notoriety is reaching our town and our small community." Candidate De Blasio's ancestors, his grandparents to be exact, left Sant'Agata de' Goti in the province of Benevento, Campania), in the early 1920's looking to fulfill their American dream.

Sant'Agata de' Goti is a pretty Italian comune in the province of Benevento, Campania. Its name comes from the Gascony family De Goth who reigned there in the 14th century and its spectacular Gothic church of the Annunziata dating back to the 13th century, houses 15th-century frescoes, and a diptych of the Annunciation dating to the same age.

Touring Club Italiano (Italy's major national tourist organization) nominated it one of the best small towns in Italy because "Historians assert that this picturesque town, hidden among the moss terrace



between the two tributaries of the river Isclero and not far from Mount Taburno, rose up on the site of the Samnite city of Saticula in 313 B.C. The internal roads are still man-sized, their toponymy recalls function or form: vicolo Stretto (narrow), via Fontana (fountain), vicolo del Forno (oven), for example, is what all the streets of Sant'Agata are like: a pleasure for the eyes and the mind."

The sights that cannot be missed are, in addition to the Church of the Annunziata, the Duomo, preceded by an ample portico formed by twelve ancient columns in the Baroque style; the church of S. Menna and its rug of mosaics in Cosmati style, (one of the oldest in southern Italy) and the Hall of Coats of Arms, within the Bishop's Palace, that features the images of 68 bishops, indicative of the importance of the local diocese.

Lately this rare gem has been in the news and it is not for its great cuisine or artistic heritage... the entire town has a say in the upcoming elections of New York City's Mayor. Indeed everybody is rooting for Bill de Blasio, whose family has roots in.... yes, Sant'Agata de' Goti itself. De Blasio's ancestors, his grandparents to be exact, left Italy in the early 1920's looking to fulfill their American dream.

De Blasio often said that his grandfather is the person who influenced his life the most, "an old Italian man with an accent that was nearly incomprehensible... He only had 70 years to get comfortable with English."

Many relatives (aunt Adele, cousins Arturo, Luigi and Roberta) still reside in Sant'Agata de' Goti, mostly cousins who keep in touch with the Democratic candidate. A few traveled to New York during the summer just to give him a hug and support.

Carmine Valentino, the town's mayor openly said that "Our city is proud to be the hometown of Bill de Blasio's family. We are supportive of his campaign to become New York City's first citizen and we are proud to be a part of his life. We are happy his notoriety is reaching our town and our small community."

"He speaks Italian well because he studied in an Italian school in Brooklyn and he is also a fan of Napoli's soccer team," Arturo Mongillo, one of Bill De Blasio's cousins said. "Everybody knows him in Sant'Agata de' Goti ... he is very popular everywhere," his cousin Roberta Mongillo said. The two met in New York during the summer. "When we exited the restaurant tons of people wanted to take pictures with him... and he was kind, welcoming and available with everybody. People even posed with him for pictures. I am confident he can make it."

Carmine Valentino proposed to offer Bill de Blasio honorary citizenship. "De Blasio never forgot his origins and he is still connected to his hometown. In our next city council meeting we will discuss how to proceed with the citizenship process."

Bill de Blasio was originally born Warren Wilhelm, and legally changed his last name to his mother's maiden name. "De Blasio's family has come a long way since his Italian grandparents emigrated to the United States with little in their pockets and he believes that the further he takes his career, the closer he must stick to his roots. De Blasio knows that his grandfather's olive skin and thick curls would face scrutiny under Arizona laws if he were alive today. "That gives me perspective," he said." (www.wetheitalians.com writes)

If de Blasio wins, he will become New York City's first Democratic, Italian-American mayor since Vincent Impellitteri. His term ended in 1953. And he will not be the only NY politician with an Italian background: along with Andrew Cuomo, current governor of New York, they would be the two most powerful state politicians of Italian-American descent.

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