



## HISTORY AND RESTORATION

# COLUMBUS

Italian immigrants came to this country, like many before and since, for a better life. They began arriving in significant numbers after the unification of Italy in 1870, when the promised land reforms didn't materialize.

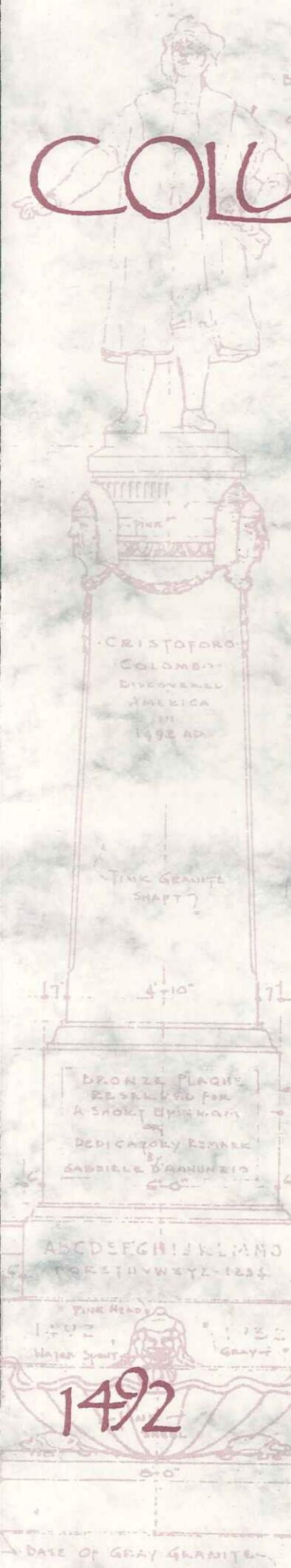
By then, the Erie Canal had already been built in Syracuse, but Italian day laborers worked on the Barge Canal and were hired to build railroads, streets, and water-works.

According to Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, in their book, *The Italian-Americans*, the pattern of Syracuse's Italian neighborhoods reflects the kind of work the immigrants did. They lived near the rail yards, round houses, and tracks along the northside, and soon opened businesses to serve their needs as well as the larger community.

Like other immigrant groups, the Italians were confronted by religious and ethnic bias. At the turn of the century, headlines in the local newspapers reflected concern about the increasing number of Italian immigrants.

Despite this, the Italian-Americans flourished here and began to feel justifiable pride in both their earlier roots in Italy and their standing in their adopted country.

1492



# HISTORY

It was out of their pride in their group identity and gratitude to the Syracuse community that a group of Italian-Americans first decided to erect a monument to Columbus, the Italian without whom, perhaps, no Europeans would have made a better life for themselves on this continent.

**B**y 1934, when the monument was dedicated, the idea for erecting it was already 25 years old. It was the brain-child of Prof. Torquato DeFelice, sculptor and painter, and Dr. Seraphino Chiarulli. In 1910, Professor DeFelice visited Professor Renzo V. Baldi in Florence, and returned with a model by Baldi. But it wasn't until 1928, after the election of John G. Ciciarelli as president of the Columbus Monument Association (also referred to as Columbus Memorial Association), that the fundraising began. Fifteen "generals" raised \$18,000. By then, the Baldi model had been set aside and, when the monument committee chose as its site the knoll in Onondaga Park, it staged a contest for design of the monument by American sculptors.

**T**he knoll site was later rejected in favor of a site downtown, and the contest winner filed a lawsuit when the change of site required an entirely different design. Meanwhile, controversy over which specific site the City and Committee agreed upon continued to hold up the project. In 1930, the City Planning Commission recommended several sites: Columbus Park at E. Genesee and Cherry Streets, a plaza at the end of Forman Avenue on Erie Boulevard, Fayette Park, and Hanover Square. Of these, the monument committee liked only the Fayette Park site, but this required moving the Hamilton S. White memorial to the east end of the park across from the White mansion. Both the fire hero's widow and his friends objected. St. Mary's Circle, between the courthouse and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, was considered but initially rejected as not being large enough.

**E**ventually Mayor Rolland B. Marvin stepped in and, on May 16, 1931, both sides agreed to place a slightly smaller version of the Baldi monument design in St. Mary's Circle, now popularly known as Columbus Circle.

**T**here was, however, a further cause for delay. The price Baldi had set for the statue was 322,000 lire, which was very reasonable at the rate of exchange at the time. But before the work was completed, the dollar to lire ratio changed. In January, 1934, a second fundraising campaign led by Joseph J. Pietrafesa, owner of Learbury's, and William T. McCaffrey, President of Lincoln Bank, raised the necessary additional funds.

**O**n Columbus Day, 1932, the Italian-American community celebrated the ground-breaking with an enormous parade. Col. Guido F. Verbeck, head of the Manlius School, was the grand marshal. His father, the late Brig. Gen. William Verbeck, was honored by the King of Italy with a citation as chevalier in the Order of the Crown.

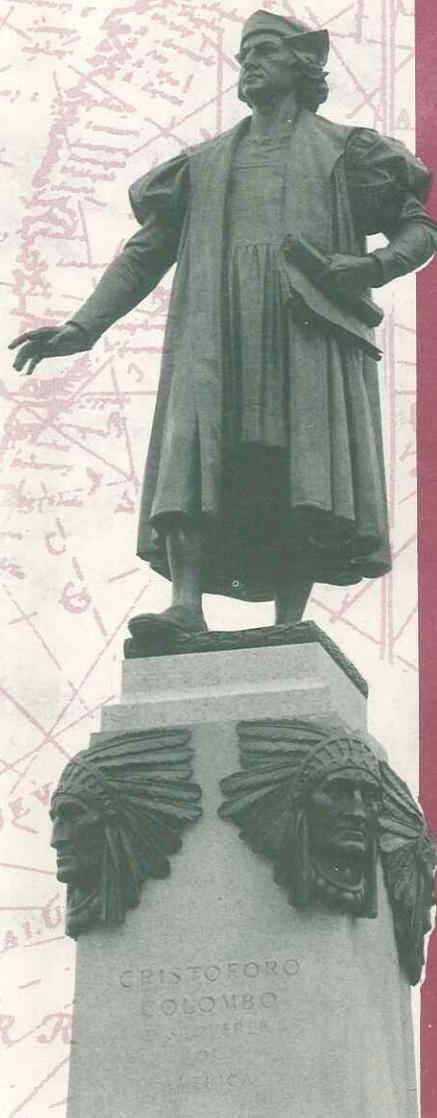


Cristoforo Colombo

Columbus was an adventurer, and adventurers teach us all the valuable lesson that the horizon of the known is not necessarily the limit of the true.



Fourteen Hundred Ninety Two



Dwight James Baum

Dwight James Baum, a Syracuse University graduate and nationally known architect, was hired to supervise the design and construction of the monument, while Baldi sculpted the bronze work.

Baum attempted to create the ambience of an Italian piazza. The modified obelisk on which the statue of the explorer stands is an ancient Egyptian symbol of power, widely used in civic monuments in Italy. Made of pink granite, it rises 29 feet above the pavement, and rests on a gray and pink granite base comprised of ancient triremes (ships' prows) representing ancient Roman vessels and symbolizing Italy's navigational prowess. The fountain spouts are creatures of the deep, which, with the brass turtles and stone shells of the fountain, serve as reminders of Columbus's confrontation of the dangers of the sea. The pool's bottom features a navigator's compass in colored pebbles, traditional in Italian grottos and fountains.

Renzo V. Baldi's Columbus is a cast bronze figure eleven feet tall. It depicts the explorer as a young man, long before he sailed to America, staring thoughtfully toward the west, maps and charts in his hand. Baldi's bronze bas-relief plaques depict scenes from the life of Columbus: at the Council of Salamanca; at the Court of Queen Isabel; arriving in the tropics and; returning to the Court of Spain. Masks of Native American faces function as clasps to hold the four sections of the obelisk together, and celebrate the people who were already in America when Columbus arrived.

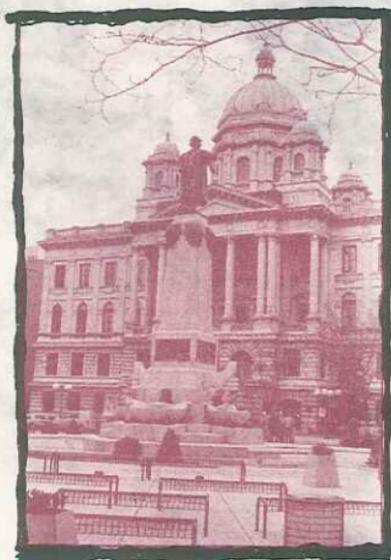
1967

In 1967, a portion of Montgomery Street in front of the cathedral was appropriated to enlarge the plaza. At this time, the fountain was redesigned to include a planter/seat wall, and jets of water from inside the seat wall sprayed toward the monument base. This larger plaza became a focal point of many special downtown events and a gathering place for office workers at lunch time.

In 1992, in anticipation of the international commemoration of the Quincentennial of Columbus's voyage, the monument and St. Mary's Circle were completely dismantled and restored. The statue was carefully removed from the pedestal and the obelisk from the base. All bronze work, the figure of Columbus, the 4 sea creature spouts, the 4 sculpted plaques, the 8 turtles, and 4 masks were shipped to Statuary Conservations, a Division of Healy Brothers Foundry in Rhode Island, and restored and refinished with a walnut-shell blasting technique. The obelisk down to the ships' prows was removed, and its broken cap stone replaced. The plumbing and nozzles were refitted, the fountain spray restored to its original direction from the mouths of the creatures into the shells, and the pool filter system was replaced and new electrical service installed.

The original masonry design was restored, from the compass in the pool bottom, to the original planter beds, to the cobblestone paving extending to the original 85' diameter circle, with cast stone benches at the points of the compass. Outside the circle a new ring of benches was installed for additional seating.

The restoration of the monument cost \$505,000, and was paid for by a New York State Environmental Quality Bond Act [EQBA] Grant (\$200,000), funds raised by the Columbus Monument Memorial Association (\$167,500), and City funds and in-kind services worth \$137,500. Design consultants were Tourbier and Walmsley, Inc. of New York City. The project was supervised and administered by Quinlivan, Pierik & Krause, Architects/Engineers of Syracuse, with stone restoration supervised by Crawford and Stearns, Architects and Preservation Planners, also of Syracuse. Law Brothers Contracting Corporation, CNY Mechanical Associates, Inc. and A. Pompo Electric, Inc., performed the work.



#### Point of Controversy

Because of the NYS EQBA grant funding, this project's design and implementation were under the jurisdiction of the New York State Historic Preservation Office. A special amendment to the City's Preservation Ordinance specifies future work on the Columbus monument or St. Mary's Circle be under the jurisdiction of the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board. Their interest is in an historically accurate restoration. But the accurate restoration of an historical artifact means that it often reflects a viewpoint that is not contemporary.

Neither in the original design of the monument, nor in its restoration, was any disrespect intended toward the thousands of Native Americans who died or were displaced by the wave of colonialism that Columbus's voyage began five centuries ago. We now know that, though the first Europeans who came here thought of themselves as heroes of an enlightened culture in an untamed wilderness, they also plundered an orderly and advanced Aztec civilization that had built magnificent aqueducts and temples in splendid cities like Tenochtitlan.

Similarly, in upstate New York, the Iroquois also enjoyed an advanced social organization. Their structure of alliances and protocols reflected their respect for nature and human relationships, while their recognition of both centralized authority and individual tribal differences influenced the framers of the United States Constitution. Like other Native Americans, as well as the other American minority groups, their rich history as a people and contributions to American culture are often overlooked. This sadly impoverishes our understanding of who we are as a nation. But so does ignoring our debt to Columbus as an explorer.

The monument, built and dedicated on October 12, 1934, by Syracuse's Italian-American community, pays tribute to a fellow-countryman's skill as a mariner and courage to pursue his beliefs. Columbus, whatever failings history may impute to him, was an adventurer, and adventurers teach us all the valuable lesson that the horizon of the known is not necessarily the limit of the true.

To learn more about the Native American culture: Sainte Marie among the Iroquois, Liverpool, NY; Onondaga Council of Chiefs, Onondaga Nation via Nedrow, NY; Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, NY; Seneca-Iroquois National Museum on the Allegany Indian Reservation in Salamanca, NY.