

# Il Gazzettino

February 2017

## Message from the Board

We hope you had a wonderful Holiday Season. We wish everyone a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!

Abbracci,

Friends of Italy Society of Hawaii Board  
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## Upcoming Events

### Talk Story on Italian Fencing

Talk Story with Pauline Chakmakjian

**Where:** Harbor Court (14<sup>th</sup> Floor)

Merchant St., Downtown Honolulu

**When:** February 9, 2017

6:30pm – 8:00pm

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### Parliamo Italiano!

#### (Let's Speak Italian!)

FOISOH is exploring the possibility of sponsoring Italian language conversation and beginning Italian classes.

Watch for email announcements coming soon!

## Talk Story on Italian Fencing

Italy is renowned for its artistic genius, a myriad of culinary delights and the charm and warmth of its people, but few are aware that Italy excels in the elegant sport of swordsmanship.

An often under-appreciated Olympic sport, fencing, is both a skill of grace and sometimes of brutality. While swordsmanship exists all over the world with different schools and philosophies, the Italian school of fencing is famous in the arena of swordplay for its history and techniques in this niche realm of sport.

Pauline Chakmakjian gives lectures on a variety of subjects related to the arts, culture and history of specific countries.

## Past Events

### Christmas Party

On December 18, 2016 FOISOH held its Festa di Natale at Café Julia. We all had a wonderful time dining, singing and dancing. Of course, there was the annual visit of Babbo Natale and gifts for the children!



## Feature Story

# HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW AND THE DANTE CLUB

By Mark Ethridge

William Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was an American poet and educator whose most famous works include “*Paul Revere’s Ride*,” “*The Song of Hiawatha*,” “*The Courtship of Miles Standish*,” and “*Evangeline*.” He was immensely popular in his own time, so much so that his poems have influenced the public perception of American historical events.

In some cases Longfellow's version of history remains the best known, if not the most accurate, account of events, as with "*Paul Revere's Ride*." Many of his poems are still studied in primary and secondary schools today, although his overall reputation as a serious original poet has declined over the years.

After gaining fame and fortune from a series of literary successes, an event that occurred in 1861 turned him away from the writing of poetry and pushed him toward a new venture. On the night of July 9, Longfellow’s second wife, Frances Appleton Longfellow, accidentally set fire to her clothes, probably when using a candle flame to seal a letter with wax. Longfellow heard her cries and rushed to help put out the flames, but unfortunately he was too late. Frances died the next morning.



Frances Appleton Longfellow

## Feature Story

Longfellow plunged into a state of deep despair and didn't publish any works for the next two years. In order to console himself somewhat, he started reading Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Dante's work, written in 1321 is an allegorical poem describing the poet's spiritual journey through Hell (Inferno), Purgatory (Purgatorio) and Heaven (Paradiso) in search of his beloved Beatrice.

After reading *La Divina Commedia*, he then returned to something that he had started while teaching Dante at Harvard in 1842: the translation of Dante's masterpiece. Longfellow had translated a few short sections at Harvard, but translating a 14,000 line poem would prove to be a daunting task - a task too big, perhaps, for one man. To provide help and advice, he invited other literary friends to meet with him every Wednesday and the group became known as the "Dante Club." The invitees were accomplished literary greats and included James Russell Lowe, William Dean Howell, and Charles Eliot Norton and other occasional guests such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., the father of the famous 20<sup>th</sup> century Supreme Court justice.

Longfellow completed his translation later that year and the final work appeared in three-volume edition that was published in 1867. The work received much critical acclaim and even today is still a widely-read translation of Dante's work.

The following are contemporary evaluations of the work:

*"Here at last that much suffering reader will find Dante's greatness manifest, and not his greatness only, but his grace, his simplicity, and his affection... Opening the book we stand face to face with the poet, and when his voice ceases we may well marvel if he has not sung to us in his own Tuscan."*

William Dean Howells, *The Nation*

## Feature Story

*"As a crown to his literary life, Longfellow combines his exquisite scholarship and his poetic skill and experience in the translation of one of the great poems of the world." -- Harper's Monthly*

Longfellow had a life-long love of Italy and Italian literature. In 1866, Longfellow composed a series of six sonnets, called the "Divina Commedia" sonnets, to honor Dante.

According to biographer Charles Calhoun, "Italy had a great influence on Longfellow's life. In addition to translating Dante's *Inferno*, in later years he became fascinated with the life and poetry of Michelangelo."



Longfellow with his family during a trip to Italy

In recognition of Longfellow's achievement a plaque was placed in one of the central squares of Florence, Italy. Longfellow lived with an Italian family during January 1828 at Place Santa Maria Novella Number 4600 when he was a student on the "Grand Tour" of France, Spain and Italy. The plaque, written in Italian, reads roughly in English:

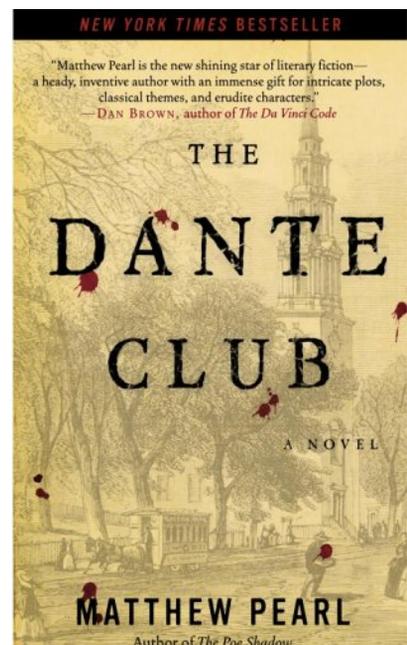
*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
(1807 – 1882)  
American poet  
master of the Neo-Latin languages  
translator of *The Divine Comedy*  
amid the Florentine dwellings  
had this (dwelling)  
in the Square that was called  
"The Mecca of foreigners"*

## Feature Story



Curiously enough, one of the other members of the Dante Club, James Russell Lowell, also has a commemorative plaque in Florence. His states: *“Here in the Old Hotel du Nord, James Russell Lowell, American poet and critic, A Dante Scholar Stayed in the winter of 1874 Drawing inspiration from the beauty of the City of Florence.”*

As a postlude of sorts, a contemporary American author, Matthew Pearl, published in 2003 a fictional novel called *“The Dante Club,”* based on an imaginary story line occurring within the known historical events just discussed. The imaginary story line concerns a series of brutal murders shadowing the infernal punishments in the *Inferno* which Longfellow and his colleagues must solve in secret at the peril of their own lives.



## Announcements

The University of Hawaii Osher Lifelong Learning Institute is offering a lecture on Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* on Monday, February 27.

### ***Madame Butterfly* (Puccini)**

**Presenter:** Jim Becker, Retired AP foreign correspondent, sportswriter, opera and drama critic

**Dates:** Monday February 27

**Time:** 1 - 4pm

**Location:** Krauss 111

“Before we watch the 1995 Frédéric Mitterand production of Giacomo Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* we will be treated to a pre-opera introduction by Jim Becker. As he frequently did in the past for Hawaii Opera Theater, Jim will set the stage for us, sharing key details on the plot and special things we should notice while watching to enhance our enjoyment of this touching universal story about an American naval officer named Pinkerton and a young woman named Cio-Cio-San.”

There is a fee for registration: A \$60 Spring Term Membership in OLLI entitles an individual to enroll in up to three courses or workshops and attend free special events on a space-available basis during the Spring Term 2017.

For more information go to:

<http://www.osher.socialsciences.hawaii.edu/>

