

JOSEPH ROCCHIETTI

Earliest Known Italian American Author

Harvard professor Elvira Di Fabio and Carol Bonomo Albright have recently discovered the work of the earliest known Italian American novelist, Joseph Rocchietti. The book had been lying on dusty library shelves for over two centuries. A copy of Rocchietti's book eventually made its way to a New England rare book fair and DiSimone Books of New York bought that copy. When DiSimone liquidated his business in 2000, the rare book landed in the hands of Italian Americana editor Carol Albright. Albright shared the find with her teaching partner, Dr. DiFabio, and the two women set about researching the author and his work, and finding a publisher.

Mellin Press is publishing the book, which includes Rocchietti's novel, *Lorenzo and Oonalaska*, as well as his essays against nativism, in 2004. Albright and DiFabio have written the introduction.

Albright said, " It's a period novel that espouses Rocchietti's liberal political ideas-- which originated in the ideals of the Risorgimento-- and it is a love story. " Rocchietti wrote between the years of 1835-1875, in English.

Rocchietti immigrated to the United States in 1831 from Casale Monferrato, in Piedmont. In New York, he gave private lessons in the Italian language and literature. One of his long essays spoke up against the rising and violent demonstrations by Massachusetts 'nativists' against Irish-Catholic immigrants. The nativists actually burned down a convent in Charleston in the mid-1840's. Edgar Allen Poe in *Poe's Broadway Journal* reviewed Rocchietti's essay.