

# Rare Columbus book visiting here

By Alfonso D'Emilia

"Colombo," a rare and exciting book, is on loan to the Western Reserve Historical Society from the city of Genoa, Italy. A copy also can be found among the reference books of the Cleveland Public Library.

Fulvio Cerofolini, mayor of Genoa, sent the large volume here through Il Cenacolo, Cleveland's Italian cultural club, as a contribution to the Greater Cleveland

Ethnographic Exhibit honoring this country's bicentennial.

Featuring a collection of important documents, all reproduced in facsimile, it purports to establish Genoa above all doubts as the birthplace of Christopher Columbus.

While "Colombo" represents a connecting link between two continents, it also serves as a reminder of the continuing Columbian controversy, another aspect of the fascinating story of the great Genoese discoverer worth recalling at this time of the year.

In brief, these are the salient points.

At dawn of Oct. 12, 1492, three caravels anchored off the eastern coast of one of the Bahama islands. Admiral Christopher Columbus and his men landed on the island of Guanahani, which they baptized with the name San Salvador, soon after giving thanks to God in the presence of many natives.

In a letter to Raphael Sanchez dated March 14, 1493, Columbus announced the successful conclusion of "La empresa de las Indias," his courageous sailing of the unknown seas aimed at reaching the coveted wealthy East by traveling westward. He wrote, "We have succeeded in that to which hitherto mortal powers have in no wise attained."

They had overcome the immense water barrier that had separated the two continents for millennia. Their conquest of the unknown seas, resulting in the discovery of America, is so important that the year 1492 is referred to as the great divide between the Middle Ages and modern times. It is comparable to the present conquest of space.

But unlike 20th century instantaneous mass communication, the news of the discovery of new islands in the Indian Ocean traveled slowly and its significance was barely understood.

Although a Latin translation of Columbus' letter was already circulating in Rome in the latter part of April, it took months before Germany, France and England received and evaluated the exciting news. It was 1497 when England undertook a similar enterprise at the exhortation of another Genoese, John Cabot.

After much exploration Columbus made his triumphant return from the first voyage on March 15, 1493. He was received by the Spanish sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, with great honors and festivities.

Three more voyages followed.

Columbus, however, was soon to be saddened. He was betrayed by his closest friends and became the target of vicious attacks. He was accused of being a poor governor, an adventurer, megalomaniac, hypocrite, liar, pirate. He was even chained and imprisoned during the third voyage. An irony of fate had decreed that the new world be misnamed America instead of Columbia.

Absorbed in endless litigations, Columbus was forced to spend the rest of his life in defense of his rights and good name. On May 20, 1506, at 60 years of age, Christopher Columbus died, broken-hearted, at Valladolid, Spain, in the midst of universal indifference.

Not even his mortal remains could find rest. In 1509 they were transferred from Valladolid to Seville; in 1536 or 1537, from Seville to Haiti; in 1795, from Haiti to Havana; and in 1898, at the time of the American occupation of Cuba, they were transported from Havana back to Seville.

But, "Waste no pity on the admiral of the ocean sea," admonishes one of his greatest biographers, the recently deceased Samuel Eliot Morison. For, he notes, "The whole history of the Americas stems from the four voyages of Columbus . . . the stout-hearted son of Genoa, who carried Christian civilization across the ocean sea."

For almost four centuries the Columbian tradition was enhanced by a vast body of favorable literature. His admirers presented Columbus as a magnanimous and bold mariner, a great genius of the Renaissance. They went as far as defining him as a true saint as well as an enchanter of beautiful women.

And then, suddenly, a literary bomb exploded threatening to devastate that age-old Columbian tradition.

It was in 1871 that the distinguished American historian, Henry Harrisse, discovered Paolo Toscanelli's letter in one of Columbus' books while doing research in Spain. Columbus had used it in his proposal to the Spanish sovereigns to add authority and prestige to his own plan to find new routes to the Orient. Toscanelli expounded the belief that the Earth was round and the distance by land from West to East was much longer than by water. Therefore, Asia could be reached more readily from Spain by sea.

It was soon theorized this was a

copy of a letter Toscanelli, a Florentine physician and geographer, had sent to the Portuguese Fernao Martins. The so-called Columbian controversy was thus born and the de-Columbization of the discovery of America became fashionable overnight.

Almost 30 years later another historian, Henry Vignaud, succeeded in casting doubt on the letter's authenticity and suggested that the presumed correspondence between Columbus and Toscanelli had never taken place. Rather, Vignaud said, it had been invented by Columbus for obvious, selfish reasons.

That was not all. Once such correspondence had been declared apocryphal, Vignaud sought to demonstrate that almost all other documents concerning the Columbian enterprise were false, including the journal Columbus had kept during the first voyage.

Further, there are those who hold that Christopher Columbus was not the first to discover America and that he was not Italian. They maintain he was Portuguese, Spaniard, Greek, Jewish or even German, French or English.

Yale University entered the controversy in 1965 with the publication of the Vinland Map showing Leif Ericsson had discovered America centuries before Columbus. But only nine years later the prestigious university was forced to admit that the Vinland Map, once referred to as "the most exciting cartographic discovery of the century," was a hoax.

Paolo Emilio Taviani, a highly regarded authority, observes it is clear that Columbus was not the first to arrive in America since at the time there were from eight to 10 million people inhabiting the continent. What distinguished the Genoese navigator from those who preceded him, Taviani continues, is that Columbus made public his plans, successfully executed them and was fortunate enough to return and bring back home news of an "otro mundo."

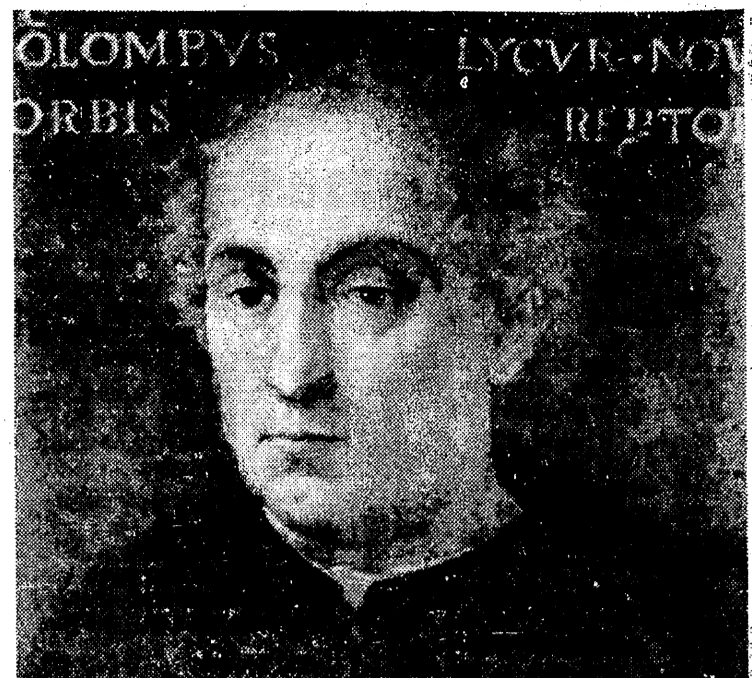
It seems that not a season goes by without a new theory or hypothesis concerning the Columbian controversy. But objective historians discard most of them while admitting there are many lacunae, contradictions and question marks in the life of the Genoese discoverer.

And so it was inevitable for his mother country, "Genova La Superba," to claim her most illustrious son.

During the celebration of the fourth century of the discovery of America in 1892, the city of Genoa sponsored the monumental "Raccolta," a nine-volume collection of original documents and studies from all over the world. "Colombo" was edited from this huge work in 1932 by a team of experts headed by Giovanni Monleone.

From this outstanding collection of notarial and court records, along with some of the admiral's correspondence and writings, emerges a Christopher Columbus who is "Genoese throughout. Preeminently individualistic; cautious and bold; restless and patient; as ready to face sacrifice as to lay hold of fortune; accustomed to sail his ship over the world."

D'Emilia, a Clevelander, participated in the International Congress for Columbian studies last fall in Genoa.



This portrait of Columbus, from the Gioviana Gallery in Como, Italy, is believed to be the only one made while he was still living.



## Less shock, more punch

WASHINGTON — The meeting here of the U.S. National Women's Agenda — bringing together for the first time every possible type of



Georgie Anne Geyer

women's organization to form and push a coherent agenda of women's rights questions for the next five to 10 years — showed very clearly that the early, "shocking" days of the women's movement are gone.

It was easy, back then, for the upright, or even simply the cautious, to dismiss the bra-less avant garde (though unfairly) as simply "masculine," "lesbian," "misfit." This assembly, on the other hand, would not have looked out of place in the Baptist church of Plains, Ga. As dynamic young black Audrey Colon, president of the National Women's Political Caucus put it, "Today we have a sense of who we are — we're everyone." And indeed they were: from churchwomen united to black feminists to the girls clubs to the gay task force to neighborhood women.

To one who has seen (and often despaired of) the chaotic, self-conscious-rites of the radical women's groups, the down-to-brass-tacks "strategy, strategy, strategy" aspect of this meeting was infinitely more inspiring than any amount of emotional railing against male oppression. As top strategist Heather Booth said in her "How-to-put-a-system-to-the-knowledge" workshops, "If you don't know where you're going, you're likely to end up somewhere else, like back where you were."

No one wanted that. So they talked about strategy. And they talked about how to break the divisive class and psyche lines between women. As Nancy Seifer, an attractive young woman who is director of the Center on Women and American Diversity said, "Although women are united by sex, we have no sense of community."

Then frail, elderly, deceptively sweet-looking Alice Hansen Cook, a professor emerita of industrial and labor relations, gave some historical examples to the contrary: In the early part of this century, for instance, working-class women were supported by middle-class women in the coalition of the Women's Trade Union League. In effect, she was saying, it can be done. Barriers can be breached.

The women's agenda, put together by representatives of all the women's groups over the last year, is an inclusive, basically nonradical document. It calls for adequate pay, access to political and economic power, quality child care — the basic issues most women now agree on.

But still, there is the problem of a coalition. Every group and every member does not agree on every point — abortion, for instance.

What the group finally came out with was a plan that called for representatives to be elected to structure the coalition, to take these ideas back to the organizations to get their final approval and, finally, to form the permanent organization that will work, lobby, push and do whatever necessary on women's issues.

These women, in their well-styled clothes and carefully combed coifs and stockings and shoes and perfume and bras and lipstick clearly thirsted for recognition. It's been a long time coming, but this meeting showed that it has come. Though admittedly a difficult one, it symbolizes a new day for women. Costume has given way to content.

## Wrestling the fat devil in the kitchen

WASHINGTON — Everyone has excuses for going off his or her diet. I would like to advance one that most people are afraid to admit to because their doctors or friends will think they are crazy. It's the "devil" theory and I can speak from personal experience when I say that the devil is responsible for every lapse in any diet that I have tried to stick to.

This is what happens. I have been able to stick to my regimen until around 11 p.m. Then my wife asks me to check to see if all the doors downstairs are locked. Unfortunately, the one she is most concerned with is the kitchen door.

I walk into the kitchen and there, setting at the counter, is the devil. I always try to ignore him, but he is the type that starts up a conversation whether you want him to or not. He might say, "While you're checking the kitchen door, why don't you take a peek in the refrigerator?"

"Just to check if the light is on or not," he says innocently.

I open the fridge. "The light's on," I say.

"Oh, I see your wife bought some Edam cheese today. I'll bet that would taste delicious on black bread."

"We have no black bread, wise guy," I snarl at him.



Art Buchwald

"Look on the third shelf behind the diet cola."

I look on the third shelf and, sure enough, a loaf of black bread is there.

"I don't want any. I'm on a diet," I say firmly.

"Well, you could offer me some. What kind of host are you anyway?"

I take out the black bread and the Edam cheese.

"Don't forget the butter and mustard," he says, grinning from ear to ear.

I make the cheese sandwich and shove it toward him.

"Care to join me?" he asks. "I hate to eat alone."

"I'll just have a taste," I say.

He pushes the sandwich toward me. "Here, take this one. I'll make my own. You know what would go good with that sandwich?"

"What?" I ask, sitting down next to him at the counter.

"A large cold glass of beer."

"I'm not supposed to drink beer on my diet."

"I know. But one glass isn't going to hurt you. You can't eat a cheese sandwich without beer."

"Where's the beer?" I ask him.

"On the bottom shelf, behind the cottage cheese."

I pour myself a glass of beer.

"Did you know your wife made chocolate chip cookies today to send to your daughter at college?" he asks.

"She did? Where are they?"

"She hid them in the broom closet so you wouldn't find them. Why don't you eat them just to let her know you're not somebody who can be trifled with? Chocolate chip cookies are delicious with vanilla ice cream."

I look at him.

He grins. "In the deep freeze, underneath the cans of frozen orange juice."

"You really are a troublemaker," I tell him as I take the ice cream out of the freezer.

"What the devil are you talking about? I'm the best friend you have in the world. Who else would have told you about the chocolate chip cookies in the broom closet? Oh, by the way, before you go upstairs you better check the kitchen door. I think it's still unlocked."

Los Angeles Times

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