

**One hundred years strong  
Dorothea House founded to help Italian immigrants**

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By Bernadette Suski-Harding, Special Writer

When supporters gather on Oct. 5 to celebrate the Cent'anni (100th anniversary) of Dorothea's House in Princeton, they might think, for a moment, that they've arrived at an Italian wedding.

Coro d'Italia, an Italian-American singing and dancing group, will entertain the guests, and restaurants from as close by as Princeton and Lawrenceville and as far away as New York City and Philadelphia, will set out spreads of Italian delicacies.

And they'll do it all to honor the memory of a woman whose short life and untimely death inspired the founding of this house in the first place.

Dorothea's House, which opened in 1914, is a living memorial to Dorothea van Dyke McLane, a volunteer social worker who assisted Princeton's newly arrived Italian immigrants in the early 1900s before dying in childbirth at the age of 23.

Italian culture centers exist in metropolitan areas across the U.S., but Dorothea's House is a rare example of an ethnic settlement house that still serves the public. Today, Dorothea's House — also known as Casa Di Cultura Italiana — provides members of the community, regardless of heritage, with free monthly programs on Italian culture, lectures by Italian luminaries, and events built around food.

Where Immigrants Found Help

Dorothea's House started out simply enough — as a way to honor the memory and carry on the mission of a beloved volunteer.

As the well-off daughter of Dr. Henry van Dyke, a Princeton University professor, poet and diplomat, and the wife of Guy Richard McLane, a New York City stockbroker, Mrs. McLane had the freedom to spend her time ministering to the needs of Princeton's newly arrived Italian immigrants.

She taught their children Sunday School at First Presbyterian Church in Princeton, and helped them find their way as they settled into American life. They worked as stone masons, carpenters, quarrymen and foremen; lived among clusters of their countrymen on Humbert, Baker and Lytle streets, and Witherspoon Lane; and were so enamored with Mrs. McLane that when their daughters were born, many named them Dorothea.

When Mrs. McLane died, her father and husband honored her memory by forming and incorporating the Dorothea van Dyke McLane Association, and later building Dorothea House, which opened Oct. 7, 1914, and immediately became a gathering place for the city's early Italian immigrants.

It's where immigrants found help with housing, employment and filing income taxes; where they gathered to read Italian-language newspapers and, no doubt, share stories of the homeland they'd left behind; where they availed themselves of indoor plumbing (often non-existent in their dwellings) to bathe.

It's where they took classes in English, math and American citizenship; where they held baby and bridal showers, wedding receptions and funeral viewings; where they put on plays and hosted social events, like a dance for Italian POWs held captive in Belle Meade.

And it's where they remembered the love of a woman named Dorothea.

During its first decades, Dorothea's House was used daily by girls' and boys' clubs; fraternal organizations; English, citizenship and sewing classes; team sports; and summer camps. More than 500 Italian children, young adults, and their parents attended these activities monthly.

## Changing with the times

When the immigrants built the Italian-American Sportsmen's Club on Governor's Lane, Dorothea House shifted its focus and offered office space (rent free) to a number of local non-profit organizations, many of whom still occupy the building.

In the 1960s, the Association's Board of Trustees established an annual scholarship program that has since awarded more than 400 scholarships to local high school graduates proficient in the study of the Italian language; in recent years, the award has also been given to one student in each year of high school, and to one Princeton University freshman.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Dorothea House came full circle, from the place that once taught Italian immigrants the traditions and language of our land, to the place that now teaches anyone who wishes to learn them the traditions and language of Italy. Twenty-four classes, including one for children, are planned for the fall.

Mangia!

The 100th anniversary celebration at Dorothea House on Oct. 5 is the perfect chance to sample foods from these regions: Piedmont: Terra Momo and Mediterra, Princeton. Molise: Procaccini Brothers of Princeton. Campania: Mezzaluna and College Park Café of Princeton. Sicily: D'Angelo's of Princeton. Calabria: Chamber's Walk of Princeton. Abruzzo: Marchelli Formaggi Importers of Montclair, and Le Virtu of Philadelphia. Emilia Romagna: Rana Pastificio of New York City

Rounding out the menu are gelato pops from bent spoon, coffee from Small World, cheeses from Pondini Imports of Somerset and, of course, wine from Firriato Winery of Sicily.

The event is scheduled for 2-5 p.m. at Dorothea's House, 120 John St., Princeton. Admission is free. For more information, go to [www.dorotheashouse.org](http://www.dorotheashouse.org) or call 609-924-9713.

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### Lifestyle

## One hundred years strong

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Dorothea's House will honor the 100th anniversary of its founding by Dorothea van Dyke McLane.

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