

# An Italian Connection in Special Collections

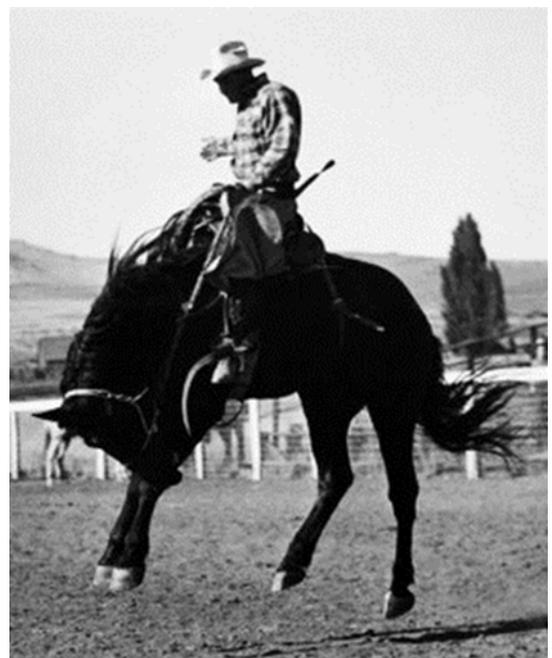
by Donnelyn Curtis



Special Collections is fortunate to have the Harry and Joan Drackert papers and photographs. The Drackerts were important in the divorce ranch industry in Northern Nevada, and between them had a range of interests and experiences that cast them as characters in several local stories. As we have learned through exploring the collection, they also garnered some national and international recognition, thanks to some of their guests who were prominent journalists.

Harry was on the rodeo circuit (once earning the Champion Cowboy of America award at Madison Square Garden) and worked as a Hollywood wrangler before moving to the Reno area where he was first an employee and later an owner of riding stables. In 1937 he nearly lost his life to a gunshot wound after an altercation over a woman. A Reno newspaper gave him a one in a thousand chance of surviving.

After being stationed in San Francisco during World War II, Harry came back to Reno where he owned the Mt. Rose guest ranch. There he met Joan Abry Deeley, a former New York model with a pilot's license who was working as a hostess while she obtained a divorce. Harry, by then, was managing the Pyramid Lake Guest Ranch where he also began breeding horses, raising thoroughbreds and quarter horses for both racing and dude ranching. Joan eventually went to work there as a hostess. They were married in 1950. During 40 years of marriage the Drackerts managed three guest ranches and a retail Indian crafts store. Harry continued to breed and race his horses, was a founder of the Reno Rodeo and long-time president of the Reno Rodeo Association. Joan became a



competitive trap shooter and art promoter, with a passion for southwestern, Native American, and Mexican art. Materials in the Drackert collection document all of their business and personal interests, and are particularly strong in telling the story of the divorce ranch industry.



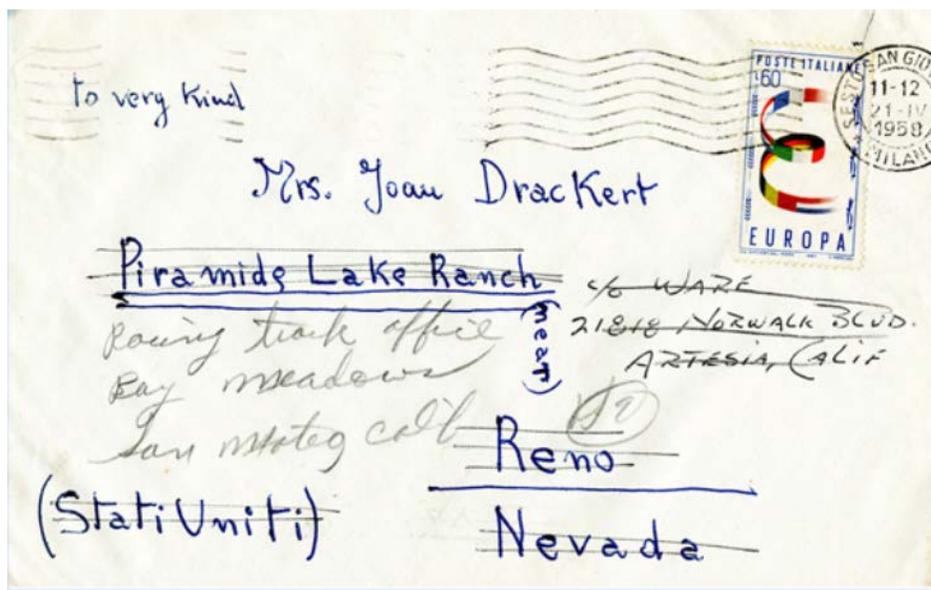
In a folder of letters from the 1950s in Joan’s files is a glamorous newspaper photo of her. It was enclosed with a charming letter from a 30-year-old Italian man, Egidio Borghi, in an envelope that was forwarded twice and seems to have been delivered at the Bay Meadows race track in San Mateo, California. Joan’s photo accompanied an article in an Italian news publication, *Tempo* or *Il Tempo*. Information about how the photo and Joan’s story reached Italy is divulged in “The Mustang Buzzers I,” an article by A. J. Liebling in *The New Yorker*, April 3, 1954. Liebling wrote about his stay at the Pyramid Lake guest ranch the previous year with his new wife, when they tagged along on a wild horse roundup. Some think that his two-part *New Yorker* article was the impetus for Arthur Miller’s stay at Pyramid Lake and the genesis of his story in *Esquire*, “The Misfits.” But that is another story. We will focus on an Italian journalist in Liebling’s article who took the story of Joan Drackert to an Italian audience.

At Pyramid Lake, Liebling made the acquaintance of an Italian journalist, Lamberti Sorrentino,. As he explains in “The Mustang Buzzers,” Lamberti was pursuing a grand investigation on the topic “The Far West of the Cinema — It Exists, or No?” As a guest of the State Department, he had initially met in Washington D.C. with Senator Pat McCarran, who recommended that he visit Virginia City and provided him a letter of introduction. As Liebling reports, however, “One look at Virginia City convinced Lamberti that the Far West of the cinema was a myth. But he had found what he considered one good story in a nearby mining town called Yerington, which still has a legalized red-light district: ‘A Brothel in Puritan America—What Is It Like? Sensational reportage of our special correspondent Lamberti.’”



A.J. Liebling of *The New Yorker* and his bride, Lucille (in the dark dress) in Virginia City with the painter Zoray Andrus and her son, Peter Kraemer, who would grow up to be the lead singer in *The Sopwith Camel*. Lin Butterfield is on the right.

After that, a “sympathetic woman painter” in Virginia City (who was most likely Zoray Andrus) suggested that he connect with Liebling, who spoke French, so the two met and investigated “the Far West” together at Harry and Joan Drackerts’ ranch. Both journalists wrote about their experiences during that time. Joan and the ranch were featured in *Tempo* or *Il Tempo* and captured the imagination of the young man Egidio Borghi.



Sesto - Italy  
April, 20<sup>th</sup> - 1958

Dear Madam Joan,  
having seen in an Italian  
great magazine your photo, I beg to apply  
to you asking whether you will kindly  
listen me.

I beg to introduce you myself:  
I am an Italian boy, named Egidio (do  
you like this name? - I like Joan because my  
first love was Giovanna (Engl. Joan), 30<sup>(thirty)</sup> years  
old, 69 inches height - I am a bachelor  
and my great desire should be to come  
in America, and to marry an American  
woman, also is beautiful, but interesting,  
also separated, but affectionated.

Will you, Mrs. Joan help me saying  
this to your lodgers eh? When I come to  
Piramide Lake I'll give you a kiss.

Up, Mrs. Joan, remember me sometimes.

1951 - 1952

Thanking you in advance for your  
kindness, I close looking forward  
to hearing from you soon.

I am yours respectfully

Egidio Borghi

The way leading my house is:

Egidio Borghi  
Picardi 143 - Sesto San Giovanni,  
Milano - Italy.

let us hope

Could he be the same Egidio Borghi who currently lives in Las Vegas, according to online sources? If so, did he find a beautiful and interesting American woman to marry, and was he able to give Joan Drackert a kiss? These questions call for further investigation. The Italian article inspired another young man, from Switzerland, to inquire about a job. Joan's files include that letter, with enclosed photos of the applicant and her encouraging response. Later photographs show a man of similar appearance in a group of divorce seekers and "dude wranglers." Another line of inquiry is open for pursuit.



A news article on page 10 of the *Nevada State Journal*, November 12, 1953 (left) helped to fill in some of the gaps in the story. We would love to track down those 1950s articles about Nevada in *Tempo* and *Il Tempo*, but so far, our attempts have been unsuccessful. And we have yet to find evidence that Lamberti wrote his book on the "pioneer life and spirit in America."

More information:

[A Guide to the Records of Harry and Joan Drackert:](#) Collection No. 91-49, Special Collections, UNR Libraries (10 cubic feet)

[Photo guide: UNRS-P1993-01: Drackert Collection,](#) Special Collections, UNR Libraries (3,297 images)