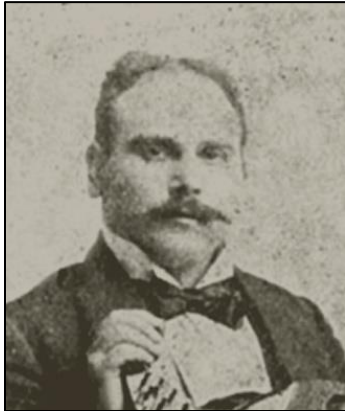


## Emilio and Emily Calamara: A Tale of Two Musicians

*Sheri Mignano Crawford*



It is not an unusual story when two musicians fall in love but this is a tale of two musicians with successful careers and intertwined lives that did not end well. The unraveling of their world and how they became estranged has been shrouded in mystery. Even their contributions and accomplishments have remained mostly unknown and underappreciated. It begins with a well-respected harp guitarist who fell in love with a married woman who taught



mandolin. A young handsome Italian immigrant Emilio Calamara encountered a regal bourgeois American woman with roots allegedly dating back to the American Revolution. Emily Regina Jeanette “Nettie” Welch, née Macomber and Signore Calamara both excelled at being the best in their fields and associated with the finest musicians, received stellar recognition from their peers and in particular, from a fellow Chicagoan, luthier Joseph Bohmann. In exchange for solicited endorsements and testimonials, their reciprocal arrangement with Bohmann expected that they performed on his musical instruments. As his stable of musicians grew, Bohmann greatly amplified his prestige and standing among luthiers and musicians. It is no different today when a manufacturer and a musician agree upon mutually satisfying benefits. Emilio and Nettie Calamara were not naïve about the stress-related pressures associated with brand loyalty; however, in the course of their marriage and professional careers, other decisions ultimately damaged their marital and professional partnership. And in the end, they would pay dearly.

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In the autumn of 1872 Gregorio Calamara and his son Emilio departed from the port of Gibraltar on the *Ismailia* and arrived at Castle Garden.<sup>1</sup> Their last residence had been Siracusa, Sicily. They settled on Third Avenue in Manhattan where Emilio’s father worked as a tailor for several years. In 1880, he opened a barbershop; his two teenaged sons, 18-year-old Leopoldo and 16-year-old Emilio, became barbers as well.<sup>2</sup> However, Emilio was destined to be a musician specializing on the harp guitar. Having progressed with his music studies at a young age, he left home and joined a traveling ensemble. As with many talented young men of his generation, he rode the wave of itinerant musical ensembles. Often, these groups of musicians were referred to as the generic “Spanish Students.”

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<sup>1</sup> Gregorio and Emilio arrived on November 12, 1872. See <http://www.castlegarden.org>

<sup>2</sup> The ship’s roster recorded Emilio’s age as six years old when he immigrated; other official documents corroborate his birth year as either 1865 or 1866. U.S. Census 1900 indicates he was born April 1865. His sister, Josephine, was born in New York, 1877. An 11-year-old Leopoldo and an 8-year old Bernardo arrived together in 1875. In the 1880 United States Census, the census taker identified a 24-year-old “Maggie” as Gregorio’s wife but she is too young to be the mother of teenage boys and may have been a live-in housekeeper. Emilio’s marriage certificate identifies Camilla Courpanclis as Emilio’s mother, and her first name “Camilla” appears on Emilio’s death certificate.

Sometimes newspapers identified them as the “Roman Students” or “La Estudiantina” among many appellations. They shared other comparable designations and repertoire and it was easy for audiences to conflate their names with the original “band of students” out of Western Europe.

One of the most famous American groups named the original “Spanish Students” was under the direction of Maestro Carlo Curti (1859-1926). They dressed in gaucho-style costumes and were a huge hit. A few of its members went on to have renowned careers as music teachers, composers, and performing artists.<sup>3</sup> For example, Carlo Colombo took over Curti’s job after he stopped touring and launched a successful career in Mexico. In 1885, when Emilio was only just becoming an established guitarist, he joined a traveling ensemble and became a part of a music circuit similar to Chautauqua. The band of eight musicians, mainly mandolinists, were attired in appropriate Neapolitan costumes calling themselves the “Students of Pompeii” or [sic] “Studiantino Pompeans.”<sup>4</sup> These kinds of splinter groups were spawned due to the unprecedented popularity of the original “Spanish Students.”

After a brief time entertaining as a traveling musician, Calamara had forged a few friendships with fellow musicians such as the Valisi brothers. Eventually, living out of a suitcase was not as appealing as it seemed and the musicians returned home to begin careers as teachers and performers. Some were able to benefit from domestic stability and regular concert schedules which eventually brought a modicum of fame and fortune.<sup>5</sup> Calamara began concertizing with Cesare Valisi and joined Valisi’s mandolin orchestra around 1884-1885.<sup>6</sup> After a peripatetic lifestyle, all the young men looked forward to building a comfortable way of life in the booming city of Chicago.

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Bohmann provided some of these names in his circular (see figure 1). Readers should be concerned about Bohmann’s veracity. He seemed to tell the truth only when it served him best. That said, out of the six musicians he listed as members of Curti’s “Spanish Students,” evidence corroborates that five are easily confirmed: Anacleto Montanelli, from Pescia, composer, soloist, & inventor (1864-1931); Carlo Colombo (1848-1918) composer and soloist, fronted Curti’s group after he left, and started a splinter group called the “Venetian Troubadours” billed as “similar to the Spanish Students”; Luigi Ricca (1855-1917) whose famous Manhattan factory produced Neapolitan bowlbacks; Giuseppe Valisi and brother Cesare managed Chicago’s Florentine Mandolin Orchestra after they returned from touring; and Salvatore P. Fachutar, (1858 -1939). The sixth member mentioned by Bohmann is Calamara. One objection to including him as a “Spanish Student” is his age. If he toured in Curti’s first year (1881) he would have been about 16 years old. The question remains: why would Bohmann invent Calamara’s membership with Curti’s group? Perhaps Bohmann conflated Calamara’s membership in the “Students of Pompeii” with Curti’s group. Other touring members, Domenico Tipaldi and Vincent Leon, were well known and served as a nexus to others. See *Guitar Heroes*, p.19; Paul Sparks’ *Classical Mandolin*, p.27. Compare Scott Hambley’s *Mandolins in the United States Since 1880*. PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1977. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1977. 82-83. For a more detailed analysis as to the origin of the “Spanish Students”, see Paul Rupp’s “Spanish Students Stop Traffic in Paris.” *American Lutherie*, No. 13, Fall 2017. pp.44-49.

<sup>4</sup> “Chickering Hall.” *New York Herald*, 5 May 1885. p.9, col.6. A list of musicians with last names only are identified as eight (8) mandolinists “in costume” and billed as the “Students of Pompeii.” Tocaben (aka Tobani), Ricca, Pietro, the Tipaldi brothers, Carmine, Calamara and Albonico.

<sup>5</sup> “Signore Cesare Valisi”, *Columbian Exposition & World’s Fair Illustrated*. Chicago: Compiled by Columbian Engraving & Publishing Company, 1893. p.121. According to this souvenir book, Valisi was born near Milan in 1861. See the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 May 1880 which describes the “Spanish Students” as 14 musicians with 4 guitars but no names are used to identify the members.

<sup>6</sup> The 1884 date is based on Valisi’s Tenth Anniversary circular published for the 1894-1895 season. Courtesy of Bruce Hammond. Cf. “Sons of America” *Inter Ocean*, December 7, 1890. p.31, col. 2-3. Cesare Valisi & Calamara performed duets at a Masonic event.

The Gilded Age of the 1890s was a prosperous decade with ballrooms filled with the glitterati and plenty of opportunities for musicians to entertain them in their lavish parlors. The events leading up to Chicago's Columbian Exposition provided even more opportunities for musicians to locate in Chicago. It offered a thriving environment with opera and the theatre, and it showed off the world's first skyscraper. Its continental railroad hub brought wealth, European aristocrats and the American upper class to the shores of Lake Michigan. It attracted European-born, classically-trained musicians and luthiers to rub shoulders with the new patrons of the arts. Credentials meant a great deal to Chicago's upper crust.

According to Joseph Bohmann whose family launched a musical instrument factory in Chicago around 1876 the best musicians were bred on the Viennese orchestral tradition. He claimed to have apprenticed in Vienna and modeled his musical instruments after the finest European examples.<sup>7</sup> He and his father founded one of the earliest musical instrument factories and manufactured all the members of the violin family. And in a few short years, Bohmann added the mandolin family, banjos, guitars, harp guitars, and zithers.<sup>8</sup> While he boasted that he alone produced the most superior musical instruments, his self-congratulatory statements of praise are still considered highly debatable.

A relentless self-promoter, Bohmann's zeal at being "the first" and "the most celebrated" produced claims to fame which he published in his circulars. He pronounced himself the leader in his field and even offered rewards in thousands of dollars to anyone who could prove that his instruments were not the best. Unintimidated by much larger competitors, he began to cultivate a faithful following among musicians. In a printed circular filled with photographs of musicians, he argued that the "Celebrated Joseph Bohmann Mandolins" were superior to all others. He openly criticized the so-called sub-standard instruments used by the "Spanish Students" and offered to repair them but to no avail. It was all a part of his promotional blitz in which he mocked their performances as "...laughable, as their instruments possessed no tone."<sup>9</sup> In exchange for surrendering their "worthless" instruments, he gained their endorsements and loyalty. If Emilio had briefly traveled with Curti, as Bohmann claimed, it is impossible to know how long or with what instrument(s). Loyalty dictated that Bohmann's promotions would award them celebrity status and that is how they were compensated—by the use of their names. Calamara had much to consider in this new role as an artist and as an independent musician in Chicago but he joined the growing list of Bohmann musicians hoping it would pay off.

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<sup>7</sup>A.T. (Alfred Theodore) Andreas, *History of Chicago, Vol. 3*. Chicago: R.R. Donnelly & Sons, Lakeside Press, 1886. pp. 653-654. According to Andreas, Bohmann was born in [sic] "Neinmart," Austria (probably Neumarkt, apprenticed in Vienna from 1860 to 1864 (from twelve to sixteen years of age) followed by six months in Bavaria, concluding with his arrival in America, November 1865. Various accounts hold inconsistencies but only one entry is noted for Joseph Bohmann at Castle Garden on October 24, 1868 aboard the Hansa from the port of Bremen. Bohmann's parents arrived in 1872.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.harpguitars.net/history/bohmann/bohmann1.htm> Others claim his birthplace as Neumarkt, Bohemia (now Utery, Czech Republic). We know he was literate in German; in addition, his earliest advertisements touted him as having arrived from Vienna where he apparently received his training. See *Chicago Tribune*, "Musical Instruments," 20 December 1880. p.7, col.6.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Bohmann, "Celebrated Joseph Bohmann Mandolins." Chicago, Ill. No Date, probably first published in 1896 and reprinted in 1899 (see figure 1).

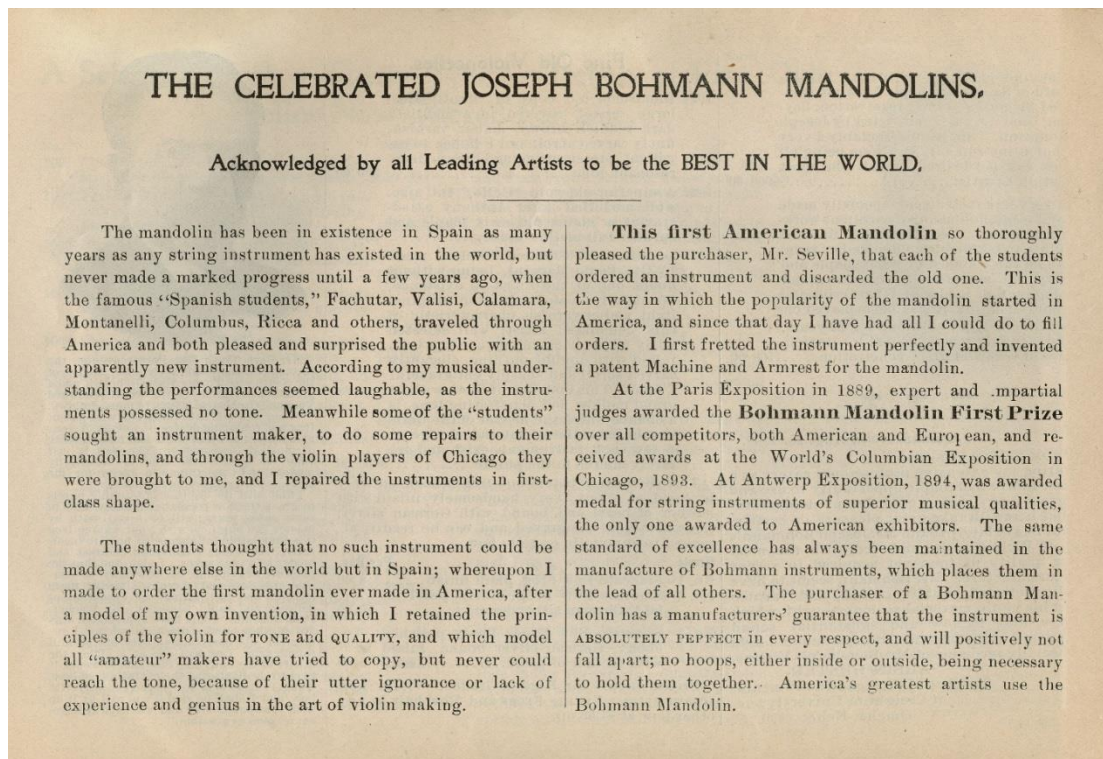


FIG. 1. Bohmann claimed to having worked on what he declared were “inferior” instruments belonging to Curti’s “Spanish Students.” (Courtesy of Bruce Hammond)

In January 1890, the patriarch of the Calamara family died and may have left Emilio and his older brother to provide for their mother (if she was still alive) and sibling.<sup>10</sup> It was around this time that his life dramatically changed when he met Nettie Welch, a mandolinist, previously married. Emilio traveled to Marinette, Wisconsin where they were married on May 23, 1891.<sup>11</sup> Nettie’s seven-year-old daughter Erma Orphia lived mostly with her maternal grandmother, Jane Macomber in Negaunee. The Calamaras set up a music studio in Chicago and even when Erma’s name appeared as his daughter on census rosters, Emilio never legally adopted her and she remained Erma Welch.<sup>12</sup> This arrangement with Nettie’s mother allowed both parents to explore their musical careers without the encumbrance.

<sup>10</sup> "New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:2WDS-45M> : 10 February 2018), Gregorio Calamara, 08 Jan 1890; citing Death, Manhattan, New York, New York, United States, New York Municipal Archives, New York; FHL microfilm 1,322,678. He was buried in Calvary Cemetery, Queens.


<sup>11</sup> "Wisconsin, County Marriages, 1836-1911," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XRPS-S5G> : 16 March 2018), Sig Emilio Calamara and Emily A Welch, 23 May 1891; citing, Marinette, Wisconsin, United States, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison; FHL microfilm 1,292,021. Note: The author cannot confirm Nettie’s divorce from Welch but several newspaper accounts in August 1890 describe a Victor Welch, about 30 years from Marquette, WI, who was run over by a train and lost both legs below the knees and his left hand. He managed to survive; however, he died in the Chicago Hospital for the Incurables in 1916. “Run Over By a Central Train.” *Auburn Bulletin*, 11 August 1890, np. Some accounts state that he would not live. It is entirely possible that Nettie thought he was killed but it does not answer the question as to whether she had received a divorce before she married Emilio.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census, 6 June 1900. A second music studio was in their home at 3156 Forest Avenue, South Chicago. Emilio was born April 1865, Jeanette in August 1861 and her daughter, March 1883.



The Calamaras were free from parental responsibilities and worked together to build upon their reputations right from the beginning. They took out regular advertisements for their North Side Chicago music studio located at 3148 Indiana Avenue. In the *Chicago Tribune* they described themselves as “artistic” teachers for “mandolin, guitar and banjo.” In addition to private lessons, they had joined the music faculty at the Chicago Conservatory of Music. Emily taught mandolin and Emilio, the guitar. Because of the same last name and a first name initial as well, it was essential to distinguish them. As a result, Emily only used “Mme. N.” or “Nettie” in her professional career. Bohmann’s circular showed Nettie in a somewhat stern but regal profile as she proudly announced that his superior “mandolins and guitars are wonderful in their perfect scale and sweet tone.”<sup>13</sup>

The Famous Joseph Bohmann Guitars,  
Style 2.




No. 2. Rosewood and finest birdseye and curly maple. Single bound edge, with white imitation ivory binding, inlaid sound hole, mahogany neck, dark rosewood, oval fingerboard, pearl position dots and highest finish, with Bohmann patent machine head. With aluminum eyelets round pins and patent bridge.

	Maple	Rosewood
Standard size.....	\$34.00	\$28.00
Concert size.....	30.00	34.00
Grand Concert size....	36.00	40.00

No discount from above prices.

Remember, the Bohmann guitars are fully guaranteed against warping and cracking and are not warranted for one year, but for a life time. See them. Hear them. Try them and you will buy no other. The Bohmann patent bridge is durable, convenient and decidedly improves the tone of the instrument.



The Bohmann mandolins and guitars are wonderful in their perfect scale and sweet tone. I could not recommend any other make to my pupils.

MME. NETTIE R. CALAMARA,  
with Chicago Conservatory of Music,  
3156 Forest Ave., Chicago.

FIG. 2. Nettie Calamara endorsed Bohmann guitars and mandolins. (Courtesy of Bruce Hammond)

In 1892, Nettie’s new freedom yielded several published and copyrighted arrangements for mandolin and guitar which appeared in the music catalog of John Church.<sup>14</sup> She switched from that Cincinnati publisher to Chicago’s National Music Company and continued to arrange; however, those later arrangements were mainly vaudevillian songs that had achieved success on stage and in the parlor.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Op Cit. Bohmann circular, Np.

<sup>14</sup> *Catalog of Title Entries*, Vol. 3, Nos. 53-78. July-December, 1892. Washington, D.C: Library of Congress. She published and copyrighted five titles, her earliest arrangements) John Church but the majority of her arrangements were with National Music Co.

<sup>15</sup> Nettie arranged some polkas and waltzes such as Carlo Curti’s “La Tipica” and Juventino Rosas’ “La Cantinera” and “Sobre Los Olas” (“Over the Waves”). However, most of her arrangements were songs destined for vaudeville: “The Man who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo” “My Sweetheart’s the Man in the Moon,” and “The Skirt” a popular song for the burlesque show “Faust up to Date.”

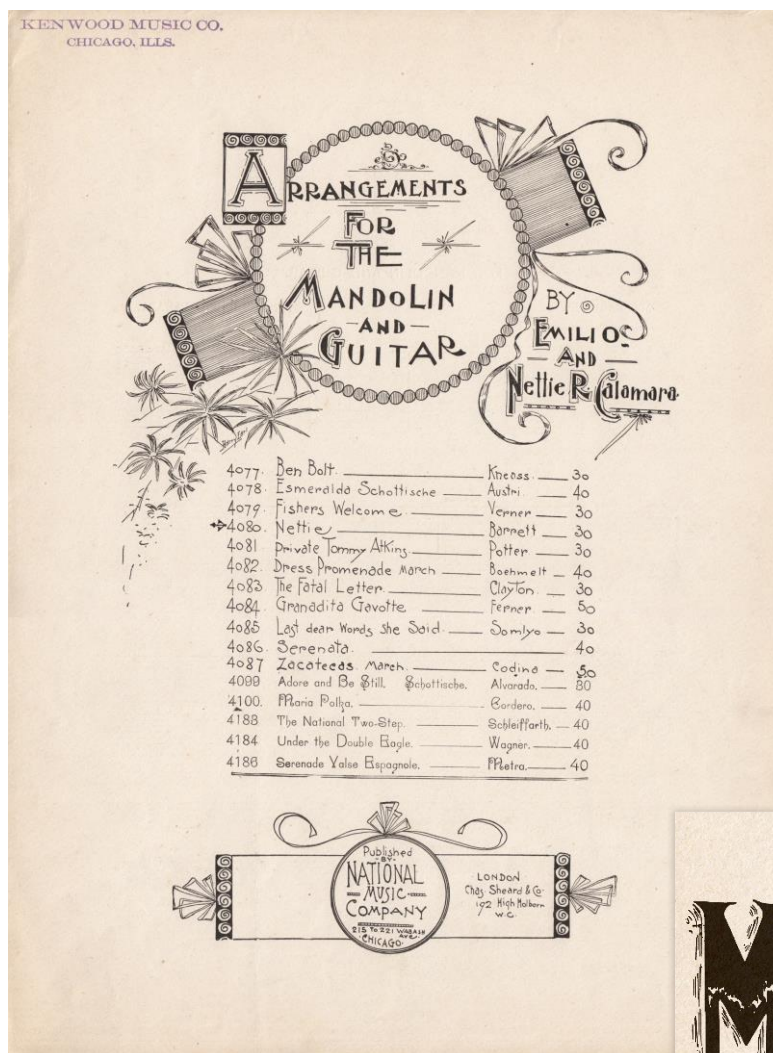


FIG. 2A. Emilio and Nettie R. Calamara arranged a wide variety of dances and songs National Music Company. In 1892 Joseph Barrett's "Nettie" was arranged by Emilio and published with National Music Co., and with the London music publisher Charles Sheard & Co. (Courtesy of Michael Reichenbach)

It seemed that two years of productivity soon ceased and it was her husband's turn to be creative. His mandolin and guitar arrangements derived from the classical realm and as a house arranger of operatic and classical music, his collection of arrangements for mandolin and guitar showed his skills in adapting operatic scores. He concentrated on Donizetti, Verdi, Rossini, Gounod, Wagner, and Meyerbeer. In 1897, Calamara introduced "Gems from Popular Operas" and they received a fairly glib mention in *The Cadenza*, a bi-monthly periodical serving mandolin, banjo, and guitar players. The publisher declared they were the "...best ever produced for the price."<sup>16</sup> Not exactly a rave review!

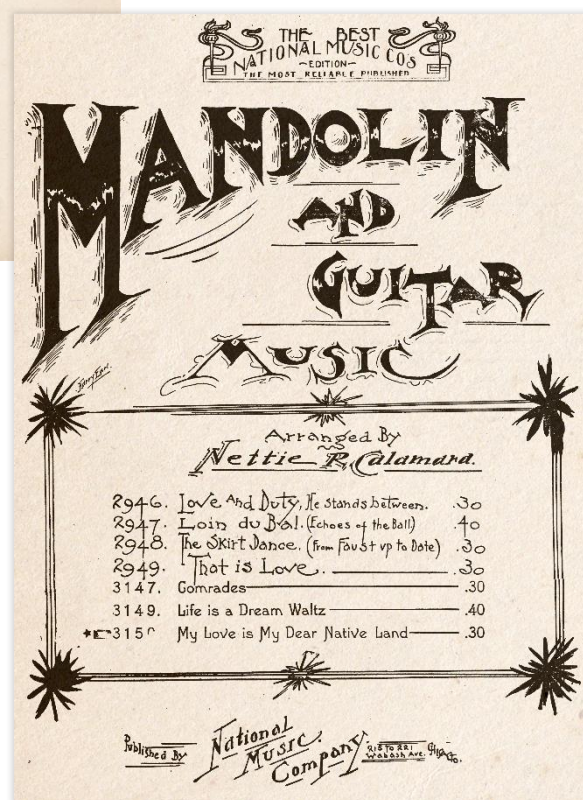


FIG. 2B. In 1892 and 1893, Nettie arranged vaudevillian songs for mandolin and guitar with a major music publisher John Church. (Courtesy of Michael Reichenbach)

<sup>16</sup> Clarence L. Partee, Editor. *The Cadenza*, "Publishers' Notes", Vol. 4, No. 1, September-October 1897. 17. Note: Partee performed on mandolin and praised Joseph Bohmann instruments. The title pages for Calamara's operatic arrangements show him posed with a Bohmann harp guitar.



Emilio would never publish any more arrangements but had cultivated a full-time performance and teaching schedule. Having grown up in America, his English was probably as good as any kid graduating from a New York public school and this bilingual fluency enabled him to appeal to the parents of American-born music students and to easily communicate during music lessons. His musical colleagues Cesare and Giuseppe Valisi had not arrived until the early 1880s but they opened a music school in the late 1880s. It served as a feeder school to the Valisi orchestras.<sup>17</sup> Calamara worked out of Valisi's music studio in Chicago's Chickering Hall where young men could be vetted for future employment.<sup>18</sup> As a guitar teacher and colleague of the Valisi brothers, he started to garner even greater visibility.



FIG. 4. Emilio Calamara's business card indicated a close association with Valisi in shared studio space. (Courtesy of Bruce Hammond)

**Chicago Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art**

America's Leading School of Music

**Auditorium Building**  
Bernhard Ulrich  
Manager

**B**EGS to announce the opening of the last term of the present season, with a corps of artist instructors unsurpassed in America. The special advantages offered to students CANNOT BE EQUALLED ELSEWHERE.

Instructors for Clarinet, Oboe, French Horn, Trombone, Contra Bass, and other wood and brass instruments are also in the Conservatory. A corps of additional assistant teachers in all departments.

A special feature is the number of high-class musical and dramatic entertainments given each year by the Conservatory. This season there will be sixty entertainments, all of which are free to the students and their friends. Send for Illustrated Catalogue. Pupils can enter at any time.

**BERNHARD ULRICH, Manager.**

**.....FACULTY.....**

<b>PIANO</b> Leopold Godowsky Frederic Grant Gleason Ella Dahl Robert Stevens Julia Canthers Maurice Aronson Rose Case-Haywood Mamie L. Sherratt Howard Wells	<b>VIOLIN</b> Theodore B. Spiering Otto Roehrborn Wilhelm Diestel <b>VIOLONCELLO</b> Herman Diestel <b>HARP</b> Clara Murray <b>FLUTE</b> Otto Helms <b>CORNET</b> John Quinn <b>MANDOLIN</b> N. Calamara Antonio Tomaso <b>GUITAR</b> E. Calamara	<b>SIGHT READING, Accompanying and Coaching</b> Amey Major Maud Goodrich <b>FOREIGN LANGUAGES</b> French, Italian, German, Spanish, by native teachers <b>ELOCUTION, PHYSICAL CULTURE, ORATORY</b> S. H. Clark Ora Lavon Haines Jessie Lee Newlin Agnes S. Thomson <b>STAGE TRAINING</b> Edward Dvorak
<b>VOCAL</b> Max Heinrich Hermas L. Walker Beatrice M. Peixotto Kate Condon <b>ORGAN</b> Clarence Eddy Wilhelm Middelbach <b>HARMONY, Counterpoint, Composition, Orchestration</b> Frederic Grant Gleason		

FIG. 3. Chicago Conservatory of Music regularly advertised and promoted its music faculty. Mandolin instructors were N. (Nettie) Calamara and Antonio Tomaso. Guitar, E. (Emilio) Calamara.

In 1890, plans were already underway for the upcoming Chicago Columbian Exposition; it became a phenomenal international success that created jobs and elevated the status of Chicago on the global stage. In October 1892, dedication ceremonies were held in preparation for its grand opening to the public in May, 1893. As special guests and dignitaries promenaded and took their places in the dining hall, Valisi's Mandolin Orchestra created the right ambience. At least three mandolin ensembles feted foreign visitors, dignitaries and guests.<sup>19</sup> Soirées at the homes of the Exposition's VIPs were sure to engage mandolinists and guitarists seeking connections and well-paying jobs.

<sup>17</sup> Cesare Valisi arrived with Carlo and Ferdinando Colombo on the *Amerique* in 1880 and Cesare's brother Giuseppe arrived soon after.

<sup>18</sup> *Chicago Blue Book of Selected Names of Chicago & Suburban Towns*, Chicago Directory Company, 1890. 735. The advertisement identifies E. [sic] Calormara and C. Valisi School at 21 Chickering Hall.

<sup>19</sup> *Dedicatory & Opening Ceremonies of the World's Columbian Exposition*, Chicago, IL: Stone Kastler & Painter Pub., 1893. 241 & 254. Antonio Tomaso and Nettie taught mandolin at the Conservatory. Antonio's brother Salvatore founded Tomaso Mandolin School in 1886 and directed his own orchestra. The Tomaso brothers performed in Cesare Valisi's orchestra; it is possible that Nettie and Emilio met through the brothers.

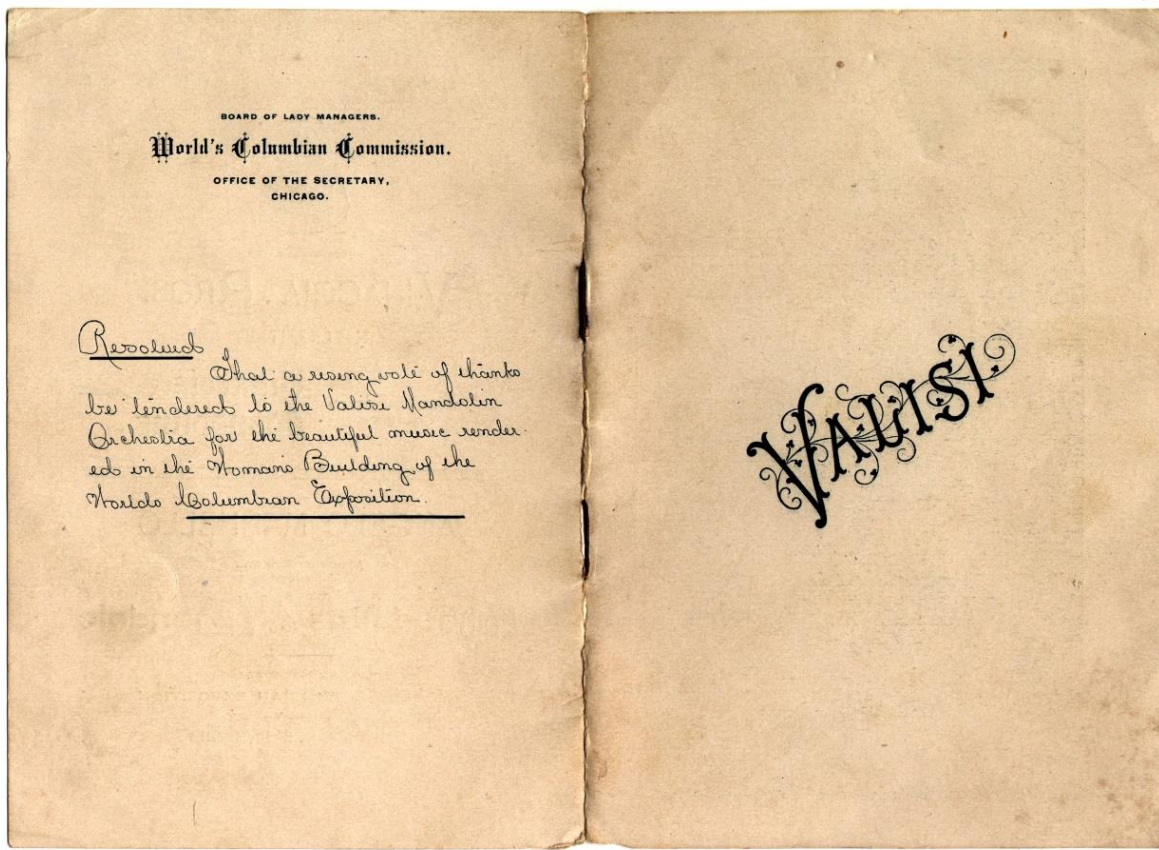


FIG. 5. Official note of appreciation from the Board of Lady Managers to Valisi's Florentine Mandolin Orchestra at the Columbian Exposition. (Courtesy of Bruce Hammond)

The Exposition's music hall displayed musical instruments from around the world and those manufactured by Chicago's Joseph Bohmann. He had just announced he had earned First Prize at the Centennial Exposition in Paris in 1889.<sup>20</sup> Bohmann's international awards may not have always been Gold Medals or even First Prizes but he claimed them nevertheless.<sup>21</sup> In Chicago's Columbian Exposition's souvenir program, it acknowledged Bohmann's technical artistry as the reason behind

<sup>20</sup> Ed. Frank D. Abbot. *Musical Instruments at the World's Columbian Exposition*, Chicago: Presto Co., 1895. pp.163-164 and 248. The only Italian mandolin manufacturers represented at the 1893 exhibition were Neapolitan Nicolà [sic] Calaca and the Vinaccia Bros., and a Sicilian luthier from Palermo, Camillo di Leo. In all fairness, Bohmann recited a litany of mistreatments related to exhibiting at the Paris Exposition of 1889. First-hand interviews with American tourists who returned with souvenir programs from the Exposition declared that "his name (Bohmann) was not listed in the catalogue of American exhibits." In fact Bohmann admitted to having his application ignored and rejected for being late, and his space forfeited. Cf. *Sunday Inter Ocean*, "Musical Instruments" 12 January 1890, p.11. Bohmann sent his instruments to Paris via American Express in April 1889 with expected delivery to the pavilion in early May. He insinuated himself as a Gold Medal winner and apparently doctored a photograph of the medal showing his name imprinted on it. Bohmann devoted an entire page to his numerous awards and medals; however, a thorough search of the Parisian souvenir catalogs reveals only a Silver Medal awarded at the 1900 Paris Exposition.

<sup>21</sup> Bohmann and the Calace brothers received Silver Medals (Médailles d'Argent) in the *Liste Des Récompense Exposition Universelle de 1900*. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9765409t/f243.item.r=Calace>



the remarkable musical instrument factory.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of Bohmann's sometimes less than truthful approach to advertising his successes, Calamara and Bohmann reaped the benefits for many years to come.

After the exposition concluded and twenty-two years after he had first arrived in America, the "Guitar Virtuoso" earned the bona fide status as a Maestro. That honorary title was coupled with his new legal status as a citizen of the United States.<sup>23</sup> On October 19, 1894, Calamara became a naturalized citizen and gained greater respect in his community. Not only had he achieved academic ranking as a faculty member of Chicago's Conservatory of Music but he earned prominence in Cesare Valisi's Mandolin Orchestra (formerly the Florentine Mandolin Orchestra) and became a member of Signore Ernesto Libonati's Chicago Mandolin Orchestra.<sup>24</sup> Once again, Bohmann attributes these successful musicians to playing on his instruments.

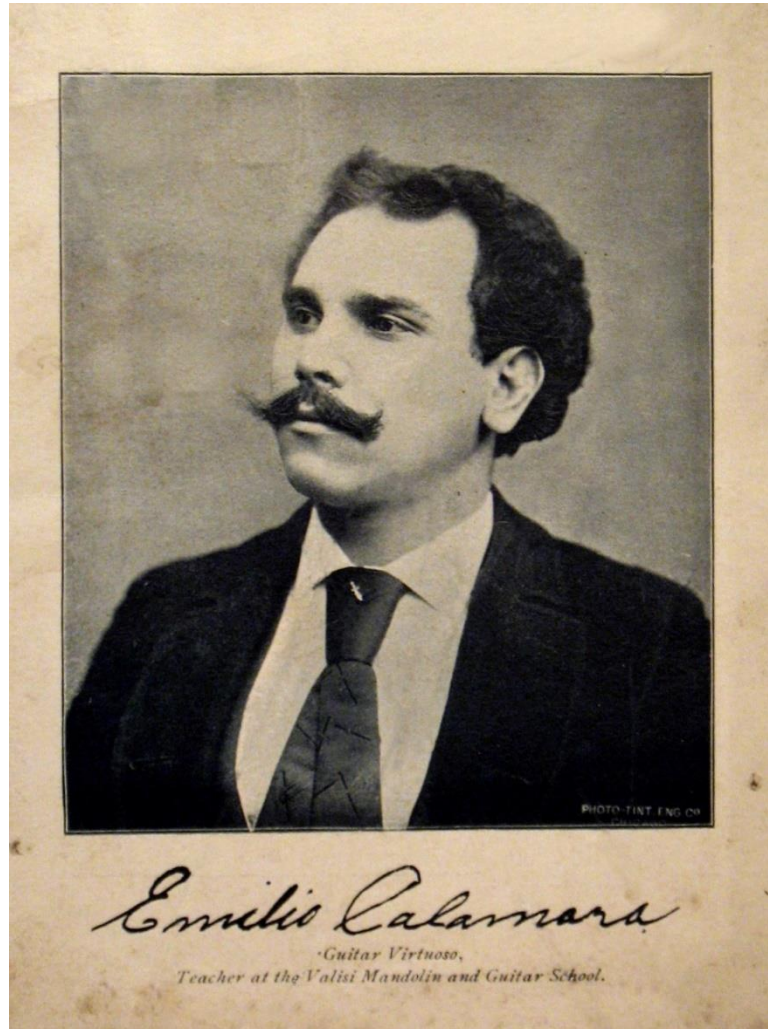


FIG. 6. Emilio Calamara posed for a Bohmann circular although the profile itself never appeared in Bohmann's advertisements.<sup>25</sup>  
(Courtesy of Bruce Hammond)

<sup>22</sup> *Columbian Exposition & World's Fair Illustrated*, Chicago: Compiled & Published by Columbia Engraving, 1893. 174. Bohmann's profile and earliest biography appear with his birth date as October 23, 1848 and birthplace in Neu-Mark, Pilsen, Austria. Author's note: Bohmann entry probably written and submitted by Bohmann.

<sup>23</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; *Soundex Index to Naturalization Petitions for the United States District and Circuit Courts, Northern District of Illinois and Immigration and Naturalization Service District 9, 1840-1950 (M1285)*; Microfilm Serial: M1285; Microfilm Roll: 32

<sup>24</sup> Cesare Valisi, and later, Ernesto Libonati (1860-1935) fronted the Chicago Mandolin Orchestra. If Calamara remained a member of the Orchestra into the early 1900s, the Orchestra functioned under the auspices of the "orchestral department" in Hans Balatka's Musical College. See Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, 9 September 1900, p.38.

<sup>25</sup> The original photo appeared to be taken when Calamara was about 30 (1895); the image originally displayed several large X's and marginalia that indicated Bohmann rejected its use for his circulars. Note: A friend of the author's, Michael Van Why, repaired the defaced image.

Whether or not every musician played Bohmann instruments, it was obvious that he cashed in on the notoriety of Calamara and others. Just as the mandolin tsunami hit Chicago, the charismatic charm and virtuosic talents of Italian musicians were used to attract new students who needed new instruments. To advertise the Valisi School, the Valisi brothers produced their own promotional circulars as marketing pamphlets.<sup>26</sup> These were distributed during concerts and after lessons to attract young men and women to buy an instrument (always offered as free loans while studying). Under the auspices and guidance of one of the members of the orchestra, students faithfully obeyed their teachers' recommendations and bought Bohmann instruments.



FIG. 7. Valisi's Mandolin Orchestra. Calamara is seated in front row, second from right, with an unidentified harp guitar.<sup>27</sup> (Courtesy of Bruce Hammond)

Calamara seemed entrenched in the branding game. He publicly affirmed that he only played Bohmann guitars and declared that he had “tried all Guitars...including those who claim to be the “Leaders” (Martin & Washburn)...but the “Joseph Bohmann [are] “The Best of All.”<sup>28</sup> That phrase, emphasized by Calamara's own underlined words, attests to the hyperbolic nature of Bohmann's

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Hammond, Telephone interview with author, 25 March 2019. In a letter, Cesare Valisi refers to these postcard size pamphlets as “circulars” distributed during concerts and at the music studios.

<sup>27</sup> Annual Announcement from the 1899 Bohmann circular featuring various musicians attesting to the superior quality of Bohmann musical instruments. Courtesy of Bruce Hammond. Note: This exact photograph appears under a different description and appears to be repurposed: “Rocco Altomare & Frank Hlavin Orchestra.” Altomare had his own school associated with Chicago's Balatka Academy.

<sup>28</sup> Emilio Calamara's handwritten endorsement on Joseph Bohmann's official business stationery. 30 December 1892. Courtesy of Bruce Hammond.



marketing strategy. Calamara attributed all his success to Bohmann in this sanctioned testimonial on the official stationery of the manufacturer. How much was dictated by Bohmann is impossible to say but the letter was dated to coincide close to the opening of the Columbian Exposition. It was only the beginning of Bohmann's prosperous decade as he was enjoying prolific sales in the catalogs of Montgomery Wards & Co. and Sears, Roebuck & Co.

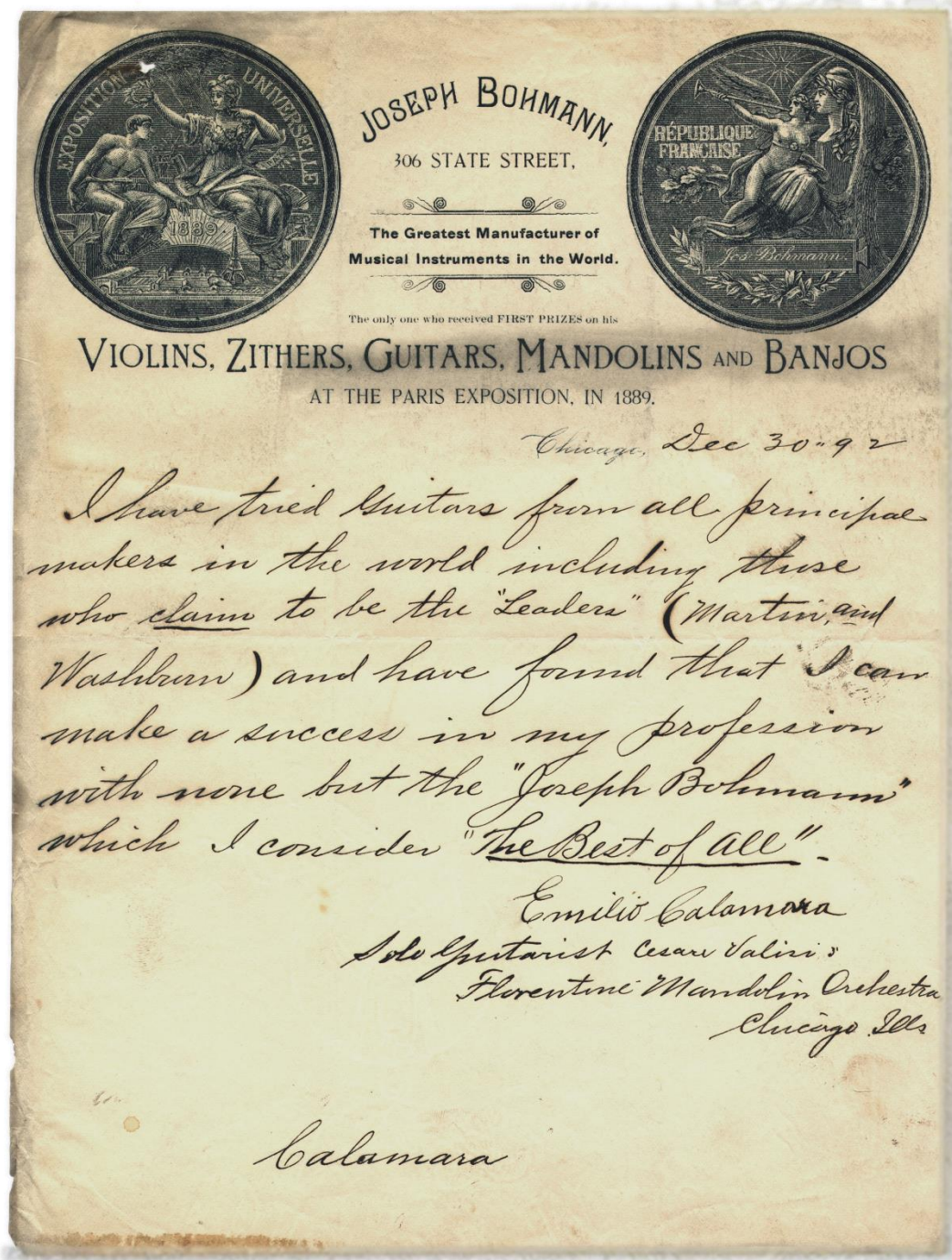


FIG. 8. Calamara's handwritten testimonial on Bohmann's stationery with its motto as the "Greatest Manufacturer of Musical Instruments in the World." Dated December 30, 1892. (Courtesy of Bruce Hammond)



With that signed affidavit, Calamara and Bohmann took on the elephant in the room: Lyon & Healy. Their Washburn parlor guitar had made its debut just as Calamara was promoting himself in the competitive world of performance.<sup>29</sup> His decision to choose Bohmann over Lyon & Healy was a bold move. Perhaps Calamara did not get the satisfaction he sought playing a Lyon & Healy guitar or perhaps a financial stipend assisted in the decision-making process. Considering that C.F. Martin and Lyon & Healy opened their factories before Bohmann, Calamara's endorsement became even more significant. It implied that Bohmann's brand answered to the highest cultural standards of Vienna and the birth of the classical tradition.<sup>30</sup> In other words, if musicians want to play the popular ragtime music, they do not need the best. Other (inferior) brands will do just fine. When Bohmann used musicians' written and spoken adoration, it implied that concert hall music only sounded great when played on the best instruments—his! This mutually beneficial agreement kept musicians supplied with his instruments and the manufacturer attained notoriety through well-known names.

Once Calamara's career improved, gaining some financial security, he began to enjoy more leisure time and ventured into the realm of the American parlor composers. He arranged mandolin trios (first mandolin, second mandolin and guitar) for the privacy of bourgeois middle-class homes. For example, his mandolin trio "Good Evening, Miss" is a feisty tango based on the piano score of Thomas J. Rohas.<sup>31</sup> Emilio's choice of instrumentation is one of the earliest examples of the mandolin trio. It heralded one of the most popular small ensemble formats in the relatively new dance genre known as *ballo liscio* (smooth dancing). Crediting him with being the "first" to arrange for mandolin trio is based on the fact that Italian music catalogs in America did not publish the mandolin trio format until late 1899.<sup>32</sup>

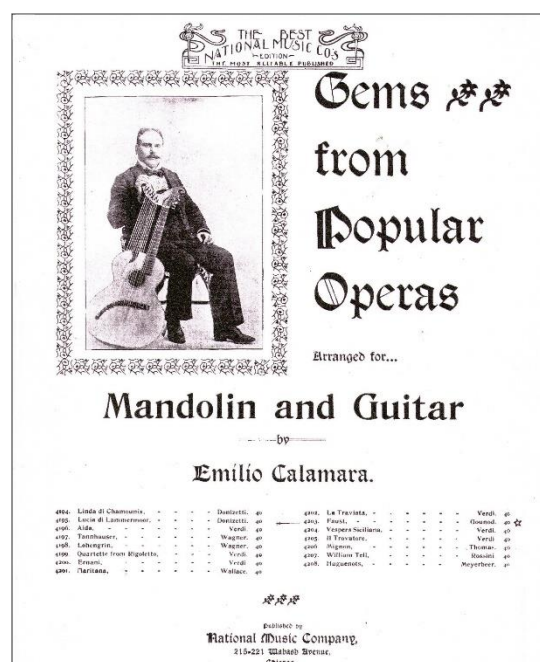


FIG. 9. Calamara posed with Bohmann's Contra Bass Harp Guitar for the 1897 publication of his operatic arrangements. (Courtesy of Norman Giorno-Calapristi)

<sup>29</sup>Washburn is Lyon's middle name and the guitar was named for that reason.

<sup>30</sup> Year: 1880; Census Place: Chicago, Cook, Illinois; Roll: 197; Page: 84B; Enumeration District: 158. The census does not tell us which specific instruments they built but both Joseph and his father William "made musical instruments."

<sup>31</sup> The Rohas' piano score of "Moonlight Serenade" (1894) is housed in the presidential library of Rutherford B. Hayes.

<sup>32</sup> The author directs the reader to her most recent publication, *Italian Mandolin Heroes in America*, to learn more about the Italian dance tradition.

In 1898, a devastating fire destroyed the contents of the five-story building that housed the Calamara's publisher, the National Music Company; its Wabash Avenue headquarters never fully recovered. While it did open a storefront in Manhattan at 41 West 28<sup>th</sup> Street, within two years of the fire, the Windsor Music Company had moved into the Wabash premises, and a few years later, Wurlitzer was manufacturing musical instruments in the building. Calamara must have been resourceful in bouncing back from the company's woes. By 1899, a Virginia music publisher sold Emilio's and Nettie's arrangements in its *Gem Catalog of Standard Sheet Music*. The Calamaras' arrangements were saved from extinction.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of these setbacks, Emilio and Nettie remained fully engaged in Chicago. Working in partnership with Chicago's South Side School, they taught mandolin, guitar, violin and banjo and privately operated "Calamara's Mandolin School." This new endeavor in the South Side neighborhood provided opportunities for their more advanced students to perform in "Calamara's Mandolin Orchestra." Emilio was its Director and Nettie handled the business angle becoming its Manager.<sup>34</sup> It seemed that their combined abilities and separate responsibilities solidified their professional standing but that would change.

The new century presented a mixed bag of opportunities and disappointments. Until 1900, Nettie and Emilio had benefited from their endorsements of Bohmann's musical instruments. There is no way to know how or when a falling out took place; however, by May 1901, Emilio had switched his allegiance from Bohmann to another musical instrument maker. Posing with a harp guitar supposedly manufactured by Henry J. Flower, Emilio appeared in the "Mayflower Music Catalog" endorsing Flowers' harp guitars. He attested to their tone as "rich and powerful, scale perfect, action easy, workmanship unequalled." He goes on to further praise its mandolins as "without a doubt the best Mandolins made. Tone is marvelous, workmanship perfect." He claimed that all his purchases had been more than satisfactory for his "friends and pupils."<sup>35</sup>

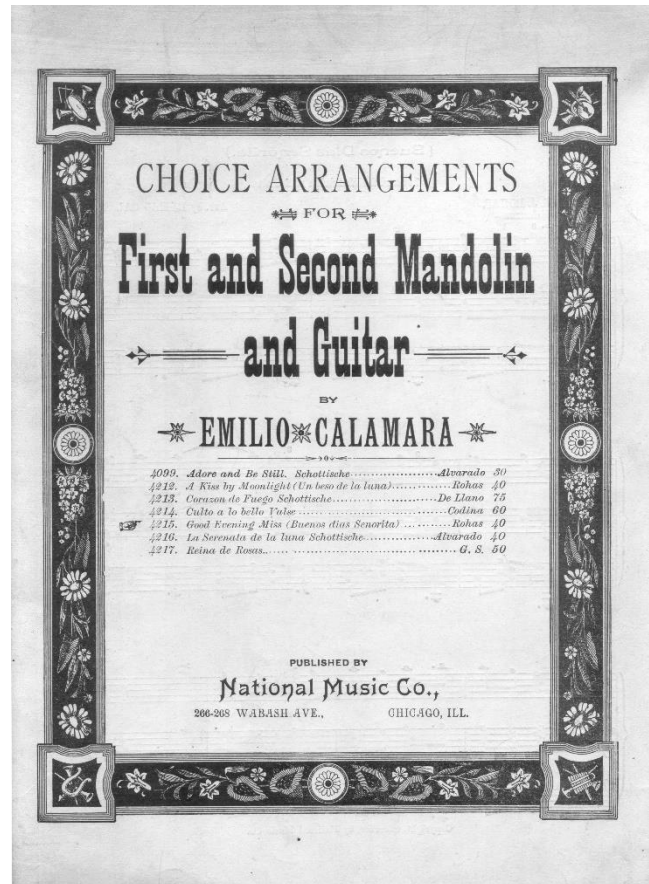


FIG. 10. "Choice Arrangements" represents a collection of dances of which Calamara's title is arguably the earliest published and copyrighted mandolin trio in America. (Author's library)

<sup>33</sup> Calamara arrangements were sold in R.E. Knight's music catalog, a well-known stationer and news dealer, who worked out of King Street in Alexandria, Virginia. When viewing this catalog, note that only those titles with "Arr. E. Calamara" refer to Emilio's arrangements. The remaining entries with "Arr. Calamara" refer to Nettie's.

<sup>34</sup> "Instruction" *Chicago Tribune*, October 2, 1898. p.27.

<sup>35</sup> Photograph of Calamara in "Mayflower Music Catalog," courtesy of Jim Garber. See Miner's website. <http://www.harpguitars.net/history/bohmann/bohmann1.htm>

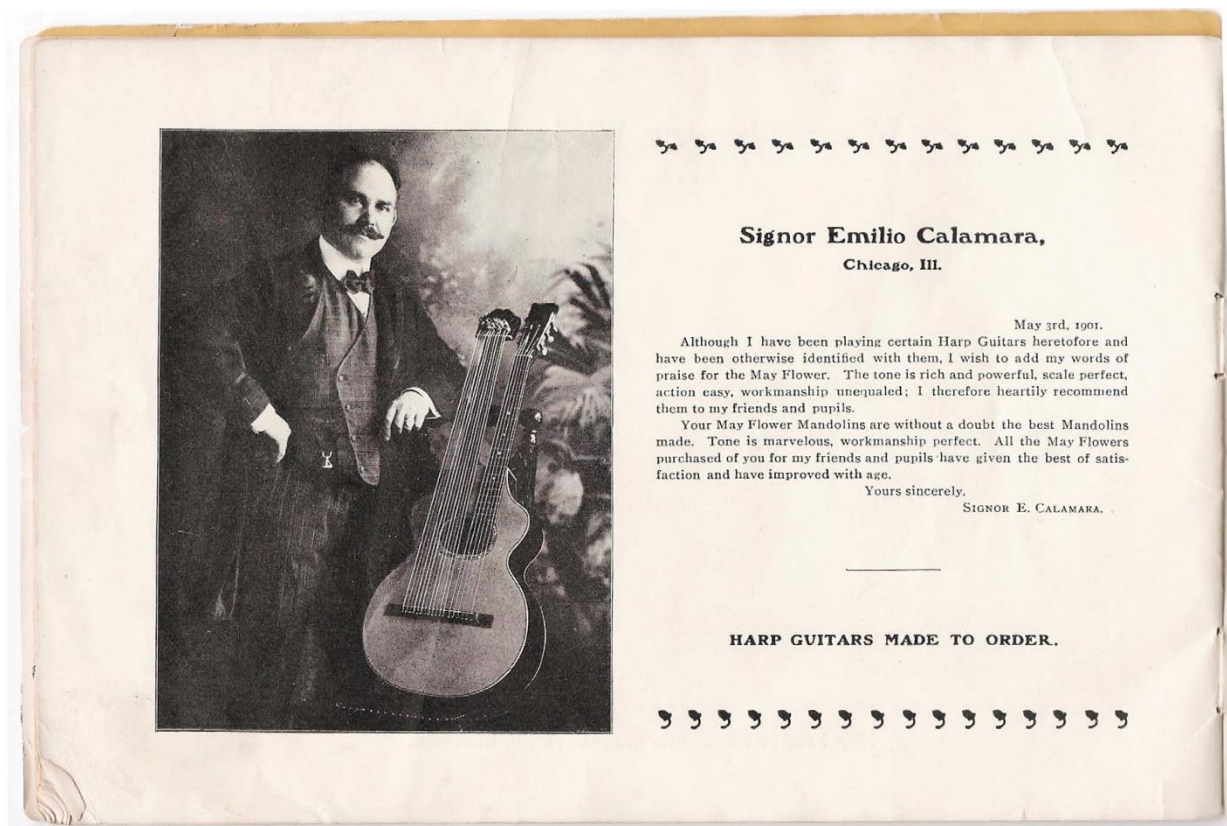


FIG. 11. Emilio Calamara with harp guitar in the Mayflower Music Catalog, May 1901. (Courtesy of Jim Garber)

Calamara's abandonment of the Bohmann brand ended that professional relationship. By withdrawing his endorsement and allegiance to Bohmann and aligning himself with an "inferior" manufacturer, Calamara took a great risk when he endorsed Harry J. Flower. Moreover, Mayflower manufacturing was already in a precarious business situation and Flower was ready to retire. Calamara's allegiance to Flower's musical instruments would be tested again as Flower began to sell off his business and Wurlitzer started to build Mayflower's musical instruments.<sup>36</sup> What happened next cannot be tied directly to having left Bohmann but Calamara may have sought out a way to liberate himself and chart a new course for his creative spirit.

While one might doubt Calamara's notoriety as a guitarist beyond Chicago, his arrangements did show up on concert programs elsewhere. In Los Angeles, the young guitarist Ethel "Vahdah" Lucretia Olcott was celebrated in Los Angeles newspapers' social and entertainment columns. When she moved back East and married an equally famous mandolinist Myron Bickford, they performed from the guitar and mandolin repertoire of which some Calamara arrangements remain housed in the Olcott-Bickford archives.<sup>37</sup> It was unlikely that Emilio and Nettie knew who was performing from their arrangements but in the fall of 1902, Emilio and Nettie ventured out to the West Coast.

<sup>36</sup> "Important Wurlitzer Deals" *The Music Trade Review*, Vol. XLVII, No. 20, November 14, 1908. 18. Author's note: I leave it to luthiers to certify if Mayflower musical instruments had already been built by other established factories.

<sup>37</sup> Guide to the Vahdah Olcott-Bickford Collection, 1800-2008. Box 38, Folders 64, 65 & 66. CSUN's Olcott archive contains Emilio's arrangements of "Lucia di Lammermoor" and "La Traviata" and Nettie's arrangement of Gillet's "Loin du Bal."



The Calamaras stayed at the Rosslyn Hotel in Los Angeles<sup>38</sup> but no evidence supports a concertizing tour. Perhaps they made a reconnaissance trip to find a fresh start in a fertile entertainment environment. The burgeoning film industry might have offered an attractive scenario for musicians to cash in on the wealthy, glamorous world that they were reading about in Chicago newspapers. Perhaps they had heard of Ms. Olcott's success. Were they drawn to the attractive Mediterranean weather, too? Perhaps Emilio's memories of his youthful travels reawakened a dream of sunnier climates similar to Sicily's.

Whatever the reasons for this trip, more questions surfaced as to where their marriage was going. It was at this time that Nettie and Emilio were becoming increasingly competitive. While she had arranged popular vaudevillian songs for theatrical venues, it was her husband's arrangements that were in demand by professional musicians. Nevertheless, Nettie started advertising and crediting herself as "the arranger of the celebrated mandolin & guitar music."<sup>39</sup> Was she taking credit for Emilio's arrangements in this manner of description? It was apparent that their marriage might have been experiencing some personal jealousy.

A marital estrangement was beginning to unravel their partnership. First, Emilio abandoned Bohmann and endorsed Mayflower, presumably leaving Nettie to reconcile matters with Bohmann and pick up the pieces. Then, Nettie insinuated herself as the arranger of all the celebrated titles arranged by Emilio. Next, Emilio's and Nettie's arrangements were consolidated in a members-only, subscription-based music catalog.<sup>40</sup> The confusing use of "Calamara" conflated the two musicians although each excelled in discrete genres. The twinned musicians became bifurcated.

In 1905, Nettie left her husband in Chicago and moved to Kansas City, Missouri where she taught mandolin for about a year.<sup>41</sup> Kansas City had become headquarters for *The Cadenza*, which served as the official arm of the American Guild of Banjoists, Mandolinists, and Guitarists. Its editor and founder was Clarence L. Partee a mandolin teacher who openly wrote of his admiration of Bohmann's mandolins.<sup>42</sup> It is entirely possible that Nettie may have considered Kansas City as new ground for a separate path in her music career. Perhaps a strategic teaching position afforded her more opportunities to work on her own. Unfortunately, Partee had already moved his publication to Manhattan and later sold it to Walter Jacobs, a Boston music publisher.

Upon Nettie's sabbatical year away from Chicago and her marriage, she returned to her Michigan roots and reunited with her mother and daughter in Negaunee while Emilio remained in Chicago.<sup>43</sup> One could speculate that the year-long change of scenery was a sign of a rocky marriage or it might have been an attempt to revitalize a dissolving marriage. Whatever the marital situation, Emilio had

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<sup>38</sup> "Hotel Arrivals" *Los Angeles Herald*, Vol. XXIV, No. 334, 2 Sept. 1902. 7.

<sup>39</sup> "Instruction Adv." *Chicago Tribune*, February 9, 1902. 26.

<sup>40</sup> D.H. Morrison, Music Editor. *Songs We Love*. Chicago: L.G. Stahl, 1902. 432-433. The listings from the "Member's Catalogue" represent Emilio's arrangements for guitar solos; in addition, Emilio's and Nettie's mandolin and guitar duets.

<sup>41</sup> *Hoyes' Kansas City Directory*, Hoye Directory Co., 1905. 1456. She lived at 2101 College (rear) and was listed as a music teacher. Cf. Sparks, *Classical Mandolin*, p. 126. Partee cites more than 100 mandolin clubs and orchestras.

<sup>42</sup> Clarence L. Partee, "First American Mandolin." *Daily Argus*, New York. 5 April 1902. Partee's admiration included a declaration that Bohmann was the first to manufacture a mandolin in America.

<sup>43</sup> "Negaunee" *The Duluth Evening Herald*, 16 December 1905. 22. Cf. *Hoye's Kansas City Directory*, Kansas City, MO: Hoye's Directory Co., 1905. p.1456. The opening of the new International Conservatory of Music could have required a music faculty.

to confront the death of his older brother and his own mortality.<sup>44</sup> As he began a grieving process, perhaps the couple reconciled their differences and reassessed the benefits of staying married. Whatever problems or jealousies they may have shared in their music careers, Emilio and Nettie uprooted themselves and made a dramatic decision to return to California and moved to San Francisco.

In early 1908, in spite of a city devastated by a catastrophic earthquake and fire in April, 1906, the Calamaras opened a music studio on Nob Hill. It did not take long to establish themselves as teachers. In addition, they were admitted into the Musicians Union, Local 6 which indicated the move was permanent and that they were active musicians. In August 1909, the Union “favorably reported” about the Calamaras as new members.<sup>45</sup> Everything pointed to a new life infused with a hopeful future together but it would not come to pass. A murky period of transition began with simultaneous city directory listings in San Francisco, Detroit, and Manhattan. It is unclear as to where exactly Nettie and Emilio lived and it is even less clear as to whether they still lived together.

A second, much more emotional, upheaval would ultimately destroy their marriage. In the space of only a week or so, in mid-September 1909, their lives were turned upside down. Something happened that resulted in residual damage for the rest of their lives. It was during this time that Nettie pronounced her husband “dead” and began to identify herself as a widow in Detroit city directories. This was not a fluke—and not a clerical error but a consistent description of how she described her marital status, even in newspaper interviews. She projected her new status in spite of the obvious fact that Emilio was alive and well, and probably teaching guitar in Manhattan. As to the triggering mechanism, it might have begun with Nettie playing the role of matchmaker.

On an early autumn evening in 1909, Nettie and Erma attended a concert at Detroit’s Wayne Casino, an enormous auditorium where a flamboyant, histrionic bandmaster who went by the name of Francesco Creatore was conducting.<sup>46</sup> After the performance, Nettie sent a note to the conductor and he agreed to meet them to discuss Italian repertoire for his band. He was smitten the minute he met Erma and within a week Nettie witnessed the marriage of her daughter to Creatore on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September.<sup>47</sup> The newspapers referred to the bride as the “daughter of the late Emilio Calamara, director of a band in Chicago.”<sup>48</sup> The hasty wedding was reported in nearly every major newspaper (including musical trade papers) and there is a high likelihood that Calamara read about his “death”

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<sup>44</sup> “New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949,” database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:2W9P-BW7> : 10 February 2018), Leo Calamara, 19 Nov 1907; citing Death, Manhattan, New York, New York, United States, New York Municipal Archives, New York; FHL microfilm 1,323,169. Inaccurate date appears on the record but without the certificate (#36730), it is likely a clerical error.

<sup>45</sup> “Musicians Union.” *San Francisco Call*, 8 August 1909. p.47.

<sup>46</sup> Francesco Creatore should not be confused with the renowned Maestro and Bandmaster Giuseppe Creatore. No relationship existed and in fact, Giuseppe sued Francesco Creatore (a pseudonym used in place of his birth name Raffaele Ficeto). At first, Giuseppe Creatore lost his lawsuit against Francesco Creatore in a “Trade-Mark” case in Manhattan. The Judge ruled that Giuseppe Creatore did not have a monopoly on the name “Creatore.” See *Trade-Mark Record*, Vol. XXXIV, 1909. 203. It took several years to get him to stop the charade. Court filings revealed the subterfuge. Not until Mardi Gras week in New Orleans, 1914, was he finally exposed when the courts intervened.

<sup>47</sup> Michigan Department of Community Health, Division of Vital Records and Health Statistics; Lansing, MI, USA; *Michigan, Marriage Records, 1867-1952*; Film: 101; Film Description: 1909 Wayne - 1910 Emmet. Mrs. Calamara’s first husband was Victor G. Welch.

<sup>48</sup> “Upper Michigan Girl” *Calumet News*, 4 October 1909. Front page. Erma was the second child from Nettie’s first marriage to Victor G. Welch. A son Earl died at nine months, 6 December 1882.

in the social columns or through his music network. Surely, Emilio must have been apprised of Nettie's fictionalized existence as a new widow.

In addition, she started to aggrandize herself with claims of being a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.<sup>49</sup> Whether it was true or not, she inflated her public persona and strategized as to how to enhance her social standing. Perhaps that streak of independence returned as she reimagined a different life for herself without having to undergo the ordeal of an unpleasant disentanglement and a second divorce. She set about finding a way to catapult herself into the limelight as a beleaguered widow. In her new status, she seized on an opportunity to use her daughter as a surrogate to achieve a vicarious, more glamorous lifestyle.



FIG. 12. Francesco Creatore and His Banda Verdi as advertised in *Variety*, 1912.

The honeymooners moved in with Nettie and her mother, Mrs. Macomber, sharing the family's house in Detroit.<sup>50</sup> No one knew that Francesco Creatore was an imposter capitalizing on the surname of the revered Bandmaster Giuseppe Creatore. He entered this sham of a marriage to Erma while flaunting himself as a "Whirlwind Acrobatic Musical Genius." This description reflected his energetic conducting style and perhaps his ability to impress the ladies, too. Erma had married a musician whose phony entertainment persona deceived them. It took several years before it would come out that Erma's husband was Frank Cola-Santo Ficeto, born April 9, 1889.<sup>51</sup> His family immigrated from Torella di Lombardi when he was just an infant, and he grew up in Connecticut. As a young adult, he'd gone on the road having duped an agent and musicians into thinking he was the original Bandmaster Creatore.

Within a few months of marriage, Creatore started to make life a living hell for his wife, his mother-in-law and Nettie's mother. During this time, Nettie was the principal mandolin instructor at Detroit's North Side School of Music and enjoyed an established reputation as an endorser of Bohmann mandolins. The "much-maligned mother-in-law" sued Creatore after he struck one of her students on the head with a music stand.<sup>52</sup> The back and forth accusations were hard to follow but the

<sup>49</sup> "Bandmaster Creatore Weds" *New York Times*, 29 September 1909. p.11. To qualify for membership in the DAR, Nettie would have had to prove a bloodline with evidence showing that an ancestor participated in the American Revolution. While it is possible she might have had lineage, nothing has been found to substantiate Nettie's claim. Her interview appeared in dozens of cities including San Francisco, New York, New Orleans, and Chicago.

<sup>50</sup> *R.L. Polk Directory*, Detroit listings, 1909. p.714. Nettie is identified as a widow and music teacher. Furthermore, in a simultaneous listing in San Francisco's 1909 City Directory, "Emile" and "Jeanette" (Nettie's other name) both show shared residence as musicians, teaching on Nob Hill, near the Fairmount Hotel, at 6 Wetmore Street.

<sup>51</sup> Erma's son Francis' military records indicate that he used two different names and was registered under both: Ralph Ficeto or Francis Colasanto Ficeto. He served one year, 1907-1908.

<sup>52</sup> "Mother-in-Law Wins." *Detroit Times*, 30 June 1910. p.7. Creatore counter-sued Nettie and they went to court. Cf. "Creatore [sic] Trail of Mother-in-law." *Detroit Times*, 18 June 1910. p.8, col.2. Creatore procured a warrant for Nettie's arrest charging she had appeared backstage at a concert, pulled out a pistol aimed



local Michigan papers reported what Madame Calamara wanted them to believe. Within the first year, Erma's grandmother (Jane Macomber) had sued Creatore for \$5,000, money that she had loaned him. She had claimed he was prepared to abandon his family, leaving the United States and taking the cash with him.<sup>53</sup>

In the midst of lawsuits and countersuits, a son Francis was born.<sup>54</sup> In the spring of 1911, Nettie, her daughter and mother, and five-month old grandson Francis had succumbed to the worst humiliation. They were about to lose the family home owned by Mrs. Macomber. A music studio was located in the residence at 155 Claremont Avenue in what had been a fashionable neighborhood. Unfortunately, the house was mortgaged and their destitute situation caught the attention of the Detroit poor commission.<sup>55</sup> The derelict husband's prosperous career never benefited Erma's family as he stayed far from Detroit and never sent financial support. He was on the run.

The horrors continued but finally, it ended when Creatore was arrested for identity fraud and had to make restitution and surrender the use of Creatore as the bandmaster's name. Warnings preceded his arrest after an injunction was filed and he was finally captured in 1914.<sup>56</sup> It had taken its toll on everyone! It quite possibly had already embarrassed Emilio but he stayed far from the circus. Reading about the melodrama in the newspapers and how Nettie doomed their marriage (and Erma's) proved to be too much. It may have initiated a sense of despair knowing that his wife had pronounced him deceased in such a public manner. Without emotional ties to his wife's grandson, he may have just thrown in the towel and concentrated on his life in Manhattan.

Emilio had returned to Manhattan's Upper Westside and set up a teaching studio at 762 Eighth Avenue, a couple of blocks down from the residence and music store belonging to the famous mandolinist and publisher Pietro Tesio.<sup>57</sup> He also advertised himself as a guitarist with the "Apollo School of Music," a campus associated with Chicago's Conservatory of Music where he and Nettie had been on the faculty back in the 1890s. His second studio, under the auspices of the Apollo School, was located at 543 West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street. He promoted himself as a professional musician with

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directly at him, and shouted "...I will shoot you and send you to hell." Creatore blamed it all on her jealousy. As to what kind, it is hard to say. The tragedy was averted when band members intervened. The bandmaster was made to pay a \$10 fine for assaulting Dora Smith (Nettie's student).

<sup>53</sup> "Bondsmen Surrender Creatore" *Detroit Times*, First Edition. 14 June 1910. p.4. Creatore had been arrested several months before but the bondsmen had become suspicious that he was going to finagle a way to escape his punishment under 'false pretenses.' He did manage to escape and it would take four more years before he was arrested.

<sup>54</sup> Francis "Creatore" was born October 21, 1910; died March 1994. Erma's son's name varies depending on the documentation. It is usually recorded as Francis Colasanto Ficeto (AKA Cola-Santo). Francesco Colasanto Ficeto used "Creatore" for the Detroit marriage records, not his legal name. Erma may have had a second son, Newton B., born June 2, 1911 & died 1981. Fairly improbable second birth so soon after a first, but not an impossible feat. The 1930 U.S. Census shows Newton living with his mother Erma but the 1940 Census shows Francis Cola-Santo living with Erma, listed as a widow. Perhaps Erma was taking after her mother alleging to be a widow when still married.

<sup>55</sup> Business Notes. *Detroit Times*, First Edition. 21 March 1911. p.9. This article described four generations living in impoverished conditions and noted the mortgaging of the home to make ends meet. The article only mentions one child (without naming him). The reporter acknowledged that Creatore had abandoned them and had not paid any child support since he left.

<sup>56</sup> Francesco Creatore's impersonation of Bandmaster Giuseppe Creatore stopped only after a Baltimore judge settled the dispute. Nevertheless, after his arrest, he enjoyed a successful career using his real name Francis Cola-Santo and died June 1971. He accompanied several famous vocalists, including Magda Dahl.

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Census, June 1910. One can't help but imagine Pietro Tesio playing duets with his neighbor Calamara on Eighth Avenue.

expertise on various instruments including Hawaiian steel guitar, mandola, guitar, and ukulele.<sup>58</sup> In late 1917, he made two known recordings on Hawaiian steel guitar at the Gennett Recording Studios on East 37<sup>th</sup> Street and became what may well be the earliest recording artist on Hawaiian steel guitar; he accompanied vocalist William D. Reid on two Hawaiian songs.<sup>59</sup> He seemed determined to not be defeated and was making the most of his life, ignoring Nettie's senseless actions and words.



FIG. 13. Gennett Records prided itself in a diversity of ethnic music. Calamara quite possibly became the world's first guitarist to record with Hawaiian steel guitar in late 1917.

If he was becoming ill or more depressed, it would be difficult to ascertain to what degree but in August of 1918, he was admitted to the Manhattan State Hospital on Ward's Island, situated between Manhattan and the Bronx, on the East River.<sup>60</sup> This large psychiatric institution housed him in the final four months of his life. Before he died on November 10, 1918, his physician signed his mandatory draft registration on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September but it was largely left empty as the doctor must have realized how pointless it was to complete it.<sup>61</sup> The physician's diagnosis is the only clue that points to the underlying cause of death: "general paralysis [attributed to or located in the] cerebral foramen."<sup>62</sup> That description was sometimes assigned in the final stages of syphilis. It can also be associated with a massive stroke.<sup>63</sup> While he died at the very peak of the Spanish Flu pandemic, it is very unlikely he was aware of the

horrors that surrounded him as he lay dying. Neither did he know that his last breath was taken the day before Armistice, November 1918. The conclusion of the war overshadowed Calamara's death

<sup>58</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 5 December 1916 and 19 April 1917. Classified Ads seem to originate with Calamara, whose name appears in all caps, who used the school's address and his own residence.

<sup>59</sup> Compiled by Tim Gracyk, *Talking Machine World*, Volume 1, "Record Bulletins for January, 1918". 125. Gracyk catalogs Gennett Record 7625, recorded with Calamara as accompanist in "Kilima Hawaiian Waltz" and "Maui Girl." Cf. Ed. J.B. Spillane, Editor, *Talking Machine World*, Vol. XIII, No. 11, November 15, 1917, 125. Spillane lists Gennett Record 7636 (identical title matches 7625); however, Louise, Ferrera & Greenus are the recording group.

<sup>60</sup> Emilio Calamara, Department of Health of the City of New York, Cert. 39528. His vital statistics are missing or inaccurate, however, his occupation as a musician is noted and his parents' names are valid.

<sup>61</sup> Dr. Philip Smith signed the affidavit without any explanation on September 12, 1918.

<sup>62</sup> "New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:2WZ3-72H:10 February 2018>), Emilio Calamara, 10 Nov 1918; citing Death, Manhattan, New York, New York, United States, New York Municipal Archives, New York; FHL microfilm 1,322,438. Certificate 39528 indicates "General Paralysis -Cerebral Formena." In recent years, there have been attempts at identifying those buried in the "City Cemetery" on Ward's Island.

<sup>63</sup> Dr. Matt Vuksinich. Email to the author. May 17, 2019.

and burial which were unremarkable, unattended, and ignored. The destitute were buried in the “City Cemetery” without ceremony and often even without identification. He was still married but without a wife or a family.

By 1920, Nettie’s mother had already died and she, Erma and a son were living in Highland Park (within Detroit).<sup>64</sup> Nettie taught music out of their rented residence at 59 Kendal Avenue. The census taker lists both women as widows although Erma’s husband was still very much alive and working as a musician. Six years later, Nettie Calamara died in Detroit on April 14, 1926 at 62 years of age having suffered from “senile dementia.” Other than the doctor’s diagnosis, the certificate is mostly blank. The physician knew nothing of her musical talents and simply wrote “unknown” on various lines including occupation and family members. In that state of alienation, she died alone and forgotten just as her husband had eight years earlier.

## Conclusion

Emilio Calamara’s legacy centers on his significance as a prominent harp guitarist in various mandolin orchestras. While he earned his reputation as a teacher and a guitarist, he evolved into a versatile musician, an arranger, and briefly as a conductor. He became a multi-instrumentalist who taught mandolin, banjo, ukulele, and Hawaiian steel guitar. During the tumultuous marriage of two talented musicians, he and Nettie had collaborated as business partners and formed a musical alliance that kept them active in the mandolin and guitar world. Unfortunately, serious errors in judgment, conflicted loyalties, and perhaps even professional jealousy may have resulted in long term damage. Emilio’s abandonment of Bohmann and Nettie’s deliberate choice to declare her husband dead and her impulsive decision to arrange the marriage of her daughter to an imposter contributed to irreparable harm. The entire family felt the consequences, and the world was robbed of a musician in his prime.

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<sup>64</sup> U.S. Census, 1920. Highland Park, Wayne County, MI. Erma’s son’s name is listed neither as Newton nor as Francis but the census clerk lists a son “Benjamin” and he is 9 years old and 2 months. Likely, this ‘second’ or ‘third’ child is evidence of sloppy clerical records. Newton (if he existed) may have been named for Nettie’s brother-in-law “Isaac Newton Welch” (Erma’s uncle and her father’s oldest brother) who was a musician.

### Notes:

Except where noted, music circulars, photographs and documents regarding Joseph Bohmann and Emilio and Nettie Calamara appear through the courtesy of Bruce Hammond. “Circulars” were marketing tools. They never included date of publication. Verification of hyperbolic praise was solely the responsibility of the person or business paying for the printing. Bohmann’s circulars served as advertisements for the musical instruments catalog. He may have edited them as he felt necessary.

For a full investigation into Calarmara’s harp guitars, see Gregg Miner’s companion article at: <http://harp guitars.net/history/bohmann/calamara/Calamara-Harp-Guitars.pdf>