

Antonio Corsi: personality from the past

BY GERALD STEWART

Antonio Corsi is not a name guaranteed to spark the memory of current residents of Highland Park, yet at one time that name had a unique popularity in the world of art.

Actually, however, the name was only incidental, for it was Antonio Corsi the man, the face and the body, which were of special importance. For Antonio Corsi was, if not the greatest, then certainly one of the greatest male artists' models ever to have graced a studio. And his home was Highland Park.

Corsi's studio, a phantasmagoria of costumes, photographs, paintings and statues — plus hundreds of authentic costumes collected from around the world—was at 6418 Eagle Rock Ave., in what was in 1923 called Garvanza, Calif.

The date of Corsi's birth at Atina, Italy, is not known. His father, a soldier under Garibaldi, had marked out a priestly life for his son. But poverty forced Corsi to earn his own living early, which he did as a street singer. In this capacity he followed his family to Dover, England, where, in 1882, he was seen by the noted English portrait painter Felix Moscheles. Moscheles engaged Corsi to model for one of his paintings, thus beginning a career for Corsi of more than 40 years, which ended only when he died an almost forgotten

man at L.A. County General Hospital on Dec. 5, 1925.

In the course of those 40-plus years, Antonio Corsi's visage was carved, painted and photographed by master artists and bungling beginners for every imaginable purpose, for the lofty murals of civic buildings, for the sculptured buttresses of bridges, and even for the label on a particular brand of devil ham.

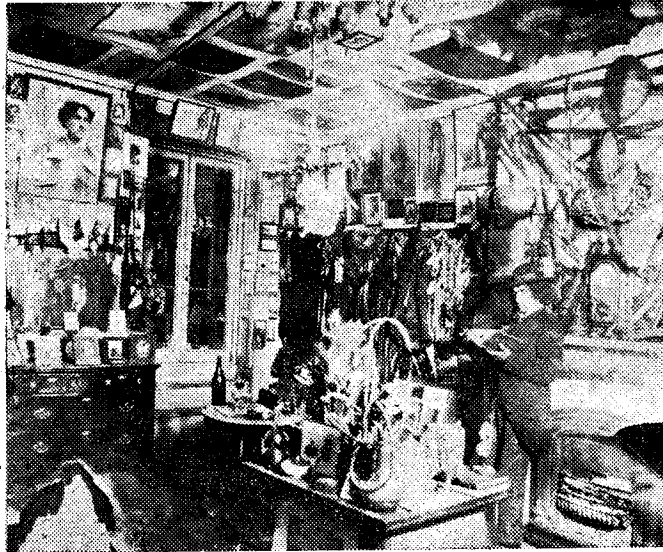
Space limits forbid a complete listing of the notables for whom he posed, but a partial listing includes: Princess Louise, daughter of Queen Victoria; Sir Edward Burne-Jones, for whom he modeled for six pictures over an eight year period; and the famous artist John S. Sergeant, for whom he posed for 11 of 16 portraits in Sergeant's series on the prophets for the Boston Library frieze.

Corsi was the original for two of painter Edwin H. Blashfield's figures in his panels for the Congressional Library, at Washington, D.C., as well as for his mural in the Iowa State Capitol.

Corsi's most famous role was the American Indian. When Corsi posed for Sir Sidney P. Hallis' famous painting of the Canadian Indians signing a peace treaty with the British, Corsi declared that the spirit of the Indian chiefs came to him. Not content to merely pose for this latter work, Corsi spent several months in the West studying and observing the Indian in his homeland.

Public buildings where Corsi gazes down on visitors include the New Amsterdam Theater, New York, where he appears 15 times; the Boston Public Library, where he is seen 70 times; New York's Hall of Rec-

(Continued on Page 14)



MODEL AMID COSTUMES—Antonio Corsi, world-renowned artists' model, relaxes among the hundreds of authentic costumes collected from around the world in his studio at 6418 Eagle Rock Ave., in Garvanza, Calif., which was later incorporated into the community of Highland Park. Born in Italy at an unknown date, Corsi died in Los Angeles County General Hospital on Dec. 5, 1925.

(Continued from Page 1)

ords, where he appears too many times to count; in the McKinley Memorial Windows in the church at Canton, Ohio, four times; and in the murals of the New York Metropolitan Museum.

One article eulogizing Corsi after his death summed up his career in the following terms: "Corsi as an Indian, Corsi as

a Florentine troubadour, Corsi as the dying Christ, Corsi as Mephistopheles, Corsi as a Greek god, Corsi as a praying monk, and yet his versatility is not half stated . . ."

Later in his career there were motion pictures. In the first American film of Pola Negri, "Bella Donna," Corsi played a fortune teller. Parts continued to come his way throughout the latter years of his life.

Corsi left little behind except his countenance, as interpreted by the world's artists, and three sons. One son died in the Italian Navy during World War I. Another died in the Danish Army. The youngest served

with the U.S. Army in the Philippines. Of his wife, or wives, we know nothing.

What little Corsi did leave behind, mainly his costumes, caused a minor legal battle when he died and left his possessions to a close friend, Vern Nye. Action against Miss Nye was brought in probate court by distant relatives, claiming Miss Nye had tricked her friend into signing away his belongings. The results of that contest are lost in the court records. And perhaps better so, for Corsi the model is a much more fitting epitaph.

Corsi's relatives are now beginning to piece his fantastic career together from published reports in various periodicals, and from the dimmed memories of local people. Anyone with information is urged to write to Corsi's grandson, Anthony John Corsi, 127 W. 51st St., Long Beach, Calif.