Getting Started With Italian Genealogy

Italian Immigration – Heaviest migration was after Italian unification (1860-1871), most came from 1880 to 1914. Some immigrated due to loss of land, high taxes and interest rates, inflation and crop failures. During this era, there was less travel time due to steamships and decreased costs of travel. Most immigrants were working class and working age (15-44) men, especially 15-34 years old. Most went to the U.S., Argentina and Brazil, with smaller concentrations going to Canada and Australia.

Birds of Passage – Many Italians immigrated temporarily to gain employment and higher wages than were available in Italy. From 1880 to 1924, 4.5 million Italians came to the U.S., but less than half stayed. Sometimes they stayed for several years before returning home to Italy permanently. The goal was to save enough money to improve their family's life in Italy, possibly by buying land, a house, or starting a business. Men often travelled together to the U.S. from the same town or province, but didn't necessarily work or settle in the same locations. Migrants may have rotated migrations from the U.S. to work in Europe, South America, or other locations. Of those who permanently settled in the U.S., they may have travelled to the U.S. for work multiple times before staying.

Chain Migration – Families/friends would often migrate after one another. Sometimes entire villages eventually immigrated. U.S. immigrants often let birds of passage or new immigrants stay in their home before they settled permanently.

Grosvenor Room Guides – The Library has developed many guides to help genealogists use the Grosvenor Room's Collections. This includes a guide on Italian genealogy. https://www.buffalolib.org/special-collections/guides-publications

Buffalo Area Italian History and Genealogy Books –

- *Family and Community: Italian Immigration in Buffalo, 1880-1930* – by Virginia Yans-McLaughlin - Italian way of life in Buffalo, family structure and roles, employment, immigration history, clubs & organizations and politics.
- *The Italians of Lackawanna, NY: steelworkers, merchants, and gardeners* - by John Andreozzi – Migration, Lackawanna Italian experience, assimilation, neighborhoods, religious life, businesses, professions, unions, organizations, politics, many photos and information about individuals.
- *Biographical Information on Lackawanna Italians* - Compiled by John Andreozzi - 9 binders of information including obituaries/death notices, marriage announcements, anniversary announcements and other newspaper articles. It is available for use in the Western New York Genealogical Society Collection.

Local History File – A partial index to local newspapers, periodicals and other publications. Search by your ancestors' names. Other topics: Clubs. Italian; Italians in Buffalo; Streets. Canal.

Scrapbooks – These are indexed in the Local History File. They are mainly newspaper clippings organized by topic. See the scrapbook titled Buffalo's Foreign Population to learn about Buffalo's Italian community, and pioneers, churches, schools, festivals, population, neighborhoods and societies.

Know Your Ancestor's Original Names – Many immigrants Americanized their given names and/or surnames when they came to the U.S. It is important to know their original names before you begin searching in Italian records.

- Translate English to Italian given names - http://www.conigliofamily.com/SicilianAndItalianGivenNames.htm
- Naturalization records and passenger lists may list original names. Naturalization records after 1906 usually have a listing of the passenger list on which your ancestor traveled. Check the passenger list (Ancestry Library Edition) to see if a different name was listed for your ancestor.
- Other records that may list original names are probate records, church records, and obituaries.
- Name Changes - Some immigrants may have just began using a new name (especially if it was very similar to the original name) and others may have changed their names legally. Check with the county clerk's office regarding name change documents.

Finding Foreign Places of Birth – It is necessary to know where your ancestor came from in Italy to search for them in Italian records. Here are some records that may tell you where your ancestor was from.

- *Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007* (Ancestry Library Edition) – An individual is usually included in this database if they made a change to their Social Security information. In the past, everyone did not have a Social Security number, especially if they did not work outside the home or had a railroad pension. This often lists exact place of birth, as well as birthdate and parents' names.
- *Naturalization Records* - If your ancestor arrived in the U.S. after 1906, and was naturalized, a Certificate of Arrival would have been created as part of the naturalization process. The Certificate of Arrival provides the immigrant's date, port, and ship of arrival. These certificates may be found in your ancestor's naturalization records.
    - **Erie County, NY, Naturalizations -** Naturalizations after 1906 may be found at the Erie County Clerk's Office (usually only until 1929) or through the National Archives at New York City (https://www.archives.gov/nyc/finding-aids/naturalization-holdings.html). Naturalizations before Sept. 27, 1906 can be found in the Erie County Clerk's Office, Basement Record Center in Erie County Hall, at 92 Franklin St.

- An index for Erie County naturalizations and some early Erie County naturalizations are available here: https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/321898
  - **Western New York Naturalizations, U.S. District Court** - The Grosvenor Room has an index that covers the National Archive held records for Western New York from Sept. 27, 1906 – 1966. Partial data from the index can also be found online for free through FamilySearch: https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1854307.
  - **Naturalizations for other locations**
    - *County Clerk's Office* where your ancestor lived at the time of naturalization.
    - Sept. 27, 1906 and later – National Archives.
    - *Ancestry Library Edition* – Many naturalization records are included, though none from Erie County. Most are U.S. District Court naturalizations vs. county naturalizations.
    - *FamilySearch* – Many naturalization records are included, both U.S. District Court and some county naturalizations. There are many from WNY, but none for Erie County. Here is a link to the New York county naturalizations: https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1999177.
- *Church Records* – American Church records (especially Catholic and Lutheran) often list the foreign place of birth or the prior foreign residence of immigrants in their marriage records. Parents' places of birth are often listed in their children's baptismal records.
  - *Grosvenor Room church records* - https://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/special-collections/guides/ChurchRecords.pdf
  - *City Directories* - Use city directories to find Italian churches. Sometimes the church's predominant ethnic group is listed or the church may have a foreign name. Look for the name of the priest/minister who will often be of the same ethnicity as the parish members. Many Buffalo directories 1868-1960 are in Ancestry Library Edition and HeritageQuest Online. Both databases are available through the Library. The Library has digitized Buffalo city directories from 1832-1913 and they are available here: https://nyheritage.org/collections/buffalo-city-directories
  - *Buffalo Church Map* – The Buffalo History Museum has put together a map of Buffalo churches. The denominations are color-coded. Input your ancestor's address to see what churches were near the home. https://mapsengine.google.com/map/edit?hl=en&authuser=0&mid=ztsjq7JTPJAg.kESNjBgGgAyc
  - *FamilySearch* – www.familysearch.org has digitized numerous church records. Search the card catalog by the name of the city/town to find church records for the location where your ancestor lived. Most of the church records have not been indexed and are browse-only.
- *Passenger Lists* – Lists from 1893 forward likely list last foreign residence and may include place of birth and the address of a close relative in the country from which they

came. Many passenger lists are available in Ancestry Library Edition. For more information on finding passenger lists, see this Grosvenor Room guide: https://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/special-collections/guides/PassengerLists.pdf

   o *The following census records list year of immigration to the U.S. or number of years in the U.S.:*
      ▪ U.S. Federal Census Records: 1900-1930
      ▪ New York State Census Records: 1905-1925
- ***Grosvenor Room Guide***, ***Where is my immigrant ancestor from?*** - https://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/special-collections/guides/Where%20Immigrant%20Ancestor%20From.pdf

Finding Italian Cities/Towns

- ***Italian Town Database*** - http://sites.rootsweb.com/~itappcnc/pipcntown.htm
- ***Translation may be necessary*** – Sometimes foreign locations found in American church records may be listed in a foreign language (i.e. Italian or Latin). Use Google Translate to translate the location to see if that is the case if you are having trouble finding the location in the above database. (i.e. Palermo = Panorui in Latin)
- **http://www.comuni-italiani.it/** - An Italian website which includes information on Italian municipalities, provinces and regions. Your web browser will likely be able to translate the web page for you, but be careful, because it will also translate the town names and you want the town names in their original form.

Italy's Changing Borders –

- Italy was made up of numerous Italian states before unification which took place from 1815-1871.
- Animation of Italy's changing borders 1829-1871 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#/media/File:Italian-unification.gif

Italian Record Keeping – By 1799 Napoleon conquered most of Italy. He unified the country and began civil vital record keeping in 1806, though not every location started it in that year. Napoleon was defeated by 1815 and Italy returned to its previous boundaries and rulers. Many Southern Italy locations kept recording vital records. Many Northern locations discontinued record keeping, but then picked it up again in the 1840s-1850s. Italy was unified between1860-1871. Most regions kept vital records by 1870.

Italian Geography – Italian regions are similar to U.S. states. Italian provinces are similar to U.S. counties. Italian comunes are similar to U.S. towns.

Civil Vital Records (Post-unification) 1866-forward - Comunes registered all vital records. Records are kept in duplicate, one kept at the comune and one to the tribunale (similar to U.S. County Court, located at the seat of each province). There is a 75-year waiting period except for close family members. After 75 years, the tribunale copies are sent to the state archive.

- *Record Access:*
  - www.familysearch.org – Search the card catalog for the comune (town) of interest and look for the vital records category in the search results. Scroll to the Film/Digital Notes section to see if there is online access. Some records are keyword searchable and others are browse-only. There will be a magnifying glass if they are searchable and a camera if they've been digitized. Click the magnifying glass/camera to search/browse the records.
  - *Antenati* - http://www.antenati.san.beniculturali.it/?lang=en – Website of the Italian State Archives, in Italian. The website has an English option. Some records are keyword searchable and some are browse-only. Mainly includes birth, death and marriage records. This site is not complete.
  - *Ancestry Library Edition* – Most Italian records are browse-only. To find Italian records, go the Search menu, select All Records, choose Europe and then Italy.
  - *Things you should know:*
    - Vital records were written in Italian.
    - Words to look for: fu – "the late"; furono – plural – often used when both parents are deceased. Defunto – deceased.
    - Indexes often list the parents' names. Using indexes is an easy way to identify children of a particular couple.
    - Numbers are usually spelled out.

Reading Italian and Latin Records

- https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Italy_Genealogy - Includes word lists and sample translated documents.
- Italian Script Tutorial - https://script.byu.edu/Pages/the-italian-documents/the-italian-documents(english)
- This book has many example records and their translations - *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Italian Ancestors* – Lynn Nelson. (available in the Grosvenor Room)
- *In their words: a genealogist's translation guide to Polish, German, Latin, and Russian documents* - Shea, Jonathan D. – Available in the Grosvenor Room.

What Information Do Italian Vital Records Include?

-- See Italian Vital Records Chart

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