ITALIAN GENEALOGICAL GROUP

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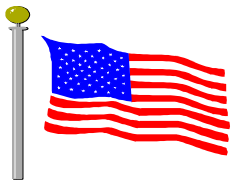
Volume 16, No. 9 **May, 2010**

President's Message



"Speak English!" was the command a generation or two ago. It was good advice as it was necessary to get ahead in this USA. Total immersion in a language is a fairly good technique to learn that language, but the exclusive use among the next generation caused all too many of us not to know the language of our ancestors. It is worse, however, when those born in America grew up learning to speak an old version of English, and have spent their years reading such archaic works such as those authored by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, Shelley, Melville, Hawthorne, Emerson, and other decidedly out-dated authors as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Finding myself to be one of these anachronisms, I shall turn the President's Message column over to the editors of the newsletter for the remainder of my time as president since I wouldn't wish to be misunderstood by writing worse than I speak, to wit.

On another note, remember our fallen who gave their lives for freedom – they are our benefactors (it actually does translate to *doer of good*). It includes those who were not in uniform and conscientious objectors who nevertheless supported the effort against the enemy and died giving first aid to soldiers on the battlefield. And remember the pioneers such as the "Black Robes" who explored the country, founded its earliest posts, and were martyred by the natives who opposed God in their own way. They did well for US.

Pro Deo et Patria,

-Nick Rossi

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Computer Corner

More websites from **Anthony DiMarino, Tony Sasso** and **Barbara Florio.**

Anthony Di Marino says here is a web site where you can bring up a map of any part of the world and get a description of the county's history. Click on a continent at the top of the page and work your way down into a country. View the map and get a brief description of the country. Then you can further learn of famous natives, fast facts, flag symbols, islands, regions and much more. There is also a short history and videos of famous areas with beautiful music.

Go to <http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/world.htm>

Having trouble typing the Italian accent codes? Try *Accents, Symbols & Foreign Script*, just go to <http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/international/bylanguage/italian.html> for guidelines for typing and using accents on your computer.

For pictures of the Old Brooklyn neighborhoods, go to <http://www.brooklynpix.com/catalog15bk.php?locality_no=10401>

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ITALIAN GENEALOGICAL GROUP

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Annual Membership: Individual $22 per year;
Family $27 per year; Outside U. S. Membership $27 per year
Newsletter is published 10 times a year.
Meetings are held the 2nd Saturday of each month, Sept. to June at 10:30 AM

Profiles from the Four Corners

Michael S. Genovese

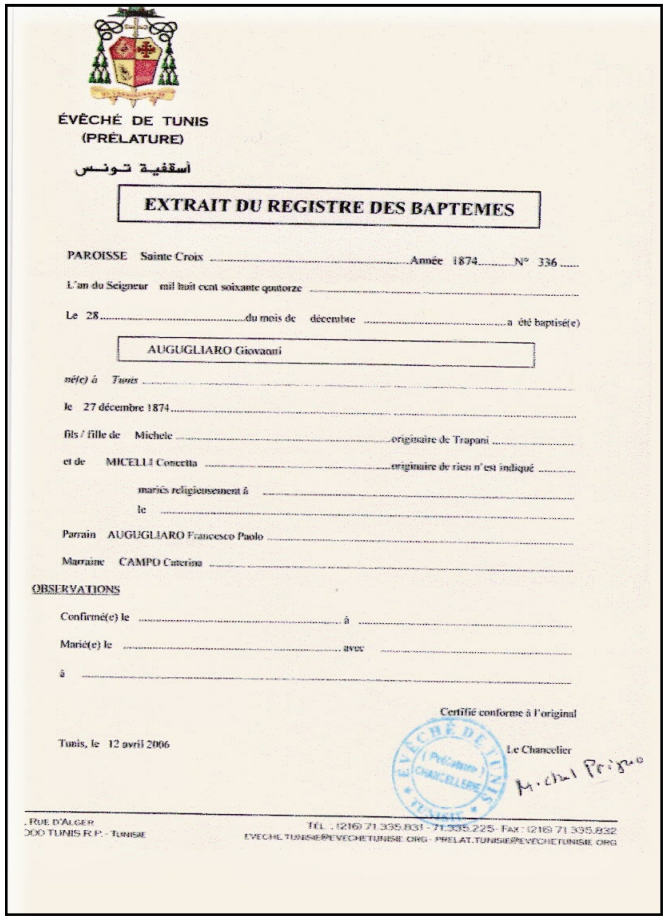
We continue our profile on IGG member **Sheila Perino Sapienza** of Setauket, Long Island, New York with the second part of her genealogical quest to find out about her husband's family story. (See April 2010 issue for Part I)

Serendipitous Encounters

While good things often happen to us by chance, they rarely occur three times in a row. Searching for the truth about my husband's family proved to be the exception. One day I was thumbing through a travel guide to Sicily, looking for some information on a Trapani town for my cousin. I stumbled on the city of Erice which, the guide informed me, at the top of Monte San Giuliano. The city, formerly known by the name of the mountain was renamed Erice in 1934, well after all my husband's family had immigrated to the United States. No wonder I could not find their hometown as stated on their records; it had taken another identity.

The second chance encounter happened almost simultaneously. My husband often described a family story about his grandfather growing up in Tunisia. I was unaware that Tunisia had had a very large Italian colony. In my ignorance, I was *Googling* "Augugliaro" and "Tunisia" when up popped a listing of Catholic baptisms in the city of Tunis. Curious, I opened up the site. It was all in French (which I don't speak) but the layout was clear enough for me to find the baptism register. There listed were both Giovanni and Giovanna Augugliaro. While their first names and their father's first name were all in French, Concetta Miceli was clearly indicated as the mother. What was more interesting was that the baptism dates were very close to what was on Giovanni's WWI registration and Giovanna's arrival information. They did not support the family's long held belief concerning Giovanni and Giovanna's ages.

The Tunis site indicated that you could send for copies of the baptisms and gave an address but was vague about paying the fee. Using an internet French translation program, I constructed a shaky letter to the dioceses requesting copies of the baptismal records and asking about payment. I glued a copy of the baptism list to letter in a vague hope it might help the process along. I also logged the site into my records for future use, and that turned out to be a wise move in and of itself. It is ironic, however, that today, the baptism list is no longer accessible. Serendipity was being in the right place at the right time.



ÉVÊCHÉ DE TUNIS
(PRÉLATURE)

أسقفية تونس

EXTRAIT DU REGISTRE DES BAPTEMES

PAROISSE Sainte Croix ..... Année 1874..... N° 336 .....

L'an du Seigneur mil huit cent soixante quatorze .....

Le 28..... du mois de décembre ..... a été baptisé(e)

AUGUGLIARO Giovanni

né(e) à Tunis .....

le 27 décembre 1874 .....

fils / fille de Michele ..... originaire de Trapani .....

et de MICELLI Concetta ..... originaire de rien n'est indiqué .....

mariés religieusement à .....

le .....

Parrain AUGUGLIARO Francesco Paolo .....

Marraine CAMPO Caterina .....

OBSERVATIONS

Confirmé(e) le ..... à .....

Marié(e) le ..... avec .....

à .....

Certifié conforme à l'original

Tunis, le 12 avril 2006

Le Chancelier

Michel Perino

RUE D'ALGER
1000 TUNIS R.P. - TUNISIE

TEL. : (216) 71 335 831 - 71 335 225 - FAX : (216) 71 335 832
EVECHE.TUNISIE@EVECHETUNISIE.ORG - PRELAT.TUNISIE@EVECHETUNISIE.ORG

One day, not very long after the request was mailed to Tunis, a response came. Amazingly the church sent the certificates. The letter, all in French necessitated the translator again. It indicated that I should send the fee (quite small) in Euros to the church official at the address on the letterhead.

The records clearly showed that Giovanni Augugliaro was born December 27, 1874, not 1880. Giovanna was born May 4, 1879. Giovanni's godfather was Francesco Paolo Augugliaro, who seemed to be married to Concetta Miceli's sister Guiseppa. Later on, I would learn that the brothers had married two sisters. The Tunis site also turned

out to be very useful in filling in details about Giovanni Augugliaro's cousin, Giuseppe Augugliaro (the fellow Giovanni and Vito were living with in NYC during 1910). I am sure that there will be information about additional family members when I have developed the tree further.

The Augugliaro Family

The third instance of serendipity was meeting Giovanni Montanti over the internet. I had been *Googling* looking for books or videos about Erice when I found Giovanni's website. He is an Italian filmmaker, not a genealogist, who was involved with the production of a video about Erice. He also lives in the town. I purchased his video and, in the course of email correspondence, he offered to pick up any certificates I wanted from the Stato Civile for a fee. I told him that I was in the process of obtaining films from the Latter Day Saints in Utah and would send him the necessary information when I could. Giovanni had a difficult time understanding how I had access to Erice records in the USA I am not sure if this is because of his limited mastery of English or if it is not common knowledge in Sicily that so many records have been filmed by the LDS. Despite our language difficulties, Giovanni would become my pipeline for records in Erice.

The Italian Genealogical Group June 2010 Luncheon

The Italian Genealogical Group will host its annual June Luncheon on Saturday, June 12th, at 12 Noon after the IGG General Meeting at the Bethpage Library.

Tickets are $15.00 per person and must be pre-paid at the May 8th meeting.

Please check your choice of sandwich:

Eggplant
Potatoes and Eggs
Chicken Parmesan,
Mozzarella-Tomato-Roasted Peppers
Grilled Chicken-Roasted Peppers & Mozzarella

Seating is limited, so please prepay early. Everyone enjoyed last year's June luncheon meeting and socializing with other members. We know this year's turnout will be just as successful. See you all there.

Please make checks to IGG
or mail to:
Mrs. Barbara M.Florio
259 North Beech Street
North Massapequa, N.Y. 11758
516-557-2917

Check will also be accepted at the May meeting.

Scholarship News

The Scholarship Committee is currently reviewing applications submitted by high school students for our $1000 IGG Scholarship. The winner will be announced in our June newsletter. Fundraising for the scholarship program is ongoing. Tax deductible donations in memory of a loved one may be sent to IGG Scholarship Fund, c/o **Angela LaGiglia**, 11 Quincy Place, West Islip, NY 11795. All memorial contributions will be acknowledged.

April Meeting: Family Tree Maker

Marie Pastore provided an interesting demonstration on her Family Tree Maker (FTM) software package. Marie explained how difficult it can be to keep our genealogy data neat and organized, and she showed us how easily FTM could be used to record, organize and publish our genealogical data. Using her laptop computer, where all her collected information is stored, and the overhead projector, she was able to show us how simple it is to use the FTM software.

Marie Pastore and Nick Rossi

Start Your Family Tree-On the Start Your Family Tree page, simply insert your name, your father's name then your mother's name.

Dates-Next, add the important dates and locations of birth, death and marriage to each person's profile. Since FTM is an Ancestry product, it is capable of querying Ancestry's on-line databases and downloading information.

Family Page-Marie then showed us some Family Pages for her Frede and Pastore families. Additional facts about marriages or other family events can be added to cue cards called More About Notes. You can also fill-out Individual Facts cards with important information about any relative.

Index of Individuals-As each Family Page is developed, the software compiles an Index of Individuals. This index can be used to easily locate and display any individual family page.

Source Citation-The program organizes and stores your genealogical information from many sources. You can list exactly where your information came from, for future reference. Also, the program has the ability to accept digitized information from your scanner. This allows you to scan photographs, and various type documents and store them on the software. All of your genealogical information is now immediately available at your fingertips from your computer.

Graphical Charts-Marie showed how the FTM program can use the Individual Family Pages to design and print Ancestor Charts and Descendant Charts with impressive graphics. You can generate kinship charts from a drop-down menu on any Family Page. There also is a section for developing Family Medical History reports.

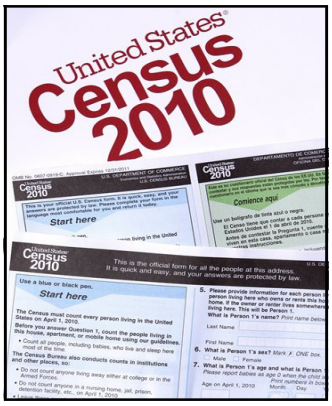
Text Reports-The FTM also can develop complete Family Group Sheets using all of your stored information. The Family Group Sheets can be can be input into the program's Publishing Center and a Family Genealogy book can be developed, page by page. With a simple click of the mouse, you can change the order in which a page appears in your book.

Calculators-The FTM contains a Soundex Calculator and a Date Calculator which can be used anytime during program operation.

Individual Scrap Book- FTM contains a complete digital photo program for each Family Page. You can insert photos from your scanner, camera or download from the internet. You can edit the photos and insert notes under each photo.

Timeline-Again, with a simple mouse click, Marie was able to present classic timelines for any portion of her family. Her timelines ranged from

Genealogists Wring Hands Over Skimpy US Census



Los Angles (April 1) -- Welcome to Census Day 2010, when genealogists hold a figurative moment of silence for the researchers of tomorrow -- who they say will find very little of interest in the information the government is collecting today.

The purpose of the census is to count everyone in the United States, with an eye toward divvying up congressional representation and federal funding. But from the beginning, most censuses have also included social and economic questions that yield a treasure trove for genealogists, including details such as the native tongues of respondents' parents, the date that respondents entered the country -- even, in 1930, who owned radios.

"The census from 1900 to 1930 has just been incredible, because [those versions] tend to have economic information," says Jan Alpert, president of the National Genealogical Society. "It's different each [decade], but they ask whether respondents rented or owned the house, what the value of the house was, what rent was paid."

Ross D. Franklin, AP

Genealogists fear researchers will find little of value when the 2010 Census records are opened to the public in 2082. The latest form has been pared down to a mere 10 queries.

Given the advances in statistical sampling techniques and the advent of the annual American Community Survey (ACS), the current census questionnaire has been pared down to a mere 10 queries -- essentially, who lives where, their race and their Hispanic background, if any.

But the basic "Just the facts, ma'am" approach means genealogists will find little of value when the 2010 records are opened to the public in 2082. (Under law, the specific answers for each address are kept sealed for 72 years.)

Demographers have concerns, too, particularly in comparing past data with newer collections, says UCLA sociology professor Suzanne Bianchi. For instance, the new ACS -- which can be more useful than the census for some areas of study -- asks in-depth questions on relationships and other issues, and offers data by year instead of by decade.

"It is going to take demographers awhile to feel comfortable using the ACS in conjunction with past censuses," Bianchi says. "We want to make sure we get it right when we assess changes or trends. And every time you change the way data are collected, you introduce the possibility of seeing things that look like changes ... that may just be a result of the change in methods."

According to Ancestry.com, the Census Bureau began using statistical sampling techniques in 1940, which over time meant that the head counters didn't need to ask detailed questions to meet the basic requirements of the census. The 2000 census was built on a short form for all respondents, but also included a long form for a specific sampling size of the country -- yet even that has been done away with for this year's census.

Alpert says she understands why the Census Bureau has scaled back on gathering information, partly a move to entice more undocumented immigrants to fill out the form by asking them fewer specifics. But the loss is posterity's: One of the key story lines that Americans try to fill out in their genealogical quests is when and how their ancestors arrived in the U.S., and questions about native languages, years in the country and other details from bygone census counts provide crucial clues.

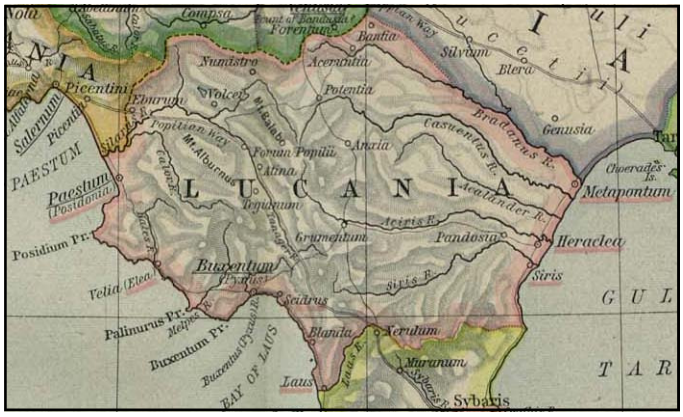
"All of that helps people find the family in Ellis Island and other ship passenger records, because it helps you narrow things down," Alpert says. Historical family data often can be found elsewhere, particularly for those who owned property. But records on the new and poor are harder to track down -- which also holds true for today's immigrants, especially in light of the new pared-down census.

"The immigrants are the hardest ones to reach, and those are the questions that aren't being asked this time," Alpert says. "It's just a shame, to me, that the immigrants who are so hesitant to answer don't realize it will be very difficult for people to trace them in future generations."

A Taste of Old Lucania

Luisa Potenza

Italy's Unexplored Region



Raffanata, a pungent horseradish soufflé, Carne alla Pastorale, an ancient shepherd's dish, Ciambotta, a medley of seasonal vegetables, Baby pumpkins infused with hot chili peppers. Agnello e Finocchio Al Forno, oven-baked lamb roasted with bulbs of fresh fennel. Zuppa di Fiori de Zucchini, a soup of zucchini flowers. Pastatelle, chestnut turnovers. Fuselli con Rafano, the ubiquitous pasta dressed with fried bread crumbs, cheese and grated horseradish. And, the renowned Lucanica, spicy sausages, once favored by the Romans.

These are part of a little recognized regional cusine of Italy, in danger of being lost forever! Few Americans have taken the time to explore the remote, interior villages of this unknown region once called Lucania, perhaps because it is part of IL Mezzogiorno, a part of Italy that has been historically ignored by the Italian government.

The quest for ancient recipes led me to remote mountain villages, some untouched by time. In searing hot weather, my Sister and I drove through Basilicata from the Northern to the Southern most points. Throughout our motor trip we experienced unforgettable moments and encountered unforgettable characters.

An indelible memory is of the afternoon my sister the navigator, lost her way. We came upon a scene out of the past. A middle-aged woman dressed in black was attending to wheat that had been placed on a large sheet in the sun. She looked at us with questioning eyes. And, then suddenly, from the doorway of her small farmhouse no less than eight faces appeared. They studied us for several minutes. And then, in unison, they called out, "venite a mangiare con noi," come eat with us.

It was the same everywhere we went-at first we were viewed with skepticism, but invariably doubt gave way to hospitality. The people wrapped us in a blanket of warmth and sincerity.

The recipes in this book have been handed down from generation to generation. Most reflect titles written in the village dialect. They represent the dishes created by peasant farmers, who utilized everything their labor and Mother Nature provided them. The once harsh, unyielding land has given them some rewards, however,

Basilicata has been blessed with fragrant vistas of wild herbs such as rosemary, fennel, sage, oregano, mint and laurel. Wild vegetables abound as well, like onions, chicory and spinach. They have always figured prominently in Lucanian cooking, and are prepared in dozens of ways.

The food of Basilicata is distinguished from other regions of Italy by its highly seasoned, robust nature. Many dishes are infused with "diavullichi," fiery hot peppers that sting the palate, but leave no after effect. Ginger makes its appearance in the renowned "soppressato." The celebrated cheeses of the region are sharp in taste, the sharpest being "provolone." Milder in taste is "caciocavallo," also known as "casiddi."

Giuliano Bugialli, the noted cookbook author and teacher, once remarked at an Italian Food Festival on Long Island that the foods of Basilicata have been ignored because "they use strange ingredients."

Haute cusine it is not. It is pure, wholesome food, simply prepared, using impeccably fresh ingredients.

The customs of the past have remained to this day, particularly among the elderly who keep to ancient traditions and methods of cooking, such as drying ripe black olives in a wood-burning oven and then preserving them in olive oil. And, the centuries-old method of cooking in cast-iron pots and air-drying homemade sausages over an open hearth.

With the advent of spring, the villagers plant their corps and forage the woods for nature's bounty. After a rainstorm, they gather up "lumache," (better known as escargot) in straw baskets, and then prepare them in a hot, spicy sauce.

Despite the availability of modern-day conveniences, food is still cooked from scratch and Sundays, like most of the Southern region of Italy, is synonymous with homemade pastas made from durum wheat. Using old-fashioned implements a variety of different pastas are created, such as "strascinati," and "fusilli," which is fashioned with a thin metal rod on which the pasta dough is rolled out onto a board, and the ancient "lagane," (favored by the Romans).

Elderly woman dressed in black shawl, tightly drawn around their heads as if to shield themselves from prying eyes, queue up at "Il Forno," the community oven, to purchase huge loaves of crusty bread and fucaccio. They appear to be locked in a time warp as the modern day world swirls about them.

Others can be seen buying huge umbrella-shaped mushrooms, picked from local forests. Some display their freshly picked zucchini flowers and baskets of snails on makeshift wooden tables in the town piazzas or on their front doorsteps. Shepherds who spend lonely hours tending to their flocks of sheep and goats still preserve their hierarchic organizations, ancient traditions and methods of cooking.

These are the faces of Old Lucania.

The above article is an excerpt from Luisa Potenza's new cookbook, "A Taste of Old Lucania, Italy's Unexplored Region." Luisa has a unique writing style as she inserts interesting genealogical stories along with some recipes.

Luisa is also is host of "Italia Mia," a radio show in East Patchogue, NY and in October, Luisa will be hosting a tour to Basilicata.

Anyone interested in purchasing her cookbook or joining her Basilicata tour should contact Luisa at 631-475-5200 ext 452 or at <LUPOT11796@aol.com> for more information.

The cost of her book $10.50 includes postage and handling.

Upcoming Events

Tony Lauriano will be presenting the last of his four lectures, *Writing the Family Story* at the Tappan Zee High School on May 4th.

He will also present lecture #1 at The Westchester County Genealogical Society on June 12. The Tappan Zee High School lecture starts at 7:00 PM and the WCGS lecture starts at 10:00 AM. Call to register for the lectures.

Tony Di Bartolo will make his *Mezzo Sicliano Mezzo Napolitano* presentation at the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum on Saturday, June 19. The Garibaldi-Meucci Museum is located at 420 Tompkins Avenue, Staten Island, NY.

Election of Officers

Nominated Officers for 2010-2011

Co-Presidents:	Nick Rossi & Marie Pastore
VP Programs:	Angela LaGiglia & Barbara Florio
VP Publicity:	Angela LaGiglia & Ann Holland
VP Public Relations:	Anthony DiBartolo
VP Special Projects:	John Martino
Treasurer:	Arthur Filete
Recording Secretary:	Joseph Battagliese
Corresponding Secretary:	Violet Sardo

Voting will be held at the June 12th meeting. Open nominations from the floor will be entertained.

Nominating Committee
Barbara Florio and William Gimello

I am an Italian-American

My roots are deep in an ancient soil, drenched by the Mediterranean sun, and watered by pure streams from snow capped mountains. I am enriched by thousands of years of culture. My hands are those of the mason, the artist, the man of the soil. My thoughts have been recounted in the annals of Rome, the poetry of Virgil, the creations of Dante, and the philosophy of Benedetto Croce.

I am an Italian-American, and from my ancient world, I first spanned the seas to the New World. I am Cristoforo Colombo.

I am Giovanni Caboto known in American history as John Cabot, discoverer of the mainland of North America .

I am Amerigo Vespucci, who gave my name to the New World, America

First to sail on the Great Lakes in 1679, founder of the territory that became the state of Illinois, colonizer of Louisiana and Arkansas, I am Enrico Tonti.

I am Filippo Mazzei, friend of Thomas Jefferson, and my thesis on the equality of man was written into the Bill of Rights.

I am William Paca, signer of the Declaration of Independence.

I am an Italian-American; I financed the Northwest Expedition of George Rogers Clark and accompanied him through the lands that would become Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin and Michigan. I am Colonel Francesco Vigo.

I mapped the Pacific from Mexico to Alaska and to the Philippines, I am Alessandro Malaspina.

I am Giacomo Belinimi, discoverer of the source of the Mississippi River in 1823.

I created the Dome of the United States Capitol. They call me the Michelangelo of America. I am Constantino Brumidi.

In 1904, I founded in San Francisco, the Bank of Italy now known as the Bank of America, the largest financial institution in the world, I am A.P. Giannini.

I am Enrico Fermi, father of nuclear science in America. I am Steve Geppi, founder of Diamond Comics, the largest distributorship of comics on the planet.

I am the first enlisted man to earn the Medal of Honor in World War II; I am John Basilone of New Jersey.

I am an Italian-American.

I am the million strong who served in America's armies and the tens of thousands whose names are enshrined in military cemeteries from Guadalcanal to the Rhine.

I am the steel maker in Pittsburgh, the grower in the Imperial Valley of California, the textile designer in Manhattan, the movie maker in Hollywood, the homemaker and the breadwinner in over 10,000 communities.

I am an American without stint or reservation, loving this land as only one who understands history, its agonies and its triumphs can love and serve it. I will not be told that my contribution is any less nor my role not as worthy as that of any other American. I will stand in support of this nation's freedom and protect against all foes.

My heritage has dedicated me to this nation. I am proud of my heritage, and I shall remain worthy of it.

I am an Italian-American.

Dolores Royere *of Woodhaven, NY, sent this to remind us Italian-Americans how involved we were with the discovery, exploration and development of America.*

Condolences

One of our dear members **Joseph Mascali** passed away of heart failure in April. Joseph has been very active in our Group and will be sorely missed. We offer his wife Joan and daughter Michelle our sincere condolences.

Five Reasons It's Not in the Courthouse

George Morgan

The best successes in my U.S. genealogical research trips have been those for which I was most prepared. And yet, despite all the careful preparation, there are always those times when I've come up with a big, fat goose egg. It also seems to me that courthouses are the places where I most often come up empty-handed on locating materials I expected to find there.

In "Along Those Lines..." this week, I'd like to address five of the top reasons that we don't always succeed in hitting the mother lode in our courthouse research and make suggestions for overcoming the most common obstacles.

Reason One: Assuming Documents Are at a Specific Courthouse

The most common mistake we all make at one time or another is assuming that something will just be there in a specific courthouse. And yes, I've made a few assumptions like this and suffered as a result. There are few things worse than going to the wrong courthouse and asking for materials that never would have been there. (I know that more than one courthouse clerk has had a good belly laugh at my expense!)

The most reliable way to avoid the "wrong courthouse" pitfall is to be thorough in your historical/geographical research before you leave home. You can do this by first determining the time period during which your ancestor or family member lived in the area. Second, read some history and learn more about that specific area to better understand what government(s) might have been in power at that time, what documents they might generated, and the reason(s) why they were produced.

Use one or more historical maps of that place from that historical period and focus on boundary lines. Based on the boundaries at that time, determine where the seat of government was. That is your first point of inquiry about the documents and whether they survived, and you will want to make contact with the courthouse or another government office in that place.

Reason Two: Documents Have Been Stored

The sheer volume of documents produced, processed, and filed in a courthouse is mind-boggling. Most courthouses will, over time, have to make decisions about retention and storage of their documents. Few courthouses will have kept every document onsite; most will have decided to place non-current documents in storage. The location and quality of the storage facilities) will always be a question mark.

Before you head off to a courthouse seeking the probate records for your great-great-grandfather (which may date from 1825), make sure you contact the courthouse to determine what is accessible in the courthouse and what might be stored elsewhere. Older documents may be stored in a records retention warehouse, and you may need to provide advance notice of the specific types of records and years that you want to access. By making contact in advance, you also can determine if there are any restrictions or special identification requirements that must be satisfied.

Reason Three: Records Have Been Relocated

In addition to moving records to a warehouse, a courthouse may have transferred custody of original records to some other entity. The most common places to which I've found records transferred or relocated have been state archives and state departments of vital records or statistics. (Remember, we're talking about the U.S. here. In other countries the documents may have been transferred to a civil registration office, a general records office, a national vital documents registry, or similar government office.)

One of my constant reference resources is Ancestry's Red Book, which helps me determine what documents were kept and when--county by county in the U.S. The book's historical articles also tell me whether the documents are best located at the state, province, or county level or at the state level. In addition, I often use the Vital Records Information site (http://www.vitalrec.com/) to quickly determine what is where. For example, birth and death records in Nevada since 1911 can be obtained from the Division of Health/Vital Statistics in Carson City, Nevada; earlier records are available from the County Recorder. Marriage

and divorce records in Nevada are only available from the county.

Since records may have been permanently relocated, it is important to make contact with the county in advance of a visit or ordering records.

Reason Four: Records Have Been Lost or Destroyed

General William Tecumseh Sherman did not destroy every courthouse in Georgia, as one genealogist once tried to convince me. Nor did the Union Army destroy all the courthouses in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama, as others have tried to convince me. Don't laugh, though.

Some courthouses have indeed lost some or all of their records at different times over the centuries. War, fire, floods, hurricanes, tornados, and other disasters have done their best to obliterate records. However, neglect and poor storage conditions have probably caused as many or more records to perish. Original documents have sometimes been removed for reference and not returned. Worse still, some researchers may have simply stolen documents for their own files, leaving the rest of us without those invaluable resources.

When you find that documents have been lost or destroyed, you must be at your most creative as a researcher. No, that doesn't mean that you should "make up information to fill the gaps." Instead, you have to consider what alternative documents and resources might help you reconstruct the information that has been lost.

Original land records may have perished but plat maps, deed transcriptions, and tax rolls were usually a high priority for reconstruction after the loss. A probate file may have disappeared from a file cabinet, but consider the fact that the minutes of the probate court may have included the reading of some pertinent details into the court records. These may point you toward the name of an executor/executrix/administrator, a law firm, sheriff's auction records, public notices, and other materials. Look, too, for transcriptions of other materials that might be used instead. This might include church marriage records to be used in lieu of a marriage book, a cemetery interment ledger as a proof of the death date and cause, and a widow's military pension records to help establish the dates of her marriage to her late husband, the date of his death, and the names of surviving children.

Ancestry.com has helped researchers recover from the loss of the 1890 U.S. Federal Census records by compiling alternative records that can be used to reconstruct population details. The 1890 Census Substitute (http://www.ancestry.com/search/rectype/census/1890sub/main.htm) uses city and county directories, state census records, voter registration lists, and a range of other documents. You, too, can reconstruct losses in courthouse records by thinking creatively about other documents that may be used as alternative sources.

Reason Five: Courthouse Staff

The most frustrating of the problems I've encountered in a few courthouses is that of the clerk who either doesn't understand what I'm looking for or who is so overworked that he or she won't devote a lot of time to my problem.

In either case, our job is to inspire and be a good example. Rather, it is important for us to be "good ambassadors," remain cheerful and polite, and to ask open-ended questions. If a clerk responds to a question you ask with an "I dunno," don't give up so easily. I often respond with, "Is there someone else here who might be able to help us?" (Notice that I said "us" and not "me.")

The other, and usually most important question you can ask is, "If the records I'm looking for aren't here, can you help me find out where they may have been stored or transferred to?" I find that this leaves a piece of unfinished business on the table that most clerks can't or won't leave unfinished.

Summary

There always are going to be situations in which courthouse records are going to be elusive. And while you won't always have success in locating them all, I hope that these five hints will be of some help.

Happy Hunting!
George

George's new book, How to Do Everything with Your Genealogy, has just been released by McGraw-Hill/Osborne Media. Look for the book in retail and online bookstores!

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Future Meeting Dates for the Italian Genealogical Group

May 8, June 12 and September 11, 2010

All meetings start at 10:30 AM

Directions to the Bethpage Library, 50 Powell Ave, Bethpage, NY:

By Train: The Bethpage Library may be reached by taking the Long Island Railroad to the Bethpage Station. You can then walk east one block to Broadway, turn left, go (north) 3 blocks on Broadway; then (at the second traffic light) turn right on Powell Avenue; the Library is about 500 ft on your right.

By Car: Use the Southern State Parkway or the Long Island Expressway. If using the Southern State Parkway take exit 28A and go north on the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway (Route 135). If using the Long Island Expressway take Exit 44S and go south on the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway (Route 135). Exit Route 135 at the Powell Avenue Exit. Proceed in a westerly direction towards the village, about 3 blocks. There is ample parking across the street from the Library. Our meeting will be in the downstairs meeting room.