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## **Coroner's Records**



As part of the "Finding Family" series at the National Archives in New York City, legal genealogist, **Judy G. Russell**, presented "Death by Undue Means – Coroners' Records" on November 12, 2019. She discussed the coroner's report as an important source of family history information. Using several examples, she explained that, by law in different places, the coroner was required to empanel a jury to conduct an inquest into any unnatural, violent, or untimely death that might have been caused by felony or other reasons. Information on coroners' reports may include the name, age and description of the deceased, personal information such as residence or marital status, name of the person

identifying the body, the location where the body was found and its condition, what effects were found with the body, the disposition of the remains and the identity of the inquest jurors. As such, these reports could be extremely important to genealogists as they investigate their family histories.

To determine whether a coroner's report might exist for a particular death, Ms. Russell advises genealogists to carefully examine the death certificate and newspaper accounts of the death for clues.

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Coroners' records are sometimes difficult to locate but some might be found on <u>familysearch.org</u>, <u>ancestry.com</u> or in local or state archives. When using <u>familysearch</u>, she recommends conducting a catalog search by place using variations of the keyword "coroner." In New York, depending on the year, the records may be found in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, the Municipal Archives or the New York State Archives. The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society also has records of eighteenth and nineteenth century inquests.

This was an extremely interesting presentation. The free "Finding Family" series on genealogicallyrelated topics is open to the public and occurs once monthly at the National Archives at New York City from September to June on Tuesdays from Noon to 1 PM on the third-floor Learning Center of the Alexander Hamilton US Custom House building near Battery Park. Anyone interested should check their website at <u>https://www.archives.gov/nyc</u> for dates and topics.

**Genealogy Essentials Series** 

useful in honing your skills and knowledge. The

January 16, 4 PM: "Getting Started in Genealogy Research." Learn about the library's

genealogy resources, discover essential research

methods and strategies, identify relevant records

and how to locate them, and organize your family

Genealogical Research." Discover the abundant

uses of historical newspapers for genealogical and

local history information in the numerous

microfilm and digital collections available at

Schwarzman Building (Main Branch, 5th Avenue

and 42 Street), South Court, Classroom A.

Both sessions will take place in the Stephen A.

January 21, 2 PM: "Newspapers in

January offerings are:

research information.

NYPL.

The New York Public Library offers workshops on genealogical topics that can be very



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# **Ellis Island Hospitals**

### Richard Graziano, Ed.D.

Many thousands of people board a Statue Cruises boat to visit Ellis Island each year. Once there, they can learn of the experiences of the millions of immigrants who passed through the island on their way to seek a better life in the United States. They will see the Great Hall, the Baggage Room, the Board of Special Inquiry Courtroom, and walk through a series of rooms that chronicle every aspect of the immigration narrative. Some who arrived at Ellis Island were marked for further inspection and processing because of a suspected medical or psychological issue and some of those were sent to the various hospital buildings located on the island.

While these buildings are generally closed to the public, there is an opportunity to walk through some



of them on a "hard hat" tour offered by Save Ellis Island. non-profit а organization affiliated with the National Park Service. This group's mission is to raise funds for the stabilization, rehabilitation and restoration of twentynine lesser known buildings on the island. Included are the Ferry Building, the three general hospital

The author near the general hospital buildings

buildings and the infectious disease and psychiatric wards. In addition, all the buildings on the island are connected by a series of corridors and breezeways that also require restoration.

On a recent Saturday, I participated in this tour. It turned out to be extremely interesting and



be extremely interesting and informative and added to my understanding of the experience of the immigrant. The tour group meets in the Baggage Room near the Park Service Desk on the left as you enter. You are asked to sign a waiver and must wear a hard hat (supplied by the tour guide) throughout the tour since most of the buildings are in

varying states of disrepair. Our guide, Torrey, first explained the general immigration process and then provided specific information about the various hospital buildings. The three general hospital buildings are not included in the tour because they sustained major damage from Hurricane Sandy and are unsafe to enter.



One of the first things one notices is that most of the windows have been covered over by what looks like a piece of plywood with a vent. These are called "preservation panes" since they keep out the elements but allow air to circulate into the buildings.

Preservation Panel

The initial building on the tour and the first to be restored by Save Ellis Island is the Ferry Building.



This was the point of embarkation to Manhattan for the immigrants after they had successfully passed through the process. Next was the laundry, where we saw large machines used for washing and rinsing clothing, linens, etc.

Later in the tour, we saw a contraption called an autoclave, which was used to decontaminate mattresses. From there we learned about the



Washing Machine and Autoclave

psychiatric ward and how an immigrant might be tagged for mental disease. That process involved a series of mental puzzles to determine the ability of the subject to process processes.

We visited an isolation ward where measles patients were treated as an example of how contagious diseases were handled. Wards were not connected to each other to avoid crosscontamination. Large windows were kept open all year round to provide light and circulate air. Corners were rounded since right-angle corners were believed to harbor germs. Heating was provided by radiators, forced hot air and radiant heating in the floors. Next on the tour was the morgue, which included nine drawers for the bodies and an autopsy amphitheater. The primary purpose of the autopsies was scientific and educational. The last stop was to the homes provided to the hospital administrators. One additional note is that scattered throughout the tour, are works of art that comprise an exhibit entitled "Unframed Ellis Island" by the French artist JR, an exhibit that chronicles the immigrant experience (below).

Over their history, the hospitals served over 275,000 patients who were treated with respect, using the latest in medical practice. About 35,000 died on Ellis Island. Approximately half of those were children.



Some logistical tips: The cost of the tour is \$60.50, less for seniors plus fees if you book online. That price includes the ferry and audio tours of both Liberty and Ellis Islands. Tours are offered seven days a week, rain or shine. Tickets can be purchased at https://www.statueoflibertytickets.com/ Hard-Hat-Tour-of-Ellis-Island or at the windows inside Castle Clinton in Battery Park. I highly recommend purchasing a Reserve Ticket, since that gives you priority entry into the boarding line. (The day I was there, the "regular" line had about a twohour wait.) You will have to go through security screening before boarding the boat which stops at both islands. (Liberty Island now features a new Statue of Liberty Museum, which is well worth seeing!) If you are leaving from New York, the boat stops first at Liberty Island and then Ellis Island before returning to the Battery, so, if you wish to go to Liberty Island, you must get off the boat there and re-board to go to Ellis. The hard-hat tour lasts about two hours and requires quite a bit of walking, so be mindful of dressing appropriately and wear comfortable shoes! The tour is not ADA accessible. Still, but not video, photography is permitted.

The tour is definitely worth the effort. The guide was well-informed and the information she provided was fascinating. The best part, however, was to be able to walk among those buildings which were an integral, and sometimes tragic, part of the immigrant's experience on Ellis Island. To help in the restoration effort, you can make a contribution to Save Ellis Island at saveellisisland.org.

# **Contribute to This Newsletter!**

We need your help putting this IGG newsletter together each month. We would like to hear about your personal research stories. Let us know what research you are doing. Or, you can write a story about some aspect of Italian culture. You can even tell us about a family tradition or give us a recipe handed down from a grandparent. If you want, we can help you to produce an article for the newsletter.

Send your information to Joe or Richard at:

Jbattag123@aol.com. Or grazgenealogy@gmail.com

Thank you, Joe Battagliese Richard Graziano



## Annotations on Passenger Records

Many of us have been lucky enough to locate a passenger manifest listing the names of our ancestors travelling to the United States from Italy and elsewhere. In addition to the information at the top of the document, such as the name of the ship, and the ports and dates of debarkation and arrival, these records include data about individual passengers. The manifest lists the name, gender, age, marital status, occupation, last place of residence, final destination in the US, the person who paid for the ticket, the amount of money held by the passenger, the person in the US who the passenger was going to meet, etc. Assuming you can read the handwriting, all this information is straightforward. Less obvious, though, are the variety of markings, codes, and annotations squeezed into the margins and small blank spaces above and behind information written in the list's columns. This could be a simple as a line drawn through the entire row which meant that the passenger did not travel on that ship on that day. Others are letters such as LPC (Likely to Become a Public Charge) and BSI or SI (a referral to the Board of Special Inquiry). Then there are various letters such as X, BC, D, or numbers such as 3X24657505 4/30/40, plus check marks, and other symbols. Deciphering this dizzying array of notes requires a level of expertise that few of us possess.

Luckily, JewishGen.org offers an article entitled, "A Guide to Interpreting Passenger List Annotations," by Marian L. Smith, Historian of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, which defines these annotations. They are organized by location on the manifest such as Left Margin, Name Column, Occupation Column, Nationality and Citizenship, Record of Detained Aliens and List of Aliens Held for Special Inquiry. Clicking on an area, brings you to a page that clarifies the specific annotations used in that section. For example, the number listed above refers to a verification of immigration records for naturalization purposes. The article also includes facsimiles of the different variations of each type of annotation.

This article, which can be found at <u>www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Manifests</u>, is an invaluable tool in enhancing what we can learn from passenger lists.

## **Did You Know?**

When you find an ancestor on a passenger list with a notation next to the name that indicated that the person was being held for inquiry, there is a second page with information about that passenger. Toward the end of the manifest for the ship's entry are pages entitled "Report of Aliens Held for Special Inquiry." This report provides the name of the passenger and the page number where that person is found on the main passenger list, the cause of the detention (abbreviations and annotations are used), the actions of the Board of Special Inquiry (the date of admittance or deportation), and the number of meals (breakfast, dinner and supper) that were provided to the passenger during detention (the steamship company was responsible for reimbursing the government for the cost of these meals). So, your ancestor might appear on two separate pages in the manifest.

Mothers with small children were often detained because of fears that they might become "public charges." (The 1882 Immigration Law excluded "any

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person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge." The 1891 law excluded "paupers or persons likely to become a public charge.") Women travelling alone or with small children often fit into that category. Remember, Italian women kept their maiden names throughout their lives, so the surnames of the mother and children on both pages of the manifest will differ since the children usually have their father's surname.

Look for these reports that can provide valuable additional information about your ancestors as they entered the United States.

### **Reference:**

"Public Charge Provisions of the Immigration Law." (2019). U.S, Citizenship and Immigration Service. <u>https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/our-history/public-charge-provisions-immigration-law-a-brief-historical-background</u>.

# **Marriage Records**

One of the most important documents to locate in family history research is the marriage record. It can contain a trove of information including: the names of the spouses, ages and/or dates and places of birth, their residences, the date and place of the marriage, the marital status of the spouses, occupations, the parents' names, including the mothers' maiden names, names of witnesses, the name and title of the official performing the ceremony.

FamilySearch indicates that marriage records actually include a number of different types of documents:

• Intentions. Most common before 1850, these were posted in a public place prior to a marriage to show a couple's intention to marry and allow others a chance to object.

• Marriage bonds. These can be found in southern and mid-Atlantic states until around 1850. Usually posted by a member of the bride's family, they showed a couple's intention to marry. The bond was the amount of money the groom would pay if the marriage did not go through.

• Marriage applications and licenses. A bride or groom applied to the civil authority for a marriage application or license, which showed that the couple had legal permission to marry.

• **Consent papers.** These can be found if the bride or groom was underage, as defined by each state. These documents show the parents' permission for the marriage.

• Marriage records. A marriage record is the actual recording of the event.

• Marriage certificates. A marriage certificate was given to the couple at the time of the marriage. The clerk or other official may also have kept a copy.

• **Returns and registers.** The person who performed the marriage, such as a minister or justice of the peace, sent these to the county clerk to show that the marriage had taken place (Huber).

Of course, in the marriage of a Catholic couple, we would add the **marriage banns** – the posting of the intention to marry in the couple's parishes, usually on three consecutive Sundays. In Italian records, these are called the *matrimoni pubblicazione*. In addition, Italian couples also had to put together the *matrimoni* processetti, a collection of documents that had to be presented to the priest or civil official. This packet usually contained the birth records of the couple and/or their baptismal certificates, the *matrimoni pubblicazione*, sometimes the death record of a parent or previous spouse, permissions of parents or grandfathers if a couple was underage.

So, these are a most vital of vital records that can further your research and move your tree back one or sometimes even two generations.

### **Reference:**

Huber, L. A. (2018, January 29). Finding your family in U.S. marriage records. Available at: https:// www.familysearch.org/blog/en/u-s-marriagerecords/?

et\_cid=1532799&et\_rid=114179089&linkid=https% 3a%2f%2fwww.familysearch.org%2fblog%2fen% 2fu-s-marriage-records%2f&cid=em-brc-8012

## **Italian Vocabulary**

A phrase seen on almost every Italian birth and death record is *e comparso*. It means appeared. However, most often on a birth certificate, that is the place where the father's name is listed. Sometimes the midwife's name appears there (*e comparsa*). On a death record, it identifies the person(s) providing the information about the death to the town official.

# Name Interpretation Tip

Ruth Lapioli Merriman

Many given and surnames are common to certain areas and will be repeated frequently in the records. If a name is illegible in one record, it may be easier to decipher in another. Also, indexes may be written more neatly than the record itself and many times a name that is confusing in the record can be read easily in the index.

Source: POINTers. (2004, Summer). p.13.

### Cameos

#### Gennaro Cambardella

My earliest fascination with cameos began as a young boy when Zia Antonella would visit my mother Concetta in Brooklyn in the early fifties. My brothers and I would greet our aunt with a reluctant, but required, embrace and kiss. She always wore a large shell cameo of a woman in profile with a diamond necklace. For my mother and her sister, the few cameos they owned were their prized possessions, originally purchased by their father in Torre del Greco, a *comune* in Naples which has been noted for its production of hand-carved shell cameos since the seventeenth century. Today, several thousand people and many businesses are employed there in the manufacture of cameos. The skill is taught at the town's Institute of Fine Arts.



cameo, by А definition, is a piece of jewelry that is carved in relief. It can be made from a variety of materials. including stone. shell, coral, lava, glass and mother-of-The most pearl. common, however, are created out of the heart of the conch shell. They are often placed in a

setting of gold or silver and can sometimes include a small diamond. Carving these pieces began during the Greek and Roman civilizations but reached its pinnacle during the Renaissance period. Production continued in the Neo-Classical and Victorian eras. Their popularity has ebbed and flowed throughout the ages, though recently, there has been a revival of interest in them.

When my mother passed, I inherited her small collection. I have added to it as I travelled to other parts of the world. While, some may collect coins, stamps or baseball cards, I collect cameos!

During a thirty-year career as an art teacher, I developed an interest in sculpting wood using simple carving tools. Most of my work involves carving relief portraits of historical figures, such as Washington and Jefferson. After retirement and the realization that I might not have the physical strength to carve large portraits, a decided to combine my two interests and try my hand at creating cameos.

I began by researching the history of cameos and seeking out examples of excellent work in this area. I found little, however, on the actual production process so I went to the source. In 2011, I travelled to Torre del Greco to learn more. Unfortunately, the Institute of Fine Arts was closed for vacation. As an alternative, I visited several of the major specialty houses that made and sold cameos. To my dismay, I learned that their production factories were off-site and not open to the general public. Each did, however, feature a local craftsman who gave a short demonstration of the carving process. The stores offer for sale some fine shell cameos, each mounted with silver or gold.

Buying hand-carved cameos can be tricky. Imitations and fakes abound. Some purveyors claim that their goods are carved by hand, but they are actually machine-made. Some are not carved at all but are fashioned from plastic. Many of these look quite genuine. Of course, experienced jewelers can tell the difference very quickly. For the novice, however, there are a few ways to tell the difference.

- 1. Holding the back of a shell cameo to natural or a bright light should reveal a translucency.
- 2. The back of the shell should be curved.
- 3. Look for tool marks around the profile.
- 4. Hold the cameo in your hand for about 30 seconds and it should feel cool to the touch.

Continuing my quest for information, I sought out individual craftsmen in neighborhoods of Torre del Greco who worked independently from the large houses. I found two elderly men who had small workshops. After I expressed a strong interest in the process, one invited me to his nearby apartment. While he was impressed with my enthusiasm to learn this skill, he suggested that I should have started as early as my teens. I was somewhat crestfallen, but he reassured me that it was never too late. He then brought out samples of his work. These were some of the most beautiful cameos I had ever seen. After some time trying to choose, I bought three at what I consider to be a fair price. They are valued pieces in my collection. I came away with a basic understanding of the process. Hand carving is labor intensive. It can take many hours or even days to finish even a simply designed shell cameo. Most begin with the conch shell, *cassis ruff*, which is cut into an oval shape that is temporarily glued on to a hand-held <u>dopstick</u> (a small wooden rod with a small platform on which to hold the glued oval shell) for ease of handling by the carver. A sketch is made on the top layer followed by rough cutting away much like a sculptor carving marble. When the artisan is satisfied with the finished carving, the next step is to polish it, utilizing a number of different techniques. This is followed by mounting the piece on a gold or silver frame. Lastly, a clasp and or metal loop is attached.

Once home, I began to apply what I had learned



and to try my hand at producing an acceptable cameo. So far, I haven't achieved the level of success I am looking for, but I continue to learn and have confidence that someday I will create a cameo of which I can be proud. In the meantime, I will continue to marvel at the craftsmanship of the artists who create these wonderful pieces.

### **References:**

Clements, M. L. and Clements, P. R. (2003). *Cameos, a Pocket Guide*. Schiffer Publishing.

Draper, J. D. (Spring 2008). *Cameo Appearances*. Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Miller, A. M. (2005). *Cameos, Old and New.* Gemstone Press.

## The Culture Column Italian New Year's Celebrations

Marilyn Ann Verna, Ed.D.

December 31, New Year's Eve, coincides with La Festa di San Silvestro. There are certain foods that can be found on every Italian table. Lentils represent prosperity because they resemble gold coins that will bring you wealth and good fortune throughout the new year. They are cooked with pork, also a symbol of an abundance of wealth because of the high fat content and richness. Dried fruit and grapes ensure that those attending the feast will be wise and frugal spenders. Having 12 grapes, one for each month of the year will give you good health throughout the year. Do not eat any fowl that flies as you do not want your luck to fly away! Eating lobster is also avoided because lobsters walk backwards and eating them may thus lead to a set-back during the year.

Celebrations with concerts or bonfires occur in the squares of Italian towns. At the stroke of midnight, the revelers make a toast, beautiful fireworks explode, and confetti fills the air. The loud noises at midnight will ward off the evil spirits. Traditions include cleaning out the old to make way for the new. Therefore, dishes are broken and pots and pans can be seen flying from windows.

Our celebration in New York reflects those of Italy. The locals have fireworks in the streets, and people come to door to door banging pots. Our family always had coffee brewing to finish those left-over desserts from Christmas. There was always a new batch of homemade *struffoli*. Italians make New Year's resolutions, as we do. The majority wish for good health and economic stability.

Kissing under the mistletoe is a tradition on New Year's Eve in Italy. It is thought to enhance one's chance of finding love. During the evening, *tombola*, a game similar to bingo, is played. This tradition was born in Naples in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when public gambling was illegal. *Tombola*, however, could be played in private.

January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Day of the Epiphany is a national holiday in Italy, with schools, government offices and most businesses closed. The date celebrates the arrival of the three wise men in Bethlehem. It is also known as the Feast of the Three Kings and the Twelfth Day of Christmas. The Adoration of the Magi has been a common theme for Western artists, including Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi (below), DaVinci, Botticelli, Rubens, Velazquez and many others.



The legend of *La Befana*, well known by children, is closely related to the story of the wise men. Folklore states that they were looking for the manger and stopped to ask directions from an old lady who was sweeping outside her home. They asked her to join them, but she refused because she had too much housework to do. Then, thinking about her own child who had died, she reconsidered and went after them. She gathered baked goods and gifts in her basket and raced out to follow the brightest star in the sky that would lead her to the Holy Child. As she grew tired, she became lost. Suddenly, angels appeared and sprinkled stardust on *Befana* and her



broom, which then took flight. Legend says she is still seeking Baby Jesus. Similar to Babbo Natale and St. Nicholas, she is known to stop at all homes that have children. If the child has been good all year, she leaves toys and candy. However, if the child has

been bad, she will leave coal. In Italy, *La Befana* is the Good Christmas Witch. Children will leave food and drink for her and write letters to her with their wishes. Stockings are hung on the fireplaces. Perhaps our tradition of leaving cookies and milk for Santa Claus derived from this legend.

The story is celebrated in many towns. Around Lake Como, men dress as the Wise Men and parade through the countryside with torches and gifts for the needy. In Venice, there is a *Befana Regatta* down the Grand Canal. *Le Marche*, a national *Befana* festival, is held in Urbania. A "House of the *Befana*" is built with a post office to receive children's letters. In Rome, *La Befana* puppets and toys are sold in the Piazza Navona market. The *Parade of the Magi* in Rome, commences at Via della Conciliazione and proceeds to St. Peter's Square, where gifts are brought to the Pope.

### A Happy Healthy New Year to All!

Next month: Valentine's Day and Carnevale Correction in last month's Christmas traditions: *La Festa del Ceppo* and *La Notte di Natale* 

## What Exactly is Myrrh, Anyway?

When the Three Kings, Balthasar, Melchior and Gaspar followed the Star of Bethlehem to find and honor Jesus as the King of the Jews, they brought with them gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. While most understand the first two, we wonder how many are familiar with myrrh.

Well, according to several sources, myrrh is an aromatic resin from a family of trees in Africa and Arabia that is used for incense and perfume.

## **January IGG Meeting**

Next IGG Meeting is January 11, 2020. The speaker is Plip Sutton of the New York Library. He will be speaking on using the NY Library's Naturalization Records in genealogy research.

Meeting starts at 10:30, guests welcome.

## January Raffle Winner

The IGG Board has announced that the January winner of the membership raffle from those who entered at the Hofstra Italian Festival is:

#### Susan Visconti

Congratulations and welcome to the Italian Genealogical Group!

## Ho, Ho, Ho and a Bottle of ... Vino! The IGG Christmas Luncheon

Joe Battaglisese

The Annual Christmas Luncheon took place this year at Cugini Italian Restaurant in Mineola. The food and the service were great and the chance to enjoy the companionship of the members was even better!



IGG Officers (L-R) Treasurer Bruce Seger, Co-Presidents Gail Cinelli and Marcelle Manteria, Vice President Michael Cassara, Maryanne Yenoli, Publicity and Bill Manteria, Special Projects



The Fred Guerra Family



Co-Presidents Marcelle Manteria and Gail Cinelli with VP Michael Cassara and the Christmas Cake



Corresponding Secretary Marilyn Verna with her sister Elaine



One of the Guerra children enjoys the pasta



Vito LaBarca of the Hofstra Committee and the German Genealogy Group's Don Eckerle and Carol Maguire

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Scholarship Chair Louise Perrotta



Marcelle and Gail running the Christmas Bingo game



Gail selling Scholarship Raffle tickets



The Bingo caller



Recording Secretary Ann M. Kurz selling 50/50 chances



Welcome to our new Treasurer Bruce Seger



The Officers and Board of Directors of the Italian Genealogical Group and the Editors of this newsletter wish you a heathy and happy 2020!





Favors and Prizes by Marcelle Manteria and Gail Cinelli, Photos by Bill Manteria

# **Our Mission Statement**

Our goal is to develop and spread the news about all the types and areas of research that are available to you. We gather and disseminate information. We give you all the tools to help you to develop the story of your own family.



P.O. Box 626, Bethpage, New York 11714-0626

# **Future Meeting Dates for the Italian Genealogical Group**

January 11, February 8, March 14 and April 11, 2020

The Library opens at 9:00 AM. The meeting starts at 10:30 AM

## Directions to the Bethpage Library, 47 Powell Ave, Bethpage, NY:



**By Train:** Take the Long Island Railroad to the Bethpage Station. Walk east one block to Broadway, turn left, go (north) 3 blocks on Broadway. At the second traffic light, turn right on to Powell Avenue, The Library is about 500 ft ahead, on your right.



**By Car:** Via Southern State Parkway. Take exit 28A and go north on the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway (Route 135). Via 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. Meeting is in the downstairs meeting room.