

Finding Immigration Journeys to America from Italy
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Start by finding records of your ancestors at home in things like family stories, interviewing the oldest generation, photos, marriage, birth and death announcements, correspondence with cousins in America and Italy, naturalization, passport and other papers, newspapers for retirement announcements, obituaries.

Wedding announcements contain not only the names, but the date and location. This shows Girgenti (now Agrigento) and a printed date of July 1908 with the 28th added later.

The Certificate of Naturalization is the copy sent home with the new citizen. It doesn't contain as much information as the Petition for Naturalization, but it does name the court and date so you can locate the Petition. The children named are often only the minor children of the applicant.

This practice sheet for the Petition for Naturalization contains more information than used on that document, so it's a treasure when it survives. This shows that Arcangela Razza arrived in New York on 20 October 1894 on the SS Welland. She has no other names, was born at Caltabellotta (AG) on 23 August 1888 to Salvatore Razza and Bertha Grande. Her maiden name was Arcangela Razza and she last lived in Caltabellotta. She sailed from Palermo on a ticket bought by her father for third class. She had a passport and paid head tax at Ellis Island where she was examined by immigration officers. She was coming to meet her father, Salvatore Razza in New York. She was traveling with her mother, Bertha Razza, her brother Ural Razza, her brother Pellegrino Razza, and her brother Giuseppe Razza.

This retirement announcement for Frank LaBella states that he came to America at age 20 with his bride, sailing from Andria where they were married. Actually they came from and were married in another town nearby, but it was close...

Since the Naturalization records name the town of birth, it is a key record to locate. You may need to request it from Homeland Security at www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/genealogy/searching-index. There is a fee for the index search and another fee for the actual record. This document is only required for dual citizenship, so if you found the hometown elsewhere, you don't need it.

The hometown will also be shown on the passenger arrival list, an Italian military record or American draft registration, some marriage and death records, some family trees and some burial records.

The above records can often be found at the following:

www.ancestry.com (USA focus, worldwide)

www.familysearch.org (FREE, LDS focus, worldwide)

www.FindMyPast.com (British focus, worldwide)

www.MyHeritage.com (Jewish focus, worldwide)

antenati.san.beniculturali.it (FREE, Italian Provincial Archives civil records and military records)

www.fold3.com (military focus from US and UK)

Census records can show the date of arrival in the US, narrowing the search for their passenger lists. Be sure to note ALL family members on census and passenger lists. Families often travel together (sometimes going to meet the father, already here). Traditional Italian naming patterns name the first son after the father's father, the second son after the mother's father. The same for the daughters. This is

most common in Sicily and Southern Italy. Of course, there are exceptions to the rules. Many folks have the same names in part because of the naming pattern described above, so finding the WHOLE family is important in order to find the RIGHT family.

On Naturalization Petitions after 1906, the home town is shown, as well as the birth date of the applicant and also the name, birth date and birth town for his wife and minor children.

The passenger arrival often shows the names and ages of family members, the name and address of the person they are meeting in the US, and the closest relative left behind in Italy. Sometimes part of this information is on the second page, so be sure to check. Arrivals after 1906 have the most information. Here we see the arrival in 1896 of Filippa Sala, 22 years old and married, from Burgio (AG), going to her husband, Gerlando Puleo. She is traveling with her son Giuseppe, 10 years old, and another son, Salvatore, 5 years old. We can see that the boys have no last name on the list and she probably didn't have her first son when 12 years old. But it does confirm the family and the hometown, so we can do more research to fix the details.

This 1921 arrival of Rosa Lauro shows she was 36 and married, from Meta (NA), and left behind her father Giovanni [Lauro], headed to the Bronx. Traveling with her were her three children, Maria Laura (6), Filomena (4), and Teresa Cacace (1), with their ages and same destination. The second page shows her husband was Saverio Cacace, living in the Bronx, that Rosa was 5'6" tall with fair skin and chestnut hair, no scars, born in Meta.

This US WWI Draft Registration shows that Vito Engravalle was born in Italy on 25 July 1885. But his WWII Draft Registration shows the same birth date with the location as Salerno. Actually it was a small town in Salerno province, but this was close enough to help locate the right town.

Many provinces have province-wide indexes of men who completed military service (matricolare). They are arranged by birth year, then town. This is available by email and can lead you to the right town, also naming the parents.

There are some basic migration patterns for Italian families moving to America. Often the father and sometimes oldest son went first to obtain jobs and housing before the wife and smaller children made the trip. We saw this in the passenger lists above.

Some families plan to return to Italy, so they send money home to help out while working here. Of all the groups arriving in the US, the Italians were most likely to return home after working here for months or years.

Some families moved back and forth between Italy and the US. This family chart shows that Giuseppe Sicignano was born in Scafati (SA) in 1883. His first wife died in New York City in 1906 but he married his second wife in Scafati in 1910. He died in Queens in 1932.

Some families made the move to the US a step at a time. This is the family of Frank Sinatra. His grandfather, Francesco Sinatra, was born in Lercara Friddi in 1857 and died in the US in 1948. His children were born in Lercara Friddi (1881-1887) and Palermo (1888-1894). They were all in America by 1915 when Frank was born in New Jersey.

Some only made the trips to Italy for weddings and funerals. Many Italian returned to Italy for military service during WWI since they were registered for that at birth. Others served in the US military at that

time, using that service to obtain their US citizenship.

Some sons of Italian Immigrants were part of the Liberation of Italy by the Allies in WWII. These photos show the sons of immigrants as big, strong American soldiers visiting their smaller, malnourished Italian cousins near Potenza after landing at Anzio. These visits not only pleased the soldiers, they cemented ties between the local Italians and their Allies.

The provincial archives in Italy hold the military records before 1915, civil records before 1866 (usually), tax and census records, and notarial contracts.

The Lista di Leva are the conscription lists based on male birth records, so they are arranged by year of birth and town within the province. They show the name, parents, date and town of birth, occupation, and physical description. Some of these records show the unit and location of military service and even a death date long afterwards.

In the ancestral town you can locate civil births, marriages and deaths as well as church baptisms, marriages and deaths. The civil records start as early in 1809 in Southern Italy, 1820 in Sicily, 1866 in Northern Italy and former Papal States. Church records frequently survive back to about 1600.

The civil and church births, marriages, and deaths name the parents and show if they are deceased and where they are living at the time of the record. They also show occupations (missing from most church records). Civil birth and marriage records were cross-referenced to church records before 1866. Some also cross-reference to other records for the same person (for example, a marriage or death shown in the margin of a birth record).

Civil records are located in the Stato Civile office, usually in the Municipio (town hall). They include births, marriages, deaths, Scheda di Famiglia and Individua Scheda. Sometimes they also have the Lista di Leva records for their town.

The Individua Scheda for Edoardo Francesco Massaro shows he relinquished his Italian citizenship in 1967 after emigrating in 1963. His parents, birth date and place and addresses are also shown. The back of the card shows he reclaimed his Italian citizenship in 1994 before he died in 1996 in Nichelini (TO) in 1996.