



Beginning Italian Research

Suzanne Russo Adams, MA, AG®

suzanne.adams@familysearch.org

"Our people have to emigrate. It is a matter of too much boundless life and too much space."
Pascal D'Angelo, *Son of Italy*

Begin your search at home! Interview relatives and gather documents from family members. If they are originals, ask for a photocopy or a scan. Pay particular attention to names, dates, places, and relationships.

After you have gathered information about your family—use records in the country your ancestor immigrated to build the story of their immigration and town of origin.

As an example, if you are researching in the United States you might consider the following resources.

U.S. Federal Census records – 1850-1940, Vital Records (birth, marriage, death), Religious Records, Passenger Lists, Naturalizations, Alien Registrations, WWI Draft/Military Records, Land, Probate & Court, Newspapers/Periodicals, Cemeteries/Obituaries/Funeral Cards and Funeral Home records, Fraternal Societies, City Directories, etc.

To research your ancestor in Italy—you will need their

- Name
- An "about" date
- Place

Countries with highest Italian diaspora –Argentina

- Argentina - 1880-1920
- Australia – 1840-1860; 1880-1900; 1921-1945
- Brazil – 1880-1901; much slower 1902-1920
- Canada – 1900-1920; 1945-1970s
- United States of America – 1880-1920
- Uruguay – 1870-1960

Italian Emigration and Immigration-FamilySearch Wiki

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Italy_Emigration_and_Immigration

Resources on Immigration

General

Italian Migration Movements, 1876 to 1926 by A. Ratti (1931):

<http://www.nber.org/chapters/c5116.pdf>

Italian Immigration/Migration (very brief)

Adams, Suzanne Russo. *Finding Your Italian Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide*. Provo: UT: Ancestry Publishing, 2009. (See Bibliography of books about Italians by US State)

Choate, Mark I. *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

D'Angelo, Pascal. *Son of Italy*. Guernica Editions Inc., 2003.

Mangione, Jerry. *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.

Cannato, Vincent J. *American Passage: The History of Ellis Island*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009.

Outside the United States

Aliano, David. *Brazil Through Italian Eyes: The Debate Over Immigration to Sao Paolo in the 1920's*. New York City, July-December 2005.

Araujo and Isetta. *Los italianos en el Uruguay*. Barcelona: Escardo y Araujo, 1920.

Bailey, Samuel L. *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Goebel, Michael. "Gauchos, Gringos and Gallegos: the Assimilation of Italian and Spanish Immigrants in the Making of Modern Uruguay 1880-1930." *Past and Present*, August 2010: 191-229.

Klein, Herbert S. "The Integration of Italian Immigrants into the United States and Argentina: A Comparative Analysis." *The American Historical Review*, April 1983: 306-329.

Sergi, Jorge. *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires, 1940.

Italian Given Names and Surnames

Surnames started to come into common use in the 1400s in Italy and are based on a few main categories:

- Patronymics (The surname comes from an ancestor's first name)—*d'Alberto, d'Angelo, d'Alessi*
- Geographical areas—*Lombardo, Di Genova, Napolitano*
- Descriptives or Nicknames—*Franco, Betto, Zello, Gambino*
- Occupations—*Ferraro, Carpenteri, Muratori*

Some Italian surnames can be uncommon and only found in certain towns, provinces, or regions of Italy.

A few surname maps that can help locate origins of a family are very useful and a lot of fun to use.

Italian Surname Websites:

<http://www.gens.info/italia/it/turismo-viaggi-e-tradizioni-italia#.X9gy19hKiUk>

Enter surname in "cerca un cognome" and click "trova". This will map the surname so that you can see where your surname is the most common in Italy.

<http://italia.indettaglio.it/eng/cognomi/cognomi.html>

Search for names by regions. Allows you to see which surnames are most prevalent in a town and province.

<https://www.cognomix.it/mappe-dei-cognomi-italiani>

Maps surnames and allows you to see where a surname is most common by region, province and town.

A few references for given names and surnames:

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Italy_Names_Personal

<https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/my-italian-last-name/>

Italian Given Names and Their English Equivalents

<https://www.oocities.org/irishkenj/givenname.html?202021#M>

For given names a typical naming pattern that continues to be used in some regions today. This practice is most typical beginning in the 1700s.

- The first male child was named for the paternal grandfather
- The second male child was named for the maternal grandfather
- The first female child was named for the paternal grandmother
- The second female child was named for the maternal grandmother

Brief Timeline- Italian Genealogy

1300	Tax assessment records and censuses begin in some parts of Italy
1340	Most notaries begin keeping records
1545-1563	Council of Trent (parishes begin keeping records)
1595	Papacy reinforces record keeping practices in Italy
1804-1814	Italy under rule of Napoleon Bonaparte
1806	Napoleon required civil records to be kept
1820	Stato Civile Borbonico civil records established in Sicily
1861-1870	Unification of Italy
1861	First nationwide census in Italy by newly formed government
1865	Military conscription of males who reach age eighteen instituted
1866	Civil Registration officially introduced in the Kingdom of Italy
1869	Passports required by Italian government
1871	All eighteen-year-old males required to report to draft board
1875	Forms began to be used for Italian civil records
1880-1920	Influx of Italian Immigrants to the United States
1911	First government census to name all family members with their ages, occupations, birthplaces, etc.
1929	Italian government accepts Catholic Church marriages
1974	Italian government legalizes divorce

Where to Find Italian Civil Records

FamilySearch

<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/location/1927178>

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog>

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Italy_Civil_Registration

(This includes links to translations of documents)

Portale Antenati (Genealogy Portal- Italian State Archives)

Portale Antenati (English)

<http://www.antenati.san.beniculturali.it/en>

Portale Antenati (Italian)

<http://www.antenati.san.beniculturali.it/>

Research in Italian civil archives- *comune*

<http://www.comuni-italiani.it/>

Italian Genealogy Handbooks

Adams, Suzanne Russo. *Finding Your Italian Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide*. Provo: UT: Ancestry Publishing, 2009.

Cole, Trafford. *Italian Genealogical Records: How to Use Italian Civil, Ecclesiastical & Other Family History Research*. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, 1995.

Colletta, John Philip. *Finding Italian Roots*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2009.

Holtz, Melanie D. *The Family Tree Italian Genealogy Guide: How to Trace Your Family Tree in Italy*. Cincinnati, OH: Family Tree Books, 2017.