

Top 10 Places to Find Maiden Names

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A Little



Italy

BY SHARON DEBARTOLO CARMACK



These 10 genealogy resources will give you a taste of your Italian roots.

🐸 **“WHAT’S NEW?”** This question ranks high on the FAQ list when you run into someone you haven’t seen for a while.

In genealogy, “What’s new?” can elicit an excited iteration about a new website filled with indexes or records, making an ancestor search quicker and easier. But ask a researcher tracing Italians “What’s new?” and you’re likely to get a shoulder shrug, a toe kicking the dirt and a mumbled “Not much.”

It seems Italian genealogy is moving into the electronic age at a sloth’s pace. A minuscule number of Italian records are popping up on sites such as Ancestry.com <ancestry.com> and FamilySearch’s Record Search Pilot Site <pilot.familysearch.org>, but I bet they aren’t the ones you need.

The reason for this sluggish progress? In Italy, records—births, marriages, deaths, recent censuses and church records—are kept at the local level, in town halls and churches. Given that, in its Italian research outline <www.familysearch.org/eng/search/rg/guide/italy1.asp>, the Family History Library (FHL) boasts “about 60,000 microfilms and microfiche containing information about people who’ve lived in Italy,” that’s a lot of records to digitize. And remember, the FHL doesn’t have every record on microfilm for every town and every time period. So you can see the magnitude of the problem for going to all those local repositories and getting their records digitized and online.

The news isn’t all gloom and doom, though, and the sidebar on page 58 shows you steps for digging into your Italian roots. But first, let’s focus on 10 resources that’ll enhance your research and get you going—without having to go to Italy.

1 **Comuni Italiani**

This website <en.comuni-italiani.it> is *molto bene*! By clicking on one of the regions in Italy, Apulia (Puglia in Italian), say, you’ll learn the names of all the provinces. Then click on a province—I chose my ancestors’ province of Bari—to get a list of all its towns and cities. Then click on the town, in my case Terlizzi, and you’ll discover helpful genealogy links.

One link gives you a Google map of the area. You can zoom in for a detailed street map. Another link delivers you to a

phone directory so you can track down potential relatives with your surname. I tried *DeBartolo*, but didn’t get any hits—which I thought odd, as I’ve visited DeBartolo cousins in the town. When I entered just Bartolo, however, it brought up all the DeBartolos in Terlizzi.

By clicking on the town’s official site, I could take a virtual tour of the area, or look at photos of local landmarks. And if you’re wondering who the town’s patron saint is—or the mayor—you can find that information along with the number of families who live there.

The town page on *Comuni Italiani* gives you the address and the phone and fax numbers for the town hall, as well as an e-mail link. Of course, you’ll need to write your letter or e-mail in Italian. See page 57 for translation sites.

2 **Social histories**

You may have heard me say this before: Genealogical research gives you only half the story—the who (names), where (places) and when (dates). But social history research gives you the other half: the how, what and why. How did your ancestors live their lives? Why did they leave Italy? What was it like to be an Italian immigrant in America?

Unless you’re fortunate enough to have surviving letters and diaries—or even better, the immigrant generation still alive to tell you—reading social history books can give you details that fill out the bare bones on your ancestor charts.

Italian-American life and immigration is well-explored in classic books such as *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* by Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale (Harper Perennial), *Italian-American Folklore*, by Frances M. Malpezzi and William M. Clements (August House Publishers), and *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian-Americans* by Richard Gambino (Guernica Editions).

More recent publications include oral histories, autobiographies, and memoirs of Italian-American life and culture. For example, *The Italian American Reader* by Bill Tonelli (Harper Paperbacks) is an anthology bearing the description “part manifesto, part Sunday dinner.” It’s a collection of excerpts from Italian-American-authored novels, memoirs, short stories, essays and poems, covering a broad spectrum of lives from little Italian grandmas to gangsters.

Transportation within the city of Venice remains, as it was in past centuries, entirely on water or on foot.

3 Italian newspapers

The country's largest collection of Italian language and Italian-American newspapers and periodicals is archived at the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) at University of Minnesota in Minneapolis <www.ihrc.umn.edu/research/periodicals/italian.php>. The IHRC is open to researchers weekdays; see the website for hours. You can purchase copies of most IHRC microfilm or borrow it through interlibrary loan (ask your librarian to make the request for you). In extraordinary circumstances, the staff can conduct research for you at a charge of \$40 per hour.

Not many Italian papers have been digitized, but continue to check newspaper sites such as GenealogyBank <www.genealogybank.com>. If your Italian ancestors settled in major cities such as Boston, New York or Chicago, you're more likely to find obituaries or other news items about them in mainstream newspapers that are digitized online.

4 Order Sons of Italy in America

According to its website <www.osia.org/about/history.php>, the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA) was originally called *Figli d'Italia*. A group of Italian immigrants who came to the United States during the great Italian migration from 1880 to 1923, including Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro, established the organization in New York City's Little Italy June 22, 1905. They wanted to create a support system that would help Italian immigrants become US citizens, assimilate to American life, and obtain health and death benefits and educational opportunities. More than 600,000 members of this still-active group belong to 650 chapters (lodges) across the country, and membership is open to men and women of Italian heritage.

The IHRC in Minneapolis is the depository for the organization's historical membership and other records. If you think a relative was a member visit <www.ihrc.umn.edu/research/vitrage> and type *Order Sons of Italy* into the Search field to learn what records the IHRC holds. But as mentioned above, if you find a promising entry, you'll need to visit the center or hire someone to check the records for you.

5 Naming traditions

Learning the traditional naming pattern many Italians followed might help you identify more relatives in Italian records. Most couples stuck to the custom of naming the first son after the father's father; the second son after the mother's father; the third son after the father; the first daughter after the father's mother; the second daughter after the mother's mother; and the third daughter after the mother. If you haven't identified your immigrant ancestor's parents, you can make an educated guess about their given names based on this pattern.

For example, Salvatore and Angelina (Vallarelli) Ebetino named their children—listed in birth order—as follows:



Rome may be an Italian cultural center, but genealogical records aren't concentrated there. Instead, your ancestor's records are likely in the town hall and church located where he or she lived.

1. Francesco
2. Fortunato
3. Fortunato
4. Stella
5. Isabella
6. Felice
7. Michele
8. Michele
9. Salvatore



TIP: Italian civil authorities began registering births, marriages and deaths in 1820 in Sicily and 1809 in many other areas.

From this, we can reasonably guess that Salvatore's parents' names were Francesco and Stella, the names of his first son and daughter, and that Angelina's parents were Fortunato and Isabella, the names of her second son and daughter. My further research confirmed this was exactly the case.

Notice, also, that they named two children Fortunato and two Michele. This is because the first Fortunato and the first Michele died in infancy. To preserve the naming pattern, Salvatore and Angelina used the names again for the next child born of the same sex. This type of name is known as



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- Searching for Jewish Italian surnames
<familytreemagazine.com/article/now-what-searching-for-jewish-italian-surnames>

+ For Plus Members

- Viva Italia! <familytreemagazine.com/article/viva-italia-how-to-use-italian-records>
- That's Italian <familytreemagazine.com/article/thats-italian>
- Italian genealogy resources
<familytreemagazine.com/article/italian-genealogy-toolkit>

\$ ShopFamilyTree.com

- Italian research guide <shopfamilytree.com/product/family-tree-magazine-italian-genealogy-guide-digital-download>
- Family Tree Passport to Europe CD
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- FamilySearch Essentials webinar recording
<shopfamilytree.com/product/how-to-access-records-without-leaving-town>

a necronym and was common in Italian families. To find out more about Italian names, visit Behind the Name <www.behindthename.com/nmc/ita.php>, which gives you Italian name details such as pronunciation, origin and masculine or feminine usage. For more sites on Italian first and last names, visit <www.angelfire.com/ok3/pearlsofwisdom/italy-names.html>. To see a distribution of your Italian surname in Italy, go to <gens.labo.net/it/cognomi>.

6 Translation tools

Translating words from Italian genealogy records is as easy as typing them into a translation website. For just a word or two, you can use an online translation dictionary, such as Reverso <dictionary.reverso.net/english-italian>. For longer phrases and sentences, try Babylon.com <translation.babylon.com/Italian/to-English> or Google <translate.google.com>.

If you're writing a short records request to an Italian town hall, you can paste your letter in English and then have it

translated into Italian. Remember, though, you'll get a literal translation. For best results, compose your English version in formal language, avoiding contractions, slang and colloquialisms (otherwise, your letter might sound like one of those foreign spam e-mails asking to deposit millions of dollars into your bank account). You also can use FamilySearch's Italian letter-writing guide to compose your request (go to <www.familysearch.org>, look under research helps and click articles, then click the I and scroll down to Italy-related articles). It also tells you how much money to send and in what currency, and where to mail your request.

Historical records can be more tricky to translate because of the dialects and archaic language. To help you translate civil registration birth, marriage and death records that you've found on microfilm from the Family History Library, there are full translations of those records in Lynn Nelson's *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Italian Ancestors* (Betterway Books). The book is out of print, but you might be able to find used copies online or at a library. Some websites

Four Steps to Finding Italian Ancestors

Those of us who've been tracing our Italian roots since the Dark Ages, long before the word *online* existed, have managed just fine. In fact, I traced my DeBartolo and Val-larelli lines back to the mid-1700s without leaving US shores and without the aid of a computer. If I can do it, you can, too—following these four key steps.

Numero Uno

If you know the town where your ancestors originated, you're one step ahead to connecting your immigrant ancestor to his forebears in Italy. But sound genealogical research means starting with the present and working back one generation at a time. So first, gather all the identifying information you can in US sources. After all, you don't want to be tracing the wrong Antonio DeLeo in Italian records. Plus, your ancestor's name may be different in America from what it was in Italy: An immigrant I've helped research named Frank Miller was born Francesco Mollo. Ask family members if they know your immigrant ancestor's Italian name. In US census records (on microfilm in large libraries and online at subscription sites such as Ancestry.com <ancestry.com>) search first for the American name. If you get no results, try the Italian name.

Numero Due

Next, move on to other US genealogical records such as births, marriages and deaths, again checking under both the American and Italian names.

Once you have a good idea of your ancestor's original name, you're ready to search

passenger lists. These lists, created at the port of departure, are online at Ancestry.com, as well as on microfilm at many large libraries. New York arrival lists are free at CastleGarden.org <castlegarden.org> (1820 until the 1890s) and Ellis-Island.org <ellisland.org> (1892 to 1924). Even married Italian women usually used their maiden names when they traveled. My great-grandmother Angelina Ebetino, who was married when she immigrated in 1910 with her small children, was on the arrival list of the *Verona* as Angelina Val-larelli, her maiden name. But her children were listed with the surname Ebetino.

Francesco Mollo, age 30, sailed on the *Nord America*, arriving in New York Oct. 1, 1903. The list shows him as a married male whose occupation was "peasant." His last residence was "Rogiano." If you don't know where in Italy your ancestor came from, the passenger list might be your ticket back to the old country. If your ancestor became a US citizen after 1906, the town of origin should be recorded on his naturalization record (see the May 2008 *Family Tree Magazine* for help using naturalization records).

Especially important to note on the passenger list is the column "Whether ever before in the United States; and if so, when and where?" Many Italians were "birds of passage," sailing back and forth between Italy and America one or more times before finally bringing their families to the United States. Frank, for example, had lived in Philadelphia from 1896 to 1901. That means there's another passenger list to look for, the 1900 census to check.

Numero Tre

Once you've exhausted the potential records America has to offer on your ancestor and learned his Italian hometown, it's time to cross the Atlantic. The Mollo family knew that "Rogiano" was actually Roggiano Gravina in the province of Cosenza and the region of Calabria. But if you're not sure of the spelling or full name of the town, run a Google search to find alternate spellings. Or try an online gazetteer, such as the Directory of Cities, Towns, and Regions in Italy <www.fallingrain.com/world/IT>. Next, check <comuni-italiani.it> for details such as the town's province and region.

Numero Quattro

Armed with the name of the town, province and region, check the online catalog of the Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City to see what records are on microfilm. Run a place search on the town name and Italy. Most FHL Italian holdings are civil registrations of births, marriages and deaths, originally kept in town halls across Italy. Records from Roggiano Gravina include *registri dello stato civile* (civil registers) from 1809 to 1910.

The family believed Frank was born Aug. 18, 1873, so the microfilm reel with the 1873 volume was a logical place to start. Sure enough, Francesco Mollo was born that date. He was the son of Vincenzo Mollo and Maria Raffaella Aita, and the grandson of Francesco Saverino Mollo (after whom Francesco was named) and Giovanni Aita. The beauty of Italian records is that they typically name three generations.

These records are in Italian, but they're not all that difficult to use once you get the hang of it. Use the FamilySearch research guides and word lists recommended on the opposite page. Typically, each year had its own volume for births, marriages and deaths, and the volumes are usually indexed. Be aware, however, that the index may be at the beginning or end of the volume. Occasionally, if a supplementary volume was used for that year, the index will be in the middle. For more Italian research strategies, see the June 2005 *Family Tree Magazine*.

Learning some Italian genealogy terms will help you decipher your ancestors' birth, marriage and death records. This document shows the 1903 birth of a child ("nato un bambino"), Maria Mollo.



TIP: See examples of handwritten Italian genealogy terms from old records on the FamilySearch Research Wiki <wiki.familysearch.org/en/Italy_Handwriting>.

Your Italian roots are rich with ancient history, such as that depicted in the Gallery of Maps in the Vatican. Social histories, newspapers, fraternal and heritage organizations, and other resources suggested here can help you delve deep into your family tree.



also offer, for a fee, a human to translate your letter or document, or you can find a translator using the Association of Professional Genealogists directory <apgen.org/directory>.

7 Research guides

FamilySearch also offers free Italian research helps. Listed along with the letter-writing guide mentioned in source 6, you'll find links to maps of Italy, a Historical Background of Italy, the PDF pamphlet "Finding Records of Your Ancestors" with details on how to find and read Italian civil records, several step-by-step guides for finding and using different types of Italian records, and an Italian Genealogical Word List you can download and print.

8 Italian Genealogical Group

Though it's based in New York City, the Italian Genealogical Group <www.italiangen.org> has membership worldwide. The group's website includes a database of surnames and Italian localities members are researching. If you find a name and place that match your interests, click the e-mail link and ask for the name of the submitter.

The IGG site also has several databases of records, but they're mostly for New York. You'll find naturalization and vital records indexes, including New York City Deaths, 1891 to 1948, and New York City Births (this currently indexes records from 1901 to 1907, but when completed, will span

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1881 to 1909). Links let you print forms to request the records from the city's vital records office <www.nyc.gov/html/records/html/vitalrecords/home.shtml>.

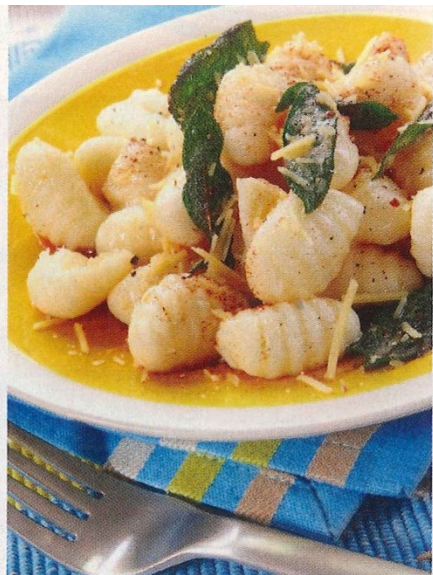
A word of caution, though: When you initially click on an Italian Genealogy Group database link, you'll get a page that says "No More Databases! Unless ..." This is a plea for indexing help from this volunteer organization. You can still get to the databases by scrolling down and clicking on the "To continue on to the databases" link.

While you're on the site, also look at the organization's newsletter articles on Italian genealogy. Not all the newsletters go online, so you may want to consider joining to get future issues.

9 POINT

Pursuing Our Italian Names Together <www.point-pointers.net> is another membership organization. Its quarterly journal, *POINTers: The American Journal of Italian Genealogy*, is filled

Whether your family came from Venice (far right), Sardinia (bottom)—part of Italy since 1861—or elsewhere, you can enhance your family's story by learning about their local cuisine and culture.



Italian Records at a Glance

Civil registers of birth, marriage and death

- begin in 1809 for most of Italy
- begin about 1820 for Sicily
- begin in 1866 for other areas

The Family History Library (FHL) has microfilmed civil registers up to 1866 for much of central and southern Italy and some of northern Italy. In some cases, FHL film goes up to 1910. The original records are kept at local registrars' offices in each town or city.

Church records

- baptism records begin about 1500
- marriage and death records begin about 1520

The FHL has records from some parishes up to 1900 and some up to 1925. Surviving records are kept at the local parish church.

Military records

- begin in 1792 for enlisted men
- conscription of all males began in 1865

The FHL has microfilmed records from the 1800s through the early 1900s for the provinces of Parma, Cosenza, Catania and Torino. Copies of original records are kept in local military archives and, after 75 years, transferred to the provincial archives and made public.



For details on FHL holdings for Italy, see the FamilySearch Italy Research Outline

<www.familysearch.org/eng/search/rg/guide/italy.asp>.

with articles on tracing Italian ancestry. The organization also sponsors a national conference every other year; the next one is in Salt Lake City Aug. 16-20 <www.point-pointers.net/CONF2010.htm>. Registration costs \$40 and includes the Friday night banquet—one of the best conference bargains around. In conjunction with the conference, the nearby Family History Library will present a free series of five lectures on Italian genealogy.

Check out the link on POINT's home page to 29 local chapters across the country. If one's near you, it's a great way to network with other Italian researchers. And you can subscribe to the free POINT e-mail list by following another link on the site.

10 *Mangia, mangia!*

What would an article on Italian resources be without bringing up food? Being Italian and loving food go hand in hand. But how, you may ask, will that help with my genealogy?

The answer is that food preferences are regional and local in Italy. Just as learning social history helps you better understand your ancestors, researching their dietary

habits might shed light on why the family always ate fish on Christmas Eve (a Southern Italian tradition) or preferred polenta (historically, a staple in Northern Italy) to pasta. Details like these not only give more depth to your family's story, but they also provide ways to carry on the traditions of your heritage.

At the website LifeInItaly.com <www.lifeinitaly.com/food-wines>, you'll find several helpful articles on Italian food and wine for the different regions. In the link for Nonna's Food, discover bits of wisdom on food and spices in the Italian diet, as well as herbal remedies. You'll also find recipes and tips for cooking pasta and making Italian bread and pizza. If you've ever wondered how good olive oil is produced, you'll learn about that here, too. And while you're on the site, check out the links for Heritage and History under the Culture tab at the top.

Maybe much hasn't changed in the way you'll research Italian ancestors, but there are more resources than ever before to help you fill in the gaps in your tree. *Buona fortuna* in your search! ■

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