



# La Notizia Italiana

*POINTers in Person*

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## ***Italian-American Museum Plans Move to Little Italy***



*The Italian-American Museum is buying three buildings on Grand Street. Its current home is an office building on West 44th street.*

### **By James Barron**

Joseph V. Scelsa has heard the talk about how Little Italy is little more than a tourist destination whose boundaries are being squeezed by NoLiTa to the north, SoHo to the west and Chinatown and TriBeCa to the south.

“Little Italy has become Littler Italy,” he said the other day, standing on the corner of Grand and Mulberry Streets. “But this is the symbolic place.” That, says Dr. Scelsa, a sociologist who is the president of the Italian American Museum, is why he is leading a campaign to move the museum from its less than conspicuous quarters in an office building on West 44th Street.

The museum plans to announce today that it is buying a cluster of historic buildings in Little Italy for \$9 million and will begin raising money toward \$19 million worth of renovations.

The three buildings, at 189, 187 and 185 Grand Street, are at what Dr. Scelsa calls “the epicenter of the Italian-American community.” But Dr. Scelsa, who is a professor at Queens College, estimates that fewer than 1,000 Italian-Americans now live in Little Italy, which covers the area bordered by Houston, Canal and Lafayette Streets and the Bowery. So it is tourists who will make the museum’s new location viable. Even if Little Italy is a shrinking version of the teeming neighborhood the museum memorializes, it draws visitors, he said.

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"The tour bus stops right here," said Dr. Jerome Stabile III, whose family has owned the three buildings that will house the museum since the 1880s. "More than once, someone has come up to me and said, 'Can you tell me where Little Italy is?'"

But the museum is looking for more than exhibition space. Its long-term plan calls for a two-story addition above the three-story buildings it is buying.

"We wanted to demonstrate the continuance, the old and the new," Dr. Scelsa said. "So we want something modern on top." The three buildings date to the first half of the 19th century, Dr. Scelsa said, and in their early years were home to a bank.

"It's the way it looked when I was a kid," said Dr. Stabile, 76, a retired surgeon, and great-grandson of the bank's founder, Francesco Rosario Stabile. "We're happy Joe is taking over so this does not become another restaurant." Dr. Stabile's father and uncles were born in the apartment above the bank, Banca Stabile.

The bank remained independent until the Depression, when it merged with Banca Commerciale Italiana Trust Company and his grandfather added an insurance and travel agency. One of the bank's safes remains in the building, a double-door unit that takes up about half the space behind two tellers' windows.

"This was challenging to me as a kid," Dr. Stabile said, pulling open one of the safe's heavy doors. "Even though I had the combination, I couldn't open it."

The museum began after a 1999 exhibition at the New-York Historical Society on Italian-Americans in New York that drew 50,000 visitors, five times the number that had been expected. "I said, if we're ever going to be established, we need our own institution," Dr. Scelsa said.

The museum received its charter in 2001 and became an affiliate of the City University of New York in 2003. Since then, while searching for a new

home for the museum, its leaders decided that it needed to be in Little Italy, even as the neighborhood has become home to fewer and fewer Italian-Americans.

Figures from the 2000 census put the Asian population in Little Italy at more than 8,200, which was about eight times the number of residents of Italian descent.

"It has not been gentrifying the way the Police Building got gentrified, the way NoLiTa got gentrified," said Sean Sweeney, a member of Community Board 2, referring to 240 Centre Street, which was the Police Department's headquarters until the 1970s and is now an apartment building.

"Some would argue there's 'squalification,' to make up a word. Some of the storefronts that sell dried clams and sea urchins and putrescible vegetables give it a kind of squalid character."

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### **Italian American Museum Mission Statement**

The Italian American Museum is dedicated to exploring the rich cultural heritage of Italy and Italian Americans by presenting the individual and collective struggles and achievements of Italians and their heirs to the American way of life. By collecting, preserving, and interpreting tangible objects and reminiscences, the Italian American Museum displays notable contributions of Italians and Italian Americans to American culture. The Italian American Museum is a cultural and educational institution promoting constructive pluralism by educating Americans to the heritage of Italian Americans and their European roots, values, language, and traditions. The Italian American Museum sponsors exhibitions, festivals, lectures, symposia and educational travel programs to Europe with a focus on Italy and its contributions to the world, as well as house precious collections of objects and memorabilia on the Italian American experience.

The Italian American Museum received its Provisional Charter from the New York State Board of Regents on June 12, 2001 and is a 503 (c) 3.



### ***Italian American Museum Exhibit: ECHOES OF ELLIS ISLAND***

New York, July 11, 2007,—The Italian American Museum presents **Echoes of Ellis Island** by photographer Janine Coyne which will be on display at The Italian American Museum from July 12 through September 21. Opening reception will be held on Thursday, July 12th from 6 to 8 p.m. Coyne photographed this extensive body of work in 1989-1990. They were first shown as a one-person exhibition at The Statue of Liberty for the six months prior to the reopening of Ellis Island to the public.

Echoes of Ellis Island embody both the restoration and the decayed, abandoned areas of Ellis Island. Coyne uses light and perspective to transform rooms and corridors into illuminating beauty. Her compositions are strong and are complemented by the wide tonality of black and white and the richness of color, as she prints all of her work.

Janine Coyne first visited Ellis Island in the early 1970's enticed by stories told by her maternal and paternal grandparents who emigrated from Italy and came to New York through Ellis Island. Coyne is widely known for her moving exhibit, Sicilian Journey, which was exhibited at the Italian American Museum in 2006 and has been shown in galleries and museums internationally.

According to Dr. Joseph Scelsa, President of the Italian American Museum, "Coyne's photographs are hauntingly beautiful. They take us back to a

time when our ancestors struggled to start a new life in America. Through these photographs we can continue to feel their presence."

The Italian American Museum is the first museum dedicated to presenting the cultural and social contributions of Italian Americans to the American way of life. The exhibit, Echoes of Ellis Island is free and open to the public from Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment (212.642.2020) at 28 West 44th Street, 17th floor between 5th and 6th Avenues. Major funding for this exhibit has been provided by the Columbus Citizens Foundation. Please visit our website [www.italianamericanmuseum.org](http://www.italianamericanmuseum.org)

Contact: Maria Fosco  
212.541.1021



*Above:  
Artist rendering of the future Italian American Museum.*

### **Books for Italian Research:**

**The Italians of New York**  
Cost \$35.00

**Italians in America, A Celebration**  
Edited by Gay Talese  
Cost \$35.00

*Purchase books through the Italian-American Museum::*

*28 W. 44th St.,*

*17th Floor*

*New York, NY 10036*

*(212) 642-2020*

email: [info@italianamericanmuseum.org](mailto:info@italianamericanmuseum.org)

## News from Familysearch.org.

*FamilySearch Unveils Program to Increase Access to World's Genealogical Records*

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH-FamilySearch announced its Records Access program to increase public access to massive genealogy collections worldwide. For the first time ever, FamilySearch will provide free services to archives and other records custodians who wish to digitize, index, publish, and preserve their collections. The program expands FamilySearch's previously announced decision to digitize and provide online access to over 2 million rolls of copyrighted microfilm preserved in the Granite Mountain Records Vault. A key component of the program allow FamilySearch and archives to team with genealogy websites to provide unprecedented access to microfilm in the vault.

The combined results ensure a flood of new record indexes and images online at [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org) and affiliated websites.

Read the full and informative news release here. <http://www.genwebsearch.com/news.php>

*Thanks to Lillian Pappas for the above information.*

### Calendar

#### Chapter 15 Meetings:

Elmwood Park Municipal Building

Next meeting:  
October 27, 2007\*

Our next meeting will be a celebration of our 10th anniversary.

We have arranged for a performance/demonstration by Mary Lou Romano from  
*Coro D'Italia.*

\*Please note the change of date, to accommodate the performance. Details are presently being arranged.



## ***POINTers in Person***

The POINTers In Person program, an autonomous branch of **POINT - (Pursuing Our Italian Names Together)** was founded in 1992. Our group, Chapter 15, was organized in September 1996. The 21 nationwide chapters of POINTers In Person provide genealogical researchers an opportunity to meet socially, and learn and share information pertinent to Italian research. Each chapter is independent and sets forth its own procedures and schedules of events.

We cordially invite Italian genealogical researchers to attend our quarterly meetings. Membership is open to all. In addition to regular meetings our group takes occasional field trips to genealogical research sites in the New Jersey/New York area.

Membership in our parent organization, POINT, is not a prerequisite to joining our group; however, it is highly recommended.

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### **The Lou Costello Chapter**

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Your letters and comments are welcomed.  
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