

The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey

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The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey met on November 7, 2015 at the Elmwood Park Municipal Building. Twenty-one people attended.

Maria Carparelli opened the meeting by alerting the Society about the death on September 26th of Dolores Cobiانchi, a long-time member of our group. Condolences from the Society were sent to the family. She also told members that promotional brochures for The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey were printed and distributed at the New York State Family History Conference in Syracuse, NY on September 2015. Maria then shared correspondence. She told members that an e-mail was received from Barbara Dispoto, Elmwood Park borough clerk, reminding the Society that the use of its council chambers for meetings must be renewed annually and is subject to approval. Since Elmwood Park (originally known as East Paterson) will be celebrating its centennial this year, the council chambers might be needed for the planning of this event. It was decided by the Society to seek a new location for our meetings. Members suggested new venues. The Clifton Public Library meeting room seems to be the most practical and convenient.

The launching of the Society's Facebook page is on hold until the location of its meetings is certain. Sue Berman's daughter, Olivia, volunteered to work on this project.

Judy Bonzkowski presented the treasurer's report. The ending balance as of November 7, 2015 is \$363.00. The chapter has 27 members, however only 25 of these have kept their membership current with the payment of dues.

It was decided that discussion and preliminary planning for the Society's 20th anniversary will take place at the February meeting.

Tony Lauriano, with the help of his son, Steve, gave the presentation, "Finding Your Ancestor's Occupations." Shipping companies enticed immigrants to come to America with the lure of employment, sometimes as "indentured servants".

Tony reminded members that many of the definitions of job-related terms have changed over time. He described many common occupations existing in the 18th through the early 20th centuries.

Among these occupations were: laborer, dress maker (usually made parts of dresses as a "piecemaker"), garment industry worker, midwife (her name would be on the birth record), linen merchant, bookbinder, peddler, coal seller, housekeeper (someone who ran a boarding house for the immigrants), boatman (navigated a boat along inland canals; or a term for a new Navy recruit), clerk (office worker or a religious cleric), proprietor, bootblack (shined shoes, before the time child labor laws were enforced), garbage dumper, street sweeper, garage worker (gas station attendant), milk dealer, countryman (one who worked in a rural area), servant (usually an indentured servant), iceman (delivered ice for home use), hod carrier (usually an apprentice who used a trough to carry a load of mortar or bricks), blacksmith, chauffer, undertaker (originally one who would "under take" any type of job and sometimes combined jobs of tailor and driver – later a term for a funeral director), longshoreman (loaded and unloaded cargo ships at the docks), stone cutter, laundry helper, bookkeeper, cigar factory worker and barber.

Sometimes the terms "Military" or "School" (meaning "student") were written on forms in the place for "employment". Many immigrants joined the U.S. military in order to shorten the years to obtain citizenship, especially during World War I. It is important to note that naturalization occurred in the town where the military man was stationed and not where he lived.

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(continued)

An ancestor's occupation can be found in many types of records. Vital records, especially birth and marriage records, are most useful in this regard. The U.S. Census began collecting occupation information in 1840 and 1850, but only for males over the age of 15 years. After these years, the federal census became more complete concerning occupations. The 1940 U.S. Census is especially valued because it also collected data about the number of weeks worked, salary, and much more job-related information. The State Census also is a source to find an ancestor's occupation.

City Directories have listings of residents by name and include their addresses and occupations. Also they feature advertisements of businesses where an ancestor might have worked. These annual directories were mostly replaced by telephone directories by 1980.

U.S. Ship Passenger Manifests often include the trade an immigrant practiced. An ancestor's occupation can also be located in U.S. Naturalization Papers, especially the Declaration of Intention and the Petition for Naturalization. Social Security application forms (Form SS-5) and U.S. Federal Military Records, especially the applications, contain this information. Contemporary newspaper articles; and company, labor union and advertising publications will add insightful context about an ancestor's livelihood.

All the above records can be found in the local library where the company was located; newspaper archives; Federal and State archives; various websites; and online databases, such as ancestry.com, familysearch.org, and archives.gov.

An 1895 advertisement in a newspaper listed wages, which depended on one's nationality. The lowest paid were usually the Italians, many of whom worked in the construction trade because they couldn't understand English. The newspapers often had a very negative view of immigrants and their prejudice was apparent.

Researchers will notice, as they pursue their inquiry, the upward mobility of Italians in America. Day laborers of an earlier generation become or give birth to second generation business owners.

Future meetings will be held on:

February 6, 2016
May 7, 2016
August 6, 2016
November 5, 2016
February 4, 2017

For details, see our website: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~njigc/>