

# The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey

## ALBERT MAROTTA

The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey met on February 7, 2015 at the Elmwood Park Municipal Building. Seventeen people attended.

Maria Carparelli opened the meeting by informing members that she received correspondence from Marylou Romano about the future programs of her organization, Coro d'Italia. Coro d'Italia is the first ensemble dedicated solely to Italian music and dance in America. Coro d'Italia organized an Italian traditional costume and memorabilia exhibit at the North Bergen Public Library, which began April 18. This ensemble's programs and events can be viewed at [www.ditaliprograms.org](http://www.ditaliprograms.org) or on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Coro-d'Italia/Italian-American-Singing-and-Dancing-Ensemble-/102910463135253>.

The Society invited Coro d'Italia to entertain our members in celebration of our tenth anniversary (then as a chapter of POINT) in October 2007. Maria is still trying to organize a field trip in the spring to the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum in Staten Island, NY and seeks volunteers to help.

Judy Bonzkowski presented the treasurer's report. The ending balance as of February 7, 2015 is \$317.30. Annual membership dues were collected. The chapter has 30 members.

The format of this meeting was a member exchange of information.

Maria alerted members about a PBS series, "Genealogy Road Show: Season 2" which broadcast January 13-February 24 and focused on St. Louis, Philadelphia and New Orleans. The show combines history and science to discover fascinating stories of diverse Americans. It featured Mary Tedesco, a genealogist who researches Italian family history.

Maryanne Graham spoke about "The Italian-Americans", a two-part, four-hour documentary by New Jersey filmmaker, John Maggio, that PBS began showing in February.

Carolyn McNamara mentioned that, although POINT has dissolved, an offshoot from that organization, PIE (Pursuing our Italian Names Together in E-Mail) is still in existence and is thriving. She noticed recently that there is much e-conversation about Internment Camps for Italians in the U.S. during World War II. This was not only a Japanese phenomenon. Also, she told members that there was Italian POW camps nearby, including one in Suffern, NY.

Cathy Cavallo asked the Society if it could guide her to sources that might help her discover the exact date of birth of her great-grandfather. There is a discrepancy between the date of his birth found on his tombstone and that of family tradition. Both the month and the day are different. Annita Zalenski suggested that Cathy locate the birth certificate or try writing for his military record, which will show the exact date of birth. Maryanne said that she did this and was successful and she recommended Trafford Cole's book, "Italian Genealogical Records," which contains form letters in Italian for such a request. Sal Lagattuta reminded members that two sets of records for births were made. One record was filed in the town where the event took place and another was sent to the province. His own great-grandfather's name which appeared on the provincial copy was different from the one on the town copy, which used his nickname.

Joe Zitelli said that his grandfather's birth year was different on his passport than the year of birth he stated when asked. His passport showed "1892" while he always said it was "1891". Joe wondered whether this was done in order to avoid military service and he wanted to know more details about Italian military service. Tony Desiderioscioli said that Italian men had to register for service at the age of 18. Sal informed members that his father received an exemption from actual service because he was the only surviving son of a family.

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Also, if you were born in December, it appears that you did not register until 13 months after you reached registration age. Tony agreed to help Joe translate the Italian on the back of two old photographs he had.

Historical context was provided by members' recommendations of various films.

Sal summarized the 2014 film, "Unbroken", which was directed by Angelina Jolie. It chronicles the life of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic athlete in the 1936 Berlin Olympics who later joined the armed forces of World War II. He was a survivor of a plane crash in the Pacific during the war and he with two others were captured, after 47 days on a raft, by the Japanese Navy and imprisoned in two Japanese POW camps. The film highlights the strength Zamperini needed during his cruel torture, his spiritual transformation and later his return to Japan to meet and forgive his enemy. He returned to the Olympics in 1998 to carry a torch when the games were held in Japan. Mr. Zamperini died three months before this film was released.

Joe spoke about a 2007 documentary, "Pane Amaro" ("Bitter Bread"), co-written and co-produced by Gianfranco Norelli, an independent filmmaker and journalist and Suma Kurien. "Pane Amaro" is considered the first comprehensive depiction on film of the early Italian American experience. It tracks the social, economic and political transformation of Italians from immigrant victims of violence to prominent members of American society. It includes the lynching of eleven Italian immigrants in New Orleans, the growth of Italian Harlem in Manhattan, the process of Americanization, the rise of the first Italian American leaders, etc. Joe was most intrigued about the Italians who came to New Orleans and were used by Southerners as slave replacements in the 1920s. He said that the KKK was growing stronger and they lynched blacks, Italians and Jews. Joe's grandfather was the first Italian to settle in Bergenfield, NJ in 1917 and he said that the KKK burned a cross at its local high school.

Sue Berman thought the 1999 movie directed and written by Lee Hutcheon, "Vendetta", was thought-provoking. It is a true story about the largest lynching in U.S. history. Eighteen Italian-Americans were falsely accused of the murder of a police chief in New Orleans in 1891. Eleven of them were shot or hung after their acquittal. She also spoke about Arbëresh, one of the four Albanian-Italian dialects spoken in southern Italy, especially in the villages in Calabria, Basilicata, Brindisi and Sicily. Arbëresh has traces of Italian and Greek.

Al Marotta reminded members that half of the Italians who came to the U.S. returned to Italy, perhaps due to the destruction of the Italian family here. Both Annita and Sal mentioned the padrone system who had agents operating in Italy to solicit people who wished to come to the U.S.. They sponsored them by providing transportation to America and upon arrival promised to take care of their basic needs, including employment, but always for a handsome fee.

Cathy commented on the usefulness of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, which Annita said were also available at Lambert Castle and in digital format from Rutgers University and other places. Also, Cathy brought up the existence of delayed birth records that she learned about while trying to find the birth record of her American grandfather. Many localities keep a file of delayed birth records since during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries many children were born at home with or without a midwife present. Thus these births were not recorded until months or even years later. Her grandfather's 1909 birth record was fully recorded only in the 1940s, when a search was done connected to war registration. Some midwives may have kept the record and did not send it to the local civil registrar. Carol Miraglia, who once worked for the Board of Health of Palisades Park confirmed that some births were registered six months to a year later.

Annita mentioned that while researching her husband's Polish ancestry she noticed that the birth date often became confused with the feast date of the saint by which the person was named.

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Many other interesting insights were shared during this meeting.

Future meetings will be held on:

August 1, 2015  
November 7, 2015  
February 6, 2016  
May 7, 2016

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