

The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey

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The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey met on May 3, 2014 at the Elmwood Park Municipal Building. Eighteen people attended.

Maria Carparelli opened the meeting by presenting the names of those nominated to be officers of the Society. Lucille Kent stated that she was willing to remain as Corresponding Secretary, but only until the year's end. The slate of officers will be voted on by the membership at the August meeting. Annita Zalenski recommended that meanwhile an attempt should be made to notify all members to see if any are interested in filling the role of Corresponding Secretary. Also officers will review and update the Society's bylaws and present any changes to the membership. A suggestion was made that the Society might consider preparing a pot luck brunch in the future, perhaps at the Clifton Senior Center.

Maryanne Graham presented the treasurer's report. The chapter has 30 active members.

Al Marotta attended on April 23rd the presentation, "Andiamo in Italia: Italian Family History in Italy and from Home" by Mary M. Tedesco, the founder of Origins Italy. It was part of the New York Genealogical & Biographical Lecture Series at the New York Public Library. Mary Tedesco frequently conducts genealogical research in Italy. Her goal was to help attendees discover what records are available and how they can be accessed. He mentioned a February 14, 2014 *New York Times* article, "Tracing Ancestry, Researchers Produce a Genetic Atlas of Human Mixing Events". The article was a summary of a recently published research paper from the journal *Science*.

Al also reminded the Society that this year commemorates the 350th anniversary of the State of New Jersey. Although first inhabited by the Delaware Indians over 10,000 years ago, the region which now encompasses New Jersey was first explored by Genoese-born John Cabot in 1498 for Britain, Giovanni da Verrazzano in 1524 for France and Henry Hudson in 1609 for the Dutch East India Co. of Holland. The Dutch settled in the area around the present Jersey City about 1633 and remained in power until 1664. Two Anglo-Dutch Wars for the territory took place. Charles II of Britain formally annexed the weakened New Netherlands settlement as a British province and granted it to his brother, James, Duke of York and Albany (James II) as Lord Proprietor. The Duke seized the colony September 8, 1664 and the Dutch surrendered Fort Amsterdam. James, Duke of York, divided the land that is the present New Jersey in half and gave control to two proprietors, Sir George Carteret (East Jersey) and Lord John Berkeley (West Jersey) in 1676. By 1702 New Jersey was united to The Crown. Thus 2014 marks the 350th year of New Jersey as an independent jurisdiction and English colony.

Dr. Mary Jo Berger, of Seton Hall University, gave the presentation on the origin of her family's names. Although she is a molecular biologist by profession, she expanded her horizons by exploring her Italian family history and becoming expert in the understanding of the development of Italian names. Her goal during the enthusiastic presentation was to show the Society how she learned about the origins of her maiden name, "De Rosa". She acknowledged that there were various spellings for her name, as there are for many Italian names. It appears that many Italian surnames ending in an "i" originated in the north, while those ending in an "o" came from the south. Surnames originating in southern Italy were often influenced in their spelling by early Greek and later Spanish settlers. She found at least six varieties in the spelling of her name and this might be because the name had two geographic origins: Italy and Spain. The Italian branch of this name first appears during the Middle Ages in the Vento, Emilia and southern regions of Italy. The use of surnames began to spread, especially between 1200 and 1300, since municipalities and their populations began to grow. After the 12th century first names were added for the legal purpose of sorting out inheritance claims. There are sizable branches of her family name throughout Italy and thus the family probably originated in various regions of Italy.

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Another interesting aspect about name research is the possibility that the name had a touch of nobility. She informed the Society that usually the first son took over the name and the ancestral property. The second son would marry into a branch of the family, preferably one which was wealthy enough to finance another branch of the family. The third son would either enter the clergy or the “educated” class. Her family was connected to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. She believes that her family might have a connection to the famous de Medici family. Shifting allegiances caused sections of Florence to be given to France. Yet Piero de Medici considered Florence an ally of Naples, which was an enemy of France. He went to Naples to request help from Spain due to this conflict with France. The “De Rosa” name was found among the documents about this endeavor.

Since there were very few surnames connected to nobility, many names in Italy, as in most other countries, began to reflect the occupation of the bearer. Dr. Berger also found the De Rosa Crest of Arms which featured the colors silver (which as a metal can sustain fire and might indicate boldness, nobility, peace and serenity), blue (which might represent the heavenly part of God’s order), red or copper (which symbolizes boldness, martyrdom, autumn, or the military) and a red rose, a symbol of hope and joy used during the Crusades and pointing to martyrdom.

She then quickly skimmed over her mother’s name and said that the Minnitti or Minetti name can be of Greek or Spanish origin.

Dr. Berger’s father was an Italian prisoner-of-war at Fort Shanks in New York. He already had family living in Connecticut, but he fell in love with America, while still living in the Naples area, through the attraction of American movies. She recommended for research the Italian collections located locally at the libraries of Rutgers University and Seton Hall University and at the libraries of the University of California.

Dr. Berger emphasized the importance for the older generation to tell the younger generation what it was like growing up, and whatever they know or have heard about the family – no matter how minor the details may seem to be. This information can provide clues for possible future research, when someone in the family finally becomes interested in their family history and wants to find out more.

She left us with the thought, “You are blessed to be American and blessed to be Italian.”

Future meetings will be held on:

November 1, 2014

February 7, 2015

May 2, 2015

August 1, 2015

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