

The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey

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The Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey met on May 7, 2016 at the Clifton Public Library. Twenty-five people attended.

Maria Carparelli opened the meeting by informing the Society that in attendance was her third cousin (confirmed by DNA test matches), Ava Argenio. Then Maria shared correspondence which alerted members to upcoming events. The Genealogical Society of New Jersey would hold its 2016 Seminar in East Brunswick, NJ in June. Excerpts would be read by Brooklyn-born author, Joseph Giordano, from his book, "Birds of Passage: An Italian Immigrant Coming of Age Story", at the Italian American Museum in Manhattan in May. Lambert Castle would soon open a permanent exhibition featuring the works of Gaetano Federici (1880-1964), a famous sculptor and a long-time resident of Paterson. Over two dozen of his statues have been recently restored.

Judy Bonzkowski presented the treasurer's report. The ending balance as of May 9, 2016 is \$249. The chapter has 31 members; however, only 22 of these have kept their membership current with the payment of dues.

Annita Zalenski, chairperson of the Society's 20th anniversary committee, gave her report. It was decided that those interested will dine together at Tiramisu Restaurante in Elmwood Park after the August meeting to launch the Society's anniversary. She urged members to let her know early if they would come in order for her to make the proper arrangements. An anniversary-issue newsletter will also be published. Meanwhile, everything else is in the planning stage including a possible update to the Society's database booklet of members' research.

Al Marotta happened upon a brochure, "Societies, Libraries, and Archives", created by The Genealogical Society of New Jersey (headquartered in Trenton) in the Genealogy Room at the New York Public Library. This publication listed the Italian Genealogy Society of New Jersey on its front page, together with seven other similar organizations.

Rich Venezia gave a very detailed and informative presentation, "U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Service". He is a member of PBS's "Genealogy Roadshow's" genealogy research team.

He began by providing the Society with a brief history and timeline of laws that laid the foundation and path for citizenship in the U.S., which included Naturalization, and how these influenced the flow and styles of immigration here.

This chronology began with the Naturalization Act of 1790, when citizenship was open to free white males who resided here for at least two years. The residency requirement was increased to five years by law in 1795 and was again increased in 1798 to fourteen years, but an 1802 law returned it to five years.

Foreign women who were married to U.S. citizens were permitted to become citizens themselves according to an Act of February 10, 1855 and the Naturalization Act of 1870 made it possible for people of African descent to become citizens.

Immigration regulation became the responsibility of the federal government in 1875 due to a Supreme Court decision and the Immigration Act of 1891 mandated that the U.S. government control the entire immigration process. The Office of Immigration (Bureau of Immigration) was created. Soon after this, Ellis Island opened its doors to passenger ships and their immigrants.

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The Basic Naturalization Act of 1906 federalized naturalization, centralized immigration records and required a record of lawful entry. This law also standardized Declaration of Intent and Petition for Naturalization forms and created the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. In 1913 this bureau became two separate agencies, but these reunited in 1933 to form the INS.

American-born women married to foreign men lost U.S. citizenship due to The Expatriation Act of 1907. However, this was basically reversed by another act in 1922. The Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act) set stricter quotas than the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, for the number of immigrants allowed to enter from each country and required all foreigners to have a visa issued by an American consular officer abroad. This quota system remained in effect until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which abolished the quota system and created a seven-category preference system. The Alien Registration Act of 1940 (Smith Act) required all resident and arriving aliens to register.

The INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) was dissolved in 2003, and USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services), along with agencies concerning immigration and customs enforcement and border protection, was created to replace it.

Rich informed the Society about the process for requesting a search and ordering a record from USCIS and the patience necessary to obtain it.

Available records include C-Files, AR-2s, Visa Files, Registry Files and some A-Files.

Certificate Files (C-Files) were created between September 27, 1906 and March 31, 1956. These files may include the Declaration of Intent, Petition for Naturalization, a copy of the Certificate of Naturalization, possible consolidated A-File, Visa File, or Registry File, Examiner's report, supporting documents, certificates of loss or resumption of citizenship. Some information may be redacted from these documents due to privacy concerns, but still may be found depending on the database used.

Alien Registration Forms (AR-2s) were created between August 1, 1940 and March 31, 1944 as a national security measure during World War II. All resident or arriving aliens over 14 years of age were required to register and were given a unique A-number. It is a two-page form containing all names the person is known by, birthdate and birthplace, physical description, arrival and occupation information, memberships, military and arrest histories, fingerprints and signature. The A-number may or may not correspond to an A-File.

Visa Files were created between July 1, 1924 and March 31, 1944 due to a law requiring visas for all arriving immigrants. This is the official record of arrival for immigrants admitted between these dates. This file contains an application which reveals the date and place of birth, parents' names, and immigrants' addresses five years prior to emigration and includes a photo. Also within this file are vital records, health and police certificates and other records. All visas issued on or after April 1, 1944 are filed as A-Files.

Registry Files were created between March 2, 1929 and March 31, 1944 for immigrants (especially those naturalized) when no arrival record could be found. Most of these arrivals were between June 29, 1906 and July 1, 1924. Found within this file may be an account of the immigrant's travel to and activities in the U.S., correspondence, affidavits, testimony, and documentary evidence.

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Alien Files (A-Files) were created between April 1, 1944 and May 1, 1951 in order to streamline record-keeping. These files were opened or consolidated for all immigrants arriving after April 1, 1944 and/or for those naturalized after April 1, 1956, for re-opened cases of immigrants registered under the Smith Act, and for law enforcement matters. Each of these files is unique and may contain at least an AR-2 and at most much more. It is wise to order the ancestor's A-File first because it may contain documents from many of the other sources named above. However, unless the person was naturalized before March 31, 1956 there will be no file. The National Archives (NARA) has A-Files of immigrants born before 1909.

It is usually better to have the selected agency do an index search before a record is ordered.

“They Became Americans: Finding Naturalization Records and Ethnic Origins” (1998) by Loretto Dennis Szucs was highly recommended.

More details can be found at <https://genealogy.uscis.dhs.gov> and www.richroots.net.

Future meetings will be held on:

November 5, 2016

February 4, 2017

May 6, 2017

August 5, 2017

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