



## Italian Immigration Impact

Italian immigration influenced great changes in America and Italy. The conditions that caused emigration from Italy in the last century were outlined in last month's newsletter but the impact to Italy was significant.

As we unfold the story of the Crachese immigration and the success they enjoyed in the New World in upcoming editions we cannot ignore what happened "back home."

[The New York Times](#) reported about it, "... the collision of poverty, urbanization, mass emigration and natural disaster, a confluence of events that has devastated many towns that had otherwise managed to thrive, or at least get by, for centuries. These towns, most of which are in the historically impoverished south, had already lost tens of millions of inhabitants in the great waves of migration from the late 19th century to the mid 1970s..." They went on to explain the importance of the losses by saying, "... rural places were once intricately tied to the countryside around them, their inhabitants working as farmers and merchants, craftsmen and shepherds ... when these towns die, it's not just the population that suffers, ... so too do the unique traditions and skills associated with each place, as well as the landscape that supported them. What is particular to Italy, however, is the exquisite architectural character of its hill towns, as well as the quality of the handiwork and traditions that were born, cultivated and perfected here."

And coming from Craco, we know and believe what is pointed out in the article, "These towns and their craftsmanship are what we think of when we think of Italy — as fundamental to the country's identity as its important cities and grand artistic legacies. It isn't far-fetched to say that what's at risk of being lost with their obsolescence is nothing less than Italy's rural soul." But solutions to this problem are not easy.

*"These towns and their craftsmanship are what we think of when we think of Italy — as fundamental to the country's identity as its important cities and grand artistic legacies."*

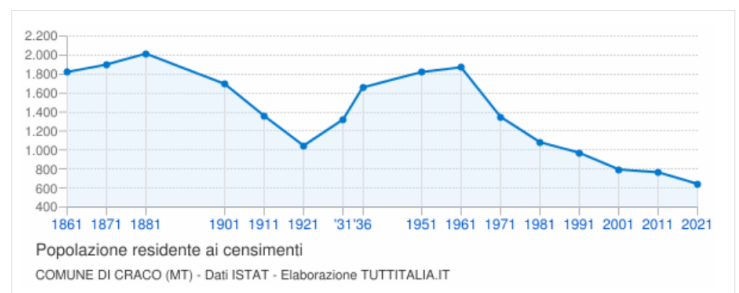
An article from [The Localit.com](#) tells us, "Italy is dotted with more than 6,000 abandoned hamlets and villages, while another 15,000 have lost more than 95 percent of their residents."

But the author suggests, "... these towns could be a powerful asset which the state should exploit ... Selling to investors or wealthy families could be a good way to breathe new life into these villages — be it as hotels or private residences." The possibility of this is yet to be seen but the article tells us, "a few successful revivals of ghost towns have been exclusively funded by private individuals and stand out as exceptions."

With our focus on Craco and Basilicata, the changes are evident by looking at population statistics in the Italian government census from 1861-2021. They clearly show the pattern described in the articles that were cited.

This background, makes our mission more of an imperative for those of us who are connected to Craco.

### Discover ~ Share ~ Preserve



*See the immigration impact to Craco and Basilicata on page 4*

# Basilicata:

## Maratea and the Sirino Mountains

The [Basilicata Region](#) reaches the [Tyrrhenian Sea](#) at the Gulf of Policastro along the Maratea coastline that is marked by sheer cliffs, rocky coves, inlets with grottos, secluded bays, and small beaches. The hills, rising from the shoreline, stretch eastward toward the Sirano Ridge of the Apennine Mountains. As they rise the vegetation of olive and citrus trees and vines change slowly to oaks, horse chestnuts, and alder trees. Lucania, another name for the region, comes from the word, *lucus* meaning “land of the forests.”

Key towns and areas are:

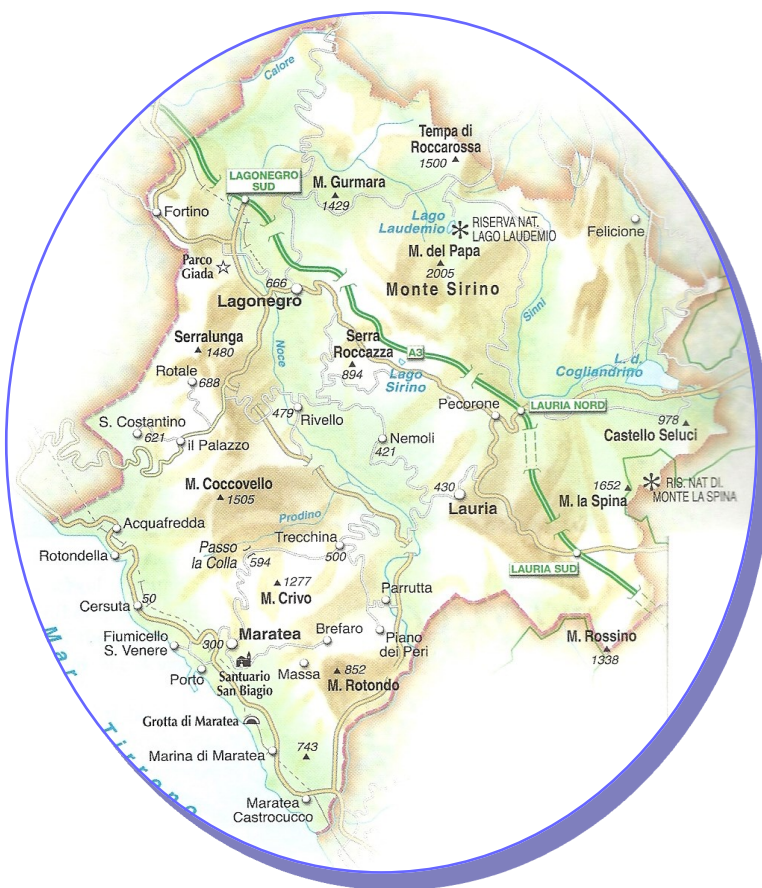
[Lagonegro](#): This picturesque town, situated on the western slopes of the Sirino Mountains, is surrounded by greenery and situated in an area with natural spring waters. Its name comes from a lake with black water that no longer exists. The village has two parts: the old part, built around the ruins of the feudal Castle, called “Castello” and a new one, characterized by a large square with trees called, “Piano.”

*“ ... marked by sheer cliffs, rocky coves, inlets with grottos, secluded bays, and small beaches ... there are ski slopes ... unique gastronomic specialties ... Mona Lisa is reported to be buried there ... ”*

Local tradition holds that Lisa del Giocondo, Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa who died there in 1506 is buried at the church of San Nicola in the old town. The area around the town is a nature reserve that protects the unique flora and fauna. The month of May in the town is devoted to the celebration of the Sirino Madonna, when a statue is taken from the town to a chapel on Mt. Sirino where it remains until September when it is returned to Lagonegro with another procession.

[Lauria](#): is also a town with two parts, Lauria Superiore, known as “il Castello” and Lauria Inferiore called “il Borgo.” Lauria offers a range of picturesque landscapes from the Sirino peaks, the Cogliandrino and Rotonda lakes, to the Sinni and Torbido freshwater springs. With roots dating back to 400BC the present town was built in 1150. Not far from the village, in the area called ‘Conserva’, there are ski slopes. Gastronomic specialties of this town include ruote di pane (wheels of bread made from bran) and pizza con patate (pizza topped with sliced Sirino potatoes).

[Maratea](#): Built on the side of Monte San Biagio, it was a fortified village to protect against Saracen raids. With several charming seaside resort villages (Aquafredda, Cersuta,



Fiumicello-Santa Venere, Porto, Marina Castrucucco, Santa Caterina, Massa, and Bréfaro), Maratea is a major tourist center. In addition to the beautiful natural landscapes, the town has 44 churches containing outstanding works of art. Overlooking the town on top of Monte San Biagio is the impressive 70 foot high statue of [Christ the Redeemer](#).

Being situated on the coast, the availability of seafood makes it a unique addition to the traditional pastas. But Maratea is also noted for its cheeses, especially mozzarella di Massa.





# The America the First Crachesi Found

*“Conditions in New York City in the 1880s were horrible ... By establishing their own communities where they could speak their own language, eat their own foods, practice their customs and religion as if back in their homeland ... neighborhoods developed.”*

Italian immigration grew ten-fold in the 1880s over previous decades. In 1880 about 20,000 Italians lived in New York City but their numbers would increase more than twelve times by 1900. While Italian immigration was dispersed throughout the United States, large numbers of Southern Italians arriving in New York City from the regions of Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicily settled on the Lower East Side. Included in this were small groups (41 people from 1880-1890 and 380 people between 1891-1900) from Craco.

Conditions in New York City in the 1880s were horrible for them. Forced to live in a slum area known as “Mulberry Bend,” the Italians arriving there were following earlier immigrants from Ireland and Germany. They lived in dark, airless, and unsanitary [tenements](#).

Tenement buildings were dangerous firetraps, as well as a breeding place for rodents and diseases. They did not have easy access to water, especially if they lived on the upper level. Water had to be drawn from the fire hydrant in the street and carted upstairs. Lacking English, marked by their own dialects, and often not able to write, Italians were reliant

on “middlemen” ([padrones](#)) who placed men for work but extracted fees and commissions. Italian immigrants tended to do whatever was needed to support themselves, accepting jobs that other Americans didn't want to do. To maintain their families they worked 12 hours a day and often took in boarders to cover expenses.

With their agrarian experience Southern Italians were able to get the maximum from everything extracting from dumps, trash in the streets, and cast-offs of others to create riches that allowed them to return home or bring their family over to join them.

Jacob Riis, in his 1890 book, “[How The Other Half Lives](#)” documented the lives immigrants of the era faced and made an observation important to Cracotans. Referring to Italians being resourceful, he may have identified the roots of how the paper stock business became important to many from Craco. He says, “*The discovery was made ... there is money in New York's ash-barrel, ... it has become the exclusive preserve of*

*continued on page 8*

## The Craco Immigrants' Trip

The first Cracese immigrants faced considerable challenges but established the pathway and foundation for more than 1500 others that followed in the next 40 years.

Understanding both the difficulty they faced and the desperation that drove them to leave may not be fully possible to us today. Thinking about how easily we travel and how the world has changed prevents us from grasping the impact of immigration on their lives.

In going to America they faced daily challenges of not knowing the language, being unable to read any signs, dealing with unusual food, customs, and religion and realizing they were not welcomed by most of the populace.

The moment they left Craco their world changed. Prof. D'Angella, the author of the history of the town of Craco, says

their travel to Naples was 8 to 10 days by horse to cover the distance of about 160 miles. Some made the trip by using the “chooch” or donkey probably pulling a cart. Later immigrants would have had the choice of using the train reducing the travel time and risks.

The route they traveled was from Craco towards Pisticci Scalo, then along the Cavone River Valley until they connected with the Via Appia through Potenza, Salerno, and into Naples. This was a hard and dangerous trip due to what were described as “gypsies” and brigands by Prof. D'Angella. He adds, “Many people would have written a will before embarking on the trip.”

Arriving in Naples added to their dislocation by introducing the villagers to the more modern aspects of their world. For most, this trip was the first experience of leaving the area surrounding Craco. Bear in mind, there

was a Cracotan proverb that described something far away as being “from here to Pisticci ...” which is only a distance of 11 miles. Arriving in Naples was an eye opener.

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**Italian Donkey Cart**—Travel from Craco to America for immigrants in the 19th century was difficult and dangerous. In Italy they had the availability of means of travel that were familiar to them but once they ventured aboard the immigrant ships in Naples they faced an alien environment.

# Craco Population Censuses 1861-2021

*Historical demographic trend of the censuses of the population of **Craco** from 1861 to 2021.  
Percentage changes of the population, graphs and statistics on [ISTAT](https://www.istat.it) data.  
Charts and content courtesy of ISTAT*



The general censuses of the Italian population took place every ten years from **1861** until **2011**, with the exception of the **1936** census which was held after only five years by royal decree n.1503 / 1930. In addition, the censuses of **1891** and **1941** were not carried out first due to financial difficulties, second due to the war.

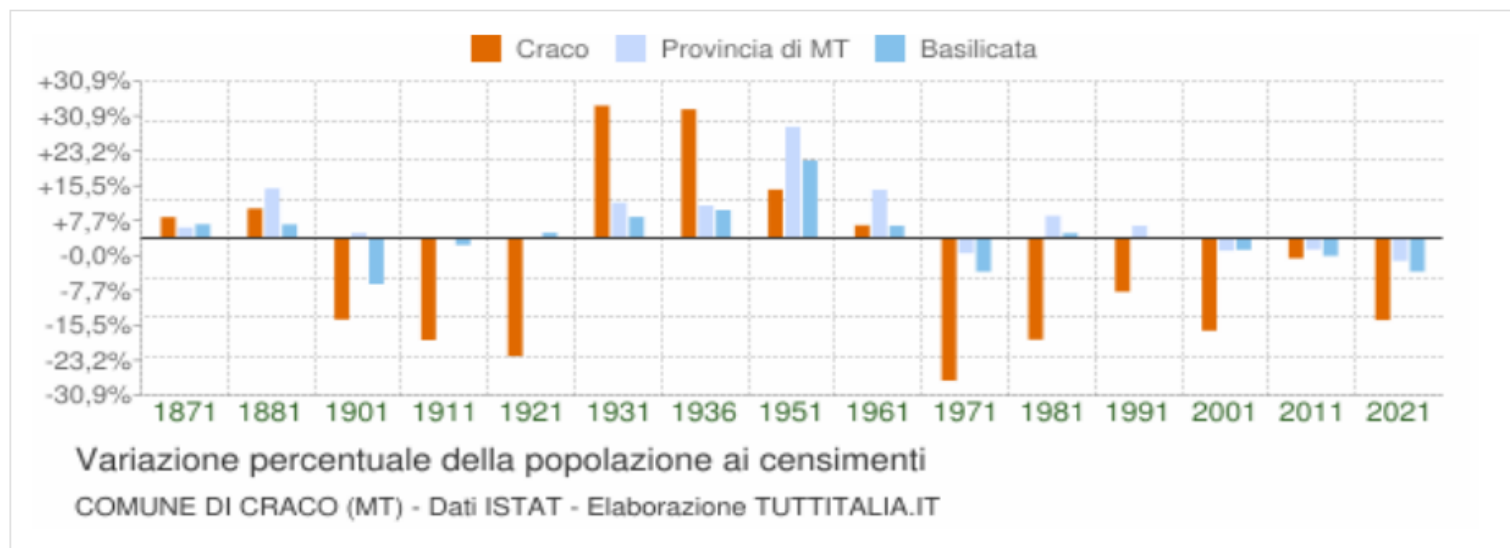
Since **2018**, ISTAT has activated the permanent census of the population, a new census survey that has an annual frequency and no longer ten years. Unlike the traditional census, which carried out a precise survey of all individuals and households, the new method is based on the combination of sample surveys and data from administrative sources treated statistically.

Starting from **2021**, the legal population will be determined every five years and no longer ten years by decree of the President of the Republic on the basis of the results of the permanent census of the population.

## Percentage change in population at censuses from 1861 to 2021

The changes in the population of Craco in the census years expressed as a percentage compared with the variations of the province of Matera and the Basilicata region.

*continued on next page*



# Craco Population Censuses

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Population data at censuses from 1861 to 2021 ([ISTAT](#))

Census			Resident population	Var %	Notes
Num.	year	Survey date			
1°	1861	December 31	1.821	-	The first census of the population is carried out in the year of the unification of Italy.
2°	1871	December 31	1.900	+4,3%	As in the previous census, the unit of survey based on the concept of "family" does not provide for the distinction between households and cohabitation.
3°	1881	December 31	2.015	+6,1%	The method of detecting the resident population is adopted, those present with habitual residence and temporary absentees are part of it.
4°	1901	February 10	1.696	-15,8%	The census reference date is moved to February. Individual cards are introduced for each family member.
5°	1911	June 10	1.359	-19,9%	For the first time, there is an age limit of 10 years for answering questions about work.
6°	1921	December 1	1.046	-23,0%	The last census managed by the municipalities also burdened with the costs of surveying. Subsequently, the statistical surveys will be entrusted to Istat.
7°	1931	April 21	1.321	+26,3%	For the first time the collected data is processed with drilling machines using two Hollerith tabs with boards.
8°	1936	April 21	1.659	+25,6%	The first and only census carried out every five years.
9°	1951	November 4	1.821	+9,8%	The first census of the population to which was also combined that of housing.
10°	1961	October 15	1.871	+2,7%	The questionnaire is divided into sections. For data collection, second-generation computers are used with the application of the transistor and the introduction of magnetic tapes.
11°	1971	October 24	1.350	-27,8%	The first survey census of the language groups of Trieste and Bolzano with questionnaire also translated into German.
12°	1981	October 25	1.083	-19,8%	Statistical information is improved through pilot surveys that test the reliability of the questionnaire and the reliability of the results.
13°	1991	October 20	971	-10,3%	The questionnaire is translated into six languages in addition to Italian and is accompanied by an "individual sheet for foreigner not resident in Italy".
14°	2001	October 21	796	-18,0%	The development of telematics allows the activation of the first website dedicated to the Census and the dissemination of the results online.
15°	2011	October 9	766	-3,8%	The <a href="#">2011 Census</a> was the first online census with questionnaires also completed via the web and also the last traditional <b>census</b> with a ten-year survey.
III	2021	December 31	644	-15,9%	It is the third edition of the <b>permanent</b> census of the population and it is the first time that this new census method is used to determine the <b>legal population</b> , which from now on will be updated every five years instead of ten years.

# The Craco Immigrants' Trip

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There may have been more people living in one Naples apartment block than in all of Craco! Naples in this era was the largest city in Italy. Such a large bustling city framed by an active volcano had to create an overwhelming impression.

Then the emigrants from Craco had to deal with new challenges. They had to rely on agents to secure passage on a ship, comply with documentation to exit Italy, and meet US regulations to permit boarding the ships. Fares for steerage class passengers, in the 1880s were about \$20 but with increasing competition among shipping lines the price would drop in half by the 1890s. Most likely, their possessions were wrapped as bundles and included food such as dried sausage or cheese. Once they boarded the ship they entered a totally alien place.

The ocean voyage was rarely smooth and averaged about two weeks. The immigrants were left to their own devices to pass the time and face worries about the uncertainty of their fates. Storms and rough seas added to the discomfort along with being jammed into the bottom of the ship with no privacy. Men and women were separated into different sleeping quarters and met in the above deck areas where they went to escape the narrow bunks and dank atmosphere in their steerage area.

We have no information about the 1880s Cracotan immigrants' experience but a narrative written by Domenic Colabella about his voyage to America gives a good idea of this portion of the trip. He left Craco when he was 14 years old in 1905 and says, *"... I left Craco ... for Napoli. I traveled alone by slow boat ... it took 29 days to New York. ... On the boat all the men were bunked in large rooms naturally, we were treated like cattle in a box railroad car. The food was like what they serve in prisons. But we were a gay young bunch, looking forward to America and nothing bothered us anymore."*

Upon entering New York Harbor they were greeted by the City's skyline and after 1886 the Statue of Liberty. Once docked they transferred to smaller boats to go to the immigration station. It was here immigrants faced the greatest challenge hoping not to be rejected. A contemporary description of the entry process at Castle Garden provides insight: "Before they are allowed in the main part of the building the immigrants have to pass in single file before the officials, who register their names, nationality, age, occupation, starting point and destination, and also ask whether they have any money or not. In case they are without funds or means of earning a living, they are detained at the Garden for a reasonable length of time. If no one appears to care for them they are eventually sent back across the sea.

After the immigrants have been registered they are allowed to do as they please. Those who have through railroad tickets with which to go to the interior of the country are sorted out by the agents of the different railroad lines, and are soon started on their way.

Others, who decide to stay in New York for a time to look for work or wait for lagging friends, are left to the not altogether tender mercies of the boarding house "runners," who are admitted to the floor of the garden after the registration has been finished. At this period of the proceedings the spectacle to the onlooker is an interesting one.

The queer costumes, many of them brightly colored, and the faces, made doubly expressive by the hopes and fears of their owners, give this crowd an aspect of almost feverish gayety. As soon as the first excitement of arrival is over, those who for any reason find it necessary to remain at the Garden gather in groups about the kettle topped stoves and discuss the incidents of the voyage or prospects for the future. Sometimes they camp in the Garden for days before starting out, sitting by day on their bags and bundles and sleeping on the hard benches at night." From there they entered a new life.

The first group of Cracotans would experience major changes in New York City that allowed the 380 others from the town who followed during the decade after 1890 to find a more hospitable home.

## Domenico Colabella's 1905 Journey

Firsthand accounts of events are always insightful, especially because that provide the emotions and impressions the individuals felt or recalled.

Domenico's ship was the SS Calabria. It was built in 1901, making it fairly new. The SS Calabria was a small ship, 376 feet long and 47 feet broad (114.6x14.3 meters) and on this voyage carried 718 passengers (19 First Class, 699 Steerage). The ship left Naples on October 7, and arrived in New York Harbor on October 23, a 16 day transit. The manifest shows Domenico was traveling with his 31-year old uncle Nicola Colabella, who had been in the US from 1902—1905 and also 14-year old Donato Mormando from Craco. Domenico gave his

brother Pasquale's residence at 52 Roosevelt St. in New York City as his destination. Donato Mormando gave his brothers Pasquale and Vitantonio living at 44 Baxter Street as his destination.

On arrival in New York, the Immigration Officers marked the ship's manifest, indicating Domenico and Donato as children and both were detained along with Nicola with a notation "LPC" (Aliens likely to become public charges). However, they were admitted at 11:00am on October 24 when their sponsors arrived.

Domenico Colabello made another voyage to the US back from Craco in 1920. In 1915 he went back to Craco and stayed there until he boarded the SS Madonna on August 21 in Naples, arriving in New York on September 4.

*See Domenico's travel document on page 7*



# Domenico Colabella's 1905 Journey

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## Municipio di Craco

L'anno 1905 addì 21 del mese di agosto, nella residenza municipale.  
Innanzi di me Ninalli Donato Sindaco ff. del Comune  
anzidetto, assistito dal sottoscritto Segretario Comunale, ed alla presenza dei  
signori 1. Cammarota Pietro & Francesco  
2. Marconi Giovanni & Gaetano  
testimoni idonei a norma di Legge.

### È PERSONALMENTE COMPARSO

il signor Colabella Andrea fu Pasquale  
il quale ha dichiarato, conformemente dichiara di dare il proprio consenso per  
l'emigrazione all'estero dei seguenti suoi figliuoli:

1. Colabella Domenico, di anni 13
2. ?
3. ?

In fede di che si è redatto il presente atto, in carta libera trattandosi di  
emigrazione a causa di lavoro<sup>(1)</sup>, che letto ed approvato viene firmato da tutti  
gl' intervenuti<sup>(2)</sup> Andrea Colabella

Pietro Cammarota Teste  
Giovanni Marconi Teste Segretario Comunale Ninalli

(1) Art. 6 Reg. 31 gennaio 1901. .... sono pure esenti dalla tassa di bollo, e da ogni altra tassa tutti gli atti necessari per ottenere il passaporto richiesto da persone che si recano all'estero a scopo di lavoro ed alle loro famiglie.

(2) In caso che il dichiarante sia analfabeta si dica: ad eccezione del dichiarante che si è qualificato analfabeta.

798. v. col. 5541-5542

## Municipio di Craco

### Atto di affidamento e dichiarazione

L'anno 1905, il giorno 16 Settembre, in Craco.  
Innanzi di me sottoscritto Sindaco del Comune  
anzidetto, assistito dal Segretario Comunale, ed alla  
presenza dei sottoscritti testimoni, sono pesso-  
nalmente comparso:  
1. Colabella Andrea fu Pasquale, comunemente  
chiamato Donato in Craco.  
2. Il di lui fratello Colabella Nicola, apri-  
stato Donato in Craco, munito di  
passaporto esente in data 25 Agosto 1905.  
Il primo di lui ha dichiarato che volendo far emi-  
grare il di lui figlio Colabella Domenico,  
per fargli raggiungere il germano Pasquale  
residente in New York, lo affida per il viag-  
gio all'altro intermente Colabella Nicola,  
il quale si dichiara di assumersi l'impegno  
affidandosi di vigilare ed assistere con ogni  
cura e responsabilità durante il viaggio il detto  
minore, e di consegnarlo al predetto suo  
germano che lo riceverà a New York, risponden-  
do civilmente e finalmente a norma di legge.

Domenico Colabella's journey to New York started well before he left Craco. The official process to get his travel papers started at the Craco Municipio (town hall) on August 6, 1905 when the Mayor of Craco sent a request to the Procuratore at Matera to confirm there were no criminal records for Domenico. The response of a clean record was received on August 11. Then on August 21, Domenico's father Andrea signed the document at the Municipio (above left) giving permission for the 13-year old to "emigrate due to work." The following month on September 16, Andrea returned to the Municipio with his uncle Nicola and signed the document (above right) giving permission for Domenico to travel, with his uncle as his guardian, to New York where Pasquale Colabella, Domenico's older brother would take custody of the child. On the same dates, similar documents were also drawn up for Donato Mormando to travel with Nicola Colabella as his guardian.



**SS Calabria:** Built by D. and W. Henderson and Co Ltd, Glasgow, Scotland, 1901. 4,376 gross tons; 376 feet long; 47 feet wide. Steam Triple Expansion engines, single screw. Service speed 13 knots. 1,170 passengers (20 first class, 1150 third class). One funnel, two masts. Steel hull with two decks. Built for Anchor Line, British flag, in 1901 and named Calabria. Mediterranean-New York and later Glasgow-New York service. Scrapped in London in 1923.



Traveling in steerage was not pleasant as Domenico reported. The above photograph shows a men's sleeping quarters in a steerage area with the arrangement of bunks, baggage and beds with occupants. This scene, from Leslie's Monthly Magazine, May 1904, gives us an understanding of what Domenico experienced.

# The America the First Crachesi Found

*continued from page 3*

*the Italian immigrant ... The city hired gangs of men ... The men were paid a dollar and a half a day, they kept what they found...*” He goes on to say the arrangement changed, suggesting that “junk picking” became very profitable, “To-day Italians contract for the work, paying large sums to be permitted to do it ... The effect ... giving him exclusive control of the one industry ... ”

Many Italians were lured by stories told in Europe about plentiful work and big wages, in America but could not find steady work and returned to Italy discouraged and with empty pockets.

Early Italian immigrants were not welcomed in America; they would be verbally abused by name calling such as "wop," "guinea," and "dago."



*1880s in New York City—The poor conditions for Italian immigrants living on Jersey Street were documented by Jacob Riis in “[How The Other Half Lives](#).”*

In the face of such hostility, Italian immigrants disregarded differences, and preferences for local townspeople (paesani) drew together, mingling language, worship, and traditions, creating a sense of security among themselves. By establishing their own communities where they could speak their own language, eat their own foods, practice their customs and religion as if back in their homeland numerous “[Little Italy](#)” neighborhoods developed.

Over the 1880s immigrants’ gains set the stage for the even larger number of arrivals during the next decade. For the Crachesi, the initial group of immigrants who arrived brought with them skills (barbers, tailors) that aided in their assimilation and provided the pathway for others to follow in the next decade. ■



*San Rocco Feast, Bandit's Roost, Mulberry St.—This Jacob Riis photograph shows the crowded tenement conditions and also how the Italian immigrants adapted by maintaining familiar customs and traditions that continue today.*

## Reminder:

Your should have received your 2023 membership dues notice.  
**Please submit your payment**, the Society relies on you for support.



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