



The Craco Society

DISCOVER. SHARE. PRESERVE. | SCOPRIRE. CONDIVIDERE. CONSERVARE.



A New Year of Learning About Our History

As we open this new year we are enthusiastic about the opportunities to fulfill our mission to preserve the history, culture, and traditions of Craco.

Last year we set out a plan to publish the material we have to make it readily available. That resulted in the release of the English language translation of [Note Storiche Sul Comune di Craco](#) in hard cover on Amazon. This supplements the [soft cover version](#) that was previously published and is still available.

Following that, another reprint that has been out of print for years was the historic booklet, [Homage to the Madonna Della Stella \(Omaggio alla Stella\)](#).

These were followed by [San Vincenzo Martire and the Crachesi in Two Worlds](#) and in conjunction with the Federazione Lucana d'America, we published a cookbook, [Flavors of Basilicata: Cooking the food of happiness](#).

With that foundation, during this year we will highlight the story of our ancestors who started arriving in the US over 140 years ago. There can be nothing more important than making the multiple generations know about our history and ancestry. This is especially true with five to six generations of descendants with roots from Craco since the 1880s.

In the upcoming months we will publish a serialized story of their arrival in the monthly Newsletters. By sharing and preserving the knowledge of our history, culture, and traditions, we ensure our ancestors' legacy remains alive.

We ask you to contribute any stories, recipes, photographs, or material that help us all learn our shared history. Please contact us with your contributions at:
memberservices@thecracosociety.org

“There can be nothing more important than making the multiple generations know about our history and ancestry.”

My belief is that all of us from Craco are “cousins” and drives me to seek to learn more about each and every one of you through these stories. ■

With best wishes for a Happy New Year.

Joseph Rinaldi



Italians have been influencing America starting with its discovery and continued through its exploration, naming, and founding as a country in 1776. The greatest cultural impact came from the 4 million Italians that came in the early 20th century making them the 4th largest European group in America.

The Crachesi Come to America

The story of the Crachese immigration to the Americas occurs in two phases. Both phases share common motives—the search for a better life, which is the reason behind all immigration and are usually part of larger events of the eras they occur.

Before the 1880-1924 arrival of Crachesi most immigrants to the US arrived from Western and Northern European nations. Early immigrants were mainly English, Germans, and Scotch-Irish and a small percentage were other Europeans: French, Dutch, Welsh, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Swiss and African slaves who were forced immigrants.

By the 1850s 2 million Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine, and 1.5 million Germans fleeing crop failures and the collapse of their democratic revolutions arrived. These immigrants generally were Protestant with some Catholics (particularly the Irish) and their cultures easily meshed into American culture of their era.

“...new immigrants faced difficulties in assimilating into American culture that earlier immigrants did not.”

Then from 1880—1924, 24 million immigrants arrived primarily from Italy, Croatia, Greece, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungry, and Russia. They came for a variety of reasons including economic, social issues, disease, escape from forced military conscription, and religious persecution. This coincided with the boom of the industrial revolution in the Eastern US providing opportunities for individuals to fill the need for laborers and created the largest increase in the standard of living and production in history.

These new immigrants faced difficulties in assimilating into American culture that earlier immigrants did not. Most could not speak English, nor were they literate. They typically settled in Eastern seaboard cities and entered low-paying, wage-labor jobs. They filled the growing factories and other jobs such as construction or sewing. Often arriving with little money and forced into substandard housing in the worst sections of the overcrowded cities, their increasing numbers strained the cities causing problems with sanitation and overcrowding.

Meanwhile, the immigrants created small ethnic communities where they preserved the culture of their homelands by publishing newspapers in their native languages, opening specialty grocery stores, restaurants, establishing churches, synagogues, and schools. But these enclaves could not protect immigrants from discrimination. Native-born Americans blamed the immigrants for the poor conditions and for taking over "their" nation creating prejudices and bias that continues today. These biases were among the underlying reasons for [US Immigration Act of 1924](#) creating a quota system reducing the number of immigrants from Southern and

Eastern Europe and largely ending the Crachese migration until the mid-1960s when a new wave arrived.

The causes creating the need for the first group of Cracotans to leave the land they inhabited for over a thousand years were multiple and built over a long time. These included economic, social, and political issues that impacted Italy for centuries reaching a peak when the future in Craco no longer offered an opportunity for a better life intersected with better conditions elsewhere. This occurred twice, from 1880-1924 and again in the mid-1960s after the Frana.

The first wave of arrivals from Craco coincides with the great immigration period from 1880-1924 that brought millions of immigrants from Europe to the US. During this period over 1600 Crachesi arrived along with 4 million other Italians. As part of the Society's mission to preserve the history, culture and traditions of Craco in North America we will be documenting the story of the Crachese immigration beginning from 1880 when the first villager is known to have left for New York. Although some details about the families that arrived were touched on in previous newsletters or at Reunions we will be creating a chronological story that aims to encompass the history of the Crachesi in America. Over the past years we have accumulated photographs and stories that will be used in the narrative but we invite all Society members to share material with us to be included in this effort. Material can be sent by email to:

memberservices@thecracosociety.org or you can call us at 774-269-6611 to tell us about a story that you would like to add to our history. ■



Considered as a typical Southern Italian girl arriving among the immigrants coming to America, this photo shows the traditional clothing of the period.

The Seeds of Italian Immigration

Italian influences in America began with Christopher Columbus, explorers such as Amerigo Vespucci, [Giovanni Caboto \(John Cabot\)](#), and [Giovanni da Verrazzano](#); political thinkers like [Filippo Mazzei](#); artisans like [Constantino Brumidi](#). The names and contributions by Italians like [Pietro Cesare Alberti](#) (first Italian to settle in America), [Francesco Vigo](#) (Revolutionary War financier), are lost to most of us but the biggest impact by Italians was made by those nameless immigrants who arrived from 1880-1924. They and their descendants changed American culture and society by their everyday toil and perseverance. Italian Americans now are 6% of the US population.

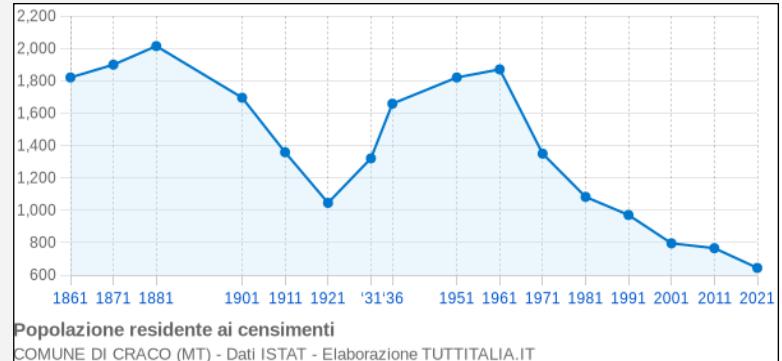
However, the seeds for the great wave of Italian immigration was sown in their homeland centuries before. During the late 19th century when most of the immigrants who would come to America were born, Italy had only been unified since 1861 but it was in disarray. After centuries of fragmented states and rule by foreign powers, a divide existed between Northern Italians who were contemptuous of the backwards Southern area. The south was resentful and paranoid about prospects of exploitation from the north. Southern Italians were barely surviving in their hardscrabble agrarian economy. They were trapped in a feudal land system with no hope of progress as absentee northern landlords drained their earnings. Added to that were negative effects of the Italian Revolution. In attempting to unify Italy, the new government eliminated the Roman Catholic Church from the nation's education system. In the North, where a public school system existed, this wasn't a problem but in the South there was no educational system except for the Church. So large numbers of Southern Italian youth born in the 1880s, including the Crachesi, were raised "percho analfabeti" – without letters but skilled in the crafts and trades that allowed them to survive.

Not only was the South separated from the rest of Italy by politics and economics but dialects, geography, and history combined to make it a world apart. By the late 1800s conditions deteriorated as a series of events dramatically changed Italy's economic and social conditions. These included almost annual catastrophes that seemed to compound the distress of the population and included:

- 1884-1887—cholera epidemics kill over 55,000 in the south
- 1887—trade with France is severed
- 1888—trade war with France
- 1888—legislation recognizes the right to emigrate
- 1890—plant disease destroys the grapevines in the south
- 1890—drop in agricultural prices causes a trade war
- 1894—land reforms proposed to try to quell Sicilian unrest
- 1894—large earthquake
- 1898—bread riots lead to suppression of civil rights

Meanwhile, in the New World, economic conditions had created a huge demand for labor and offered social structures that enabled individual accomplishment and rewarded hard work. This combination of events triggered an exodus.

But America would prove to have its own challenges.

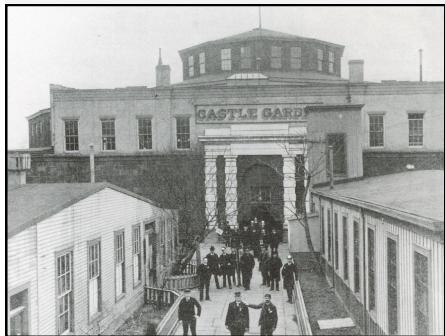


Craco Population Changes—the graph above shows that although conditions after the Italian Unification were challenging, Craco's population actually grew in the period from 1861 until 1881. From that time until 1921 the population dropped by 50%. It rebounded through 1961 but shows a large drop since the Frana when the town was changed forever.

Population data at censuses from 1861 to 2021

Census	Population			Notes
	Num.	year	Survey date	
1°	1861	31 Dec	1.821	- The first population census was carried out in the year of the unification of Italy.
2°	1871	31 Dec	1.900	+4,3% As in the previous census, the survey unit based on the concept of "family" does not provide for the distinction between families and cohabitation.
3°	1881	31 Dec	2.015	+6,1% The method of surveying the resident population is adopted, including those present with habitual residence and temporary absences.
4°	1901	10 Feb	1.696	-15,8% The census reference date is moved to February. Individual cards are introduced for each member of the family.
5°	1911	10 Jun	1.359	-19,9% For the first time, there is an age limit of 10 years to answer questions about work.
6°	1921	1 Dec	1.046	-23,0% The last census managed by the municipalities also burdened with survey costs. Subsequently, the statistical surveys will be entrusted to Istat.
7°	1931	21 Apr	1.321	+26,3% For the first time, the data collected is processed with drilling machines using two Hollerith tabbed tabs.
8°	1936	21 Apr	1.659	+25,6% The first and only census carried out every five years.
9°	1951	4 Nov	1.821	+9,8% The first census of the population to which the census of housing has also been combined.
10°	1961	15 Oct	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	24 Oct	1.350	-27,8% The first census of the linguistic groups of Trieste and Bolzano with a questionnaire also translated into German.
12°	1981	25 Oct	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	20 Oct	971	-10,3% The questionnaire is translated into six languages in addition to Italian and is accompanied by an "individual sheet for foreigners not residing in Italy".
14°	2001	21 Oct	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	9 Oct	766	-3,8% The 2011 Census was the first online census with questionnaires also completed via the web and also the last traditional census with a ten-year survey.
III	2021	31 Dec	644	-15,9% The 2021 Census was the first permanent population census to be used to determine the legal population , which will now be updated every five years instead of every ten years.

The First Immigrants from Craco



Castle Garden Immigration Station

Operating in New York Harbor from 1831 to 1891 over 10 million immigrants entered the US before Ellis Island opened.

From 1880-1891 over 50 Crachesi passed through here entering a new life in America.

From 1880 - 1924 over 1,600 Crachesi left to settle in North America primarily in New York City and New Jersey.

Prof. Dino D'Angella in his history of the town of Craco identified Antonio Viggiano as the first immigrant from Craco to go to America. Antonio Viggiano had been a member of the town council since 1867 but was unable to find a secure job so he became an expatriate in 1880.

D'Angella added, "Craco was one of the villages of the Materano that had the highest number of emigrations. The Crachese population in 1881 numbered 2,015 inhabitants, the population present in 1901 was 1,696 persons, and by 1911 Craco counted 1,359 inhabitants. Entire family units abandoned their native land, their customs and their culture to begin a new life..."

Considering the difficulties to get to America, the conditions and despair must have been extreme. Those seeking to emigrate needed to have considerable money, and documents to travel to Naples and obtain ship's passage before they began an arduous and life threatening voyage. D'Angella commented that, "This was a hard and dangerous trip due to what were described as "gypsies" and brigands. Many people would have written a will before embarking on the trip."

From 1880—1890, the first decade of mass immigration from Italy to America, US records show 40 people from Craco arriving at New York's Castle Garden Immigration Station. (The more commonly known Ellis Island Immigration Station would not be opened until 1892.) Probably, twice that many actually arrived from Craco but manifests in the earlier part of the period did not require immigrants to provide their town of origin.

The following is the list of names transcribed from manifests by CastleGarden.org that provided online access to records. The names below contain obvious errors but are provided as extracted from the Castle Garden online database so those seeking to find the record can use them.

1. MARIA ARANZO
2. PIETRO BALDO
3. ANTONIO BARBETTA
4. FIOMENA BARBETTA
5. ANGELO BATTISTO
6. VINCENZO BRANDA
7. DOMENICO BRUNETTI
8. F. CANTAROCO
9. SALVATORE CITARELLO
10. ROSA DADDURNO
11. FRANCESCO ELIA
12. GIUSEPPE ELIA
13. MARIA EPISCOPIA
14. GIOVANNA EPISCOPIA
15. ANGELA EPISCOPIA
16. GIUSEPPE FERRANTE
17. VINCENZO FORGIONE
18. ANDREA LABASCO
19. A.M. LABASCO
20. GIUSEPPE LAMBERLURO
21. ELEONORA LAPENTA
22. ROCCO LIBERTINI
23. DONATO LOMBARDI
24. BENEDETTO MANFREDI
25. GIUSEPPE MARRESE
26. PASQUALE MARRESE
27. LEONARDO MORANDA
28. ELEONORA MORANDA
29. ANGELA MORANDA
30. GAETANO MORMA
31. NICOLA MORMANDO
32. PASQUALE PARISI
33. GIOVANNI RINALDI
34. ANGELO SACCAFINO
35. VINCENZO SACCAFINO
36. ANTONIO SCIANNAP
37. ANDREA SCIOSCIA
38. GIUSEPPE SIMONETTI
39. VINCENZO TERRA
40. NICOLA VITARELLI

These first arrivals and their descendants served as the foundation for the Crachese presence in America. It was their communications back home about the opportunities and the ability to sponsor others that allowed more to follow and settle in the New World.

Your 2026 membership dues notice is on the way.

Please remember to send your dues. The Society relies on you for support.

How to contact us - Come contattarci



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