



The America the First Crachesi Found

Italian immigration grew ten-fold in the 1880s over previous decades. In 1880 about twenty-thousand 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 from Craco (41 people from 1880-1890 and 380 people between 1891-1900).

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 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 him to return home or bring his family over to join him. Jacob Riis, in his 1890 book, “[How The Other Half Lives](#)” documented the lives that immigrants of the era faced and made an observation important to Cracotans.

“... there is money in New York’s ash-barrel ... [it] has become the exclusive preserve of the Italian immigrant ...”

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 the Italian immigrant ... The city hired gangs of men ... The men were paid a dollar and a half a day, kept what they found ...*”

He goes on to say the arrangement changed, suggesting that “junk picking” became very profitable: “*Today 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.”

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 the gains of the immigrants 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. ■

Craco Immigrants' Trip

The first Crachesi 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 by 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 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. 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. Needing to secure passage on a ship, comply with the documentation required to leave Italy, and meet U.S. regulations in order to be permitted to board, they were forced to rely on agents.

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 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.

Crachesi Immigrants 1891-1900

From 1891-1900 there were 480 Crachesi who arrived in New York Harbor. The overwhelming majority landed in the last three years, which coincided with the burning of Ellis Island and the use of the Barge Office on Whitehall Street in Manhattan. The population of the town of Craco in 1881 was 2,015, so by the turn of the 20th century 25% of the town was now living in America. Emigration from the town continued over the next two decades adding 1,000 individuals and with the growth of the earlier immigrant families there were more Cracotans living in New York in 1921 than in Craco. The names of those who arrived in New York from 1891-1900 are:

1891—Castle Garden

Fittipaldi, Vincenzo
Grasso, Angelo
Seccafico, Giuseppe
Maronne, Giuseppe
Maronne, Michele
Mastronardi, Nicola
Rofania, Antonio

1892—Ellis Island

Guariglia, Margherita
Guariglia, Maria
Manghise, Pietro
Tanico, Fedele
Tanico, Vito Domenico
Tuzio, Filomena
Vozzi, Ambrogio

1893—Ellis Island

Acquavivo, Guiseppe
Azzone, Pasquale
Biancuni, Antonio
Carciero, Francesco
Carciero, Leonardo
DeCesare, Nicola
di Piero, Rosa Maria
Ferrante, Nicola
Fugzi, Angela
Fugzi, Innocenzo
Fugzi, Rosa
Gaetano, Angelo
Gaetano, Domenico
Gaetano, Guiseppe
Gesualdi, Nicoli
Grossi, Nicola
Lombardi, Vito
Luchetti, Guilia
Mastronardi, Maria Gaeta.
Mastronardi, Vincenzo
Matera, Alessio
Matera, Guiseppe
Matera, Prospero
Moglie, Maria
Parisi, Apollina
Rinaldi, Antonia
Rinaldi, Domenico
Sirillo, Antonio
Sirillo, Rosa

Tanico, Ma-

ria Cattarina
Tuzio, Giuseppe
Viggiano, Lucia

1894—Ellis Island

Muzio Nicola
Pargiallo, Maria
Zaffaresa, Maria Guiseppea

1896—Ellis Island

De Marco, Gesualdo
Gaetano, Paolo
Mastronardi, Maria

1897—Ellis Island & Barge Office

Alderssio, Domenico
Alderssio, Teresa
Alderssio, Vincenzo
Baldassarre, Brigida
Baldassarre, Giulia
Berardone, Gaetano
Calabrese, Maria
Cantasano, Antonia
Cantasano, Maria
Caricato, Francesco
Colabello, Donato
Colabello, Paolo
De Felice, Sebastiano
De Santi, Rosa
D'Elia, Veiola
Famighetti, Maria
Forgione, Antonio
Gallo, Maria
La Gualana, Vincenzo
Lucchetti, Antonia Maria
Lucchetti, Filomenia
Maronna, Porzia
Matera, Angela
Matera, Maria
Matera, Rocco
Matera, Vito
Novelli, Giovanni
Parziale, Domenico
Pirretti, Leonardo
Rinaldi, Antonio
Riviello, Anna Lucia
Riviello, Maria
Rubertone, Leonardo

1898—Barge Office

Brunetti, Ma. Teresa
Calabrese, Grazia
Calabrese, Vincenzo
Cantansano, Antonio
Cantansano, Guiseppe
Cantasano, Angela
Carciato, Nicola
Carulli, Carvallo
Castellano, Donato
Cigliano, Domenico
Cigliano, Ma. Cristina
Colabello, Fortunato
Colabello, Paolo
Colabello, Pasquale
Colabello, Santalucia
Curci, Antonia
Curci, Domenica
Curci, M Guiseppea
De Cesare, Angela
De Cesare, Isabella
De Costale, Francesco
De Costale, Pietro
Di Santi, Donato Antonio
Di Santi, Francesco
Di Santi, M. Rosa

Di Santi, Maria
Di Santi, Nicola
Di Santo, Donato
Di Santo, Maria Rosaria
Episcopia, Angela
Episcopia, Giulia
Episcopia, Leonardo
Episcopia, Maria
Episcopia, Rosa
Ferrante, Antonia
Filippo, Rosa
Forgione, Giovanni
Forgione, Ma. Teresa
Forgione, Pasquale
Galante, Angela Maria
Galante, Antonia Maria
Galante, Francesco
Galante, Ma. Maddalene
Galante, Margherita
Galante, Pasquale
Galante, Vincenzo
Gesualdi, Antonio
Gesualdi, Francesco
Grassi, Giovanni
Grassi, Matteo
Grieco, Guiseppe
Guarino, Alfonso
Guarino, Angela
Izzo, Guiseppe
Lanidaro, Francesco Antonio
Lanivara, Antonio Mario
Lanivara, Nicola
Lanivara, Vincenzo
Leone, Vitantopio
Lorubio, Antonio
Marano, Antonio
Marrese, Vincenzo
Matera, Vitanlonio
Mele, Domenico
Padula, Maria
Petrocelli, Michele
Porraco, Guiseppe
Ragone, Gerardo
Ragone, Guiseppe
Resoldi, Maria
Rigirone, Guiseppe
Rigirone, Vincenzo
Rinaldi, Domenico
Rinaldi, Francesco
Rinaldi, Vincenzo
Riviello, Antonio
Santalucia, Francesco
Santalucia, Rosa Maria
Serillo, Domenico
Simonetti, Carbo
Spera, Donato
Spera, Gaetano
Spera, Guilia
Spera, Isabella
Spera, Nicolotta
Spera, Vincenzo
Tuzio, Guiseppe Nicola
Tuzio, Vincenzo
Ubaldi, Rosa
Vaccaro, Francesco
Vaccaro, Vincenzo
Viggianno, Prospero
Viggianno, Rosa
Vitorello, Guiseppe
Vitorello, Vicolo
Zaffarese, Antonia
Zaffarese, Ma. Guiseppea
Zaffarese, Teresa
Zaffarese,

Crachesi Immigrants 1891-1900 (cont.)

1899—Barge Office

Artuso, Saverio
 Basile, Antonio
 Benedetto, Paolo
 Calabrese, Giuseppe
 Candeloro, Eustacchio
 Candeloro, Rosa
 Cantasano, Francesco
 Carantino, Petronilla
 Caricati, Antonio
 Caricati, Maddalena
 Castaldi, Nicoloetta
 Cigliano, Michele
 Contasano, Costantino
 Conte, Giacomo
 Conte, Pietro
 Costanzo, Dco. Antonio
 Costanzo, Ma. Filomena
 Costanzo, Nicola
 D'Addiego, Pietro
 De Fino, Angelo
 DeCesare, Paolo
 Dolcemele, Rosa
 Episcopia, Giovanni Andreo
 Forgione, Domenico
 Forgione, Ma. Vincenzo
 Galasso, Giuseppe
 Gesauldi, Pasquale
 Grieco, Giuseppe
 Grieco, Ma. Maddalena
 Grieco, Pasquale
 Griego, Angelantonio
 Grossi, Cantasano Atonia
 Grossi, Guiseppa
 Guariglia, Nicola Maria
 Hermanela, Antonio
 Hermanela, Guisepple
 Laurio, Vito Gaetano,
 Leone, Maria Teresa
 Lisanti, Nicola
 Loporchio, Ferdinando
 Loporchio, Leonardo
 Loporchio, Ma. Carmela
 Lorubio, Donato
 Lorubio, Guiseppia
 Lorubio, Maria
 Marone, Giovanni
 Mastronardi, Gaetano
 Mastronardi, Vito Antonio
 Matera, Vincenzo
 Miadomna, Silvio
 Mormando, Fracesa Saverio
 Motarrose, Anna Maria
 Motarrose, Ma. Giovanna
 Motarrose, Rosa
 Padovani, Ma. Teresa
 Padovani, Pietro
 Padovani, Rosa
 Parziale, Giulia Ma.
 Pascariello, Antonio

Pugliese, Francesco
 Rago, Nicola
 Rigirona, Nicolo
 Rinaldi, Francesco
 Rinaldi, Nicola
 Riviello, Antonia
 Riviello, Gaetano
 Riviello, Guiseppe
 Rubertone, Domenica
 Rubertone, Domenico
 Seicsaccatti, Caterine
 Sillari, Giuseppe
 Sillari, Giuseppe Antonio
 Sillari, Maria Isabella
 Sillari, Michelangelo
 Silleri, Guilia
 Simonetti, Carlo
 Sirillo, Guiglielmo
 Spera, Leonardo
 Stabile, Vincenzo
 Tursi, Domenico
 Tuzio, Nicola
 Venita, Angela Maria
 Venita, Ma. Teresa
 Ventomiglia, Egidio
 Ventura, Rocca
 Viggiano, Prospero

1900—Barge Office

Artuso, Antonio
 Bilanceri, Maria
 Branda, Angela
 Branda, Antonia Maria
 Branda, Isabella
 Camberlengo, Angiola
 Camberlengo, Antonio
 Camberlengo, Carmello
 Camberlengo, Nicola
 Camberlengo, Teodora
 Cantasano, Maria
 Caputo, Pietro
 Caruso, Vittoria
 Caruso, Vittoria Stella
 Castellano, Giovannina
 Cigliano, Domenico
 Cigliano, Margherita
 Cigliano, Vincenzo
 Conte, Pietro
 Conte, Vitantonio
 D'Alessandro, Giovanni
 D'Alessandro, Vittoria
 De Costale, Antonia
 De Costole, Pasgia
 Di Gilio, Maddalena
 Di Gilio, Maria
 Di Pierro, Leonardo
 Di Santo, Basilio
 Di Santo, Francesco
 Dodici, Carmina
 Elia, Angelo

Ferrante, Antonia
 Ferrante, Francesco
 Ferrante, Innocenzo
 Ferrante, Michele
 Fezza, Carmine
 Fezza, Maria
 Fezza, Pasquale
 Fittapaldi, Camela
 Forza, Maria
 Francavilla, Carlo
 Gaetano, Antonio
 Gallipoli, Pietro
 Gesaldi, Nicola
 Giustiniani, Italiano
 Grossi, Carlo
 Guariglia, Antonia
 Guariglia, Antonio
 Guariglia, Austragio
 Guariglia, Camillo
 Guariglia, Carmilla
 Guariglia, Giovanni
 Guariglia, Lucrezia
 Guariglia, Margherita
 Lambio, Vincenzo
 Lauria, Anna
 Lombardi, Antonio
 Lombardi, Caesar
 Marano, Pasquale
 Marchese, Francesco
 Marmo, Andrea
 Maresse, Giuseppe
 Marzano, Francesco
 Montesano Vittorio Stello
 Mormando, Leonardo
 Mormando, Vincenzo
 Paduano, Antonio
 Pignataro, Nicola
 Rinaldi, Isabella
 Rinaldi, Ma. Caterina
 Riviello, Anna Lucia
 Riviello, Maria
 Riviello, Rosa
 Rosso, Egidio
 Santalucia, Angiala Maria
 Santalucia, Giuseppe
 Santalucia, Teresa
 Santalucia, Vincenzo
 Sarubbi, Giovanni
 Seccafico, Giacomo
 Seccafico, M. Giuseppa
 Seccafico, Guglielmo D.
 Spera, Vincenzo
 Toce, Antonio
 Toce, Paolo
 Toci, Domenico
 Toci, Giuseppe
 Toci, Ma. Teresa
 Vaccaro, Pietro
 Veltre, Maria Maddalean
 Ventura, Antonia

Reminder:

You should have received your 2026 membership dues notice.
Please submit your payment, the Society relies on you for support.



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