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## *Italian American Collection at the Immigration History Research Center*

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As the most extensive archive of material on Italian American immigration and ethnicity in North America, the Italian American collection at the University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) welcomes researchers interested in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of Italian Americans in the United States since the early nineteenth century. Well-prepared researchers will probably want to explore the IHRC web page (<http://ihrc.umn.edu/research/>) and consult individually with curatorial staff ([ihrc@umn.edu](mailto:ihrc@umn.edu)) prior to arrival in Minneapolis. Here, we aim only to provide a general introduction.

The Italian American collection of the IHRC includes a rich array of manuscripts; an extensive library of books, pamphlets, autobiographies, biographies, novels, and religious and political tracts written by and about Italian Americans; and almost 500 newspapers and publications in both Italian and English. The collection reflects the diversity of the Italian American experience, illuminating a wide range of political ideologies, religious activities, occupations, and leisure time interests. It offers valuable opportunities to study the regional, class, and gender distinctions among Italian Americans in the US, while revealing transatlantic bonds Italians created and maintained with their homeland.

While impressive in scope, the contents of the collection reflect its history, which is worth re-telling briefly. Like all archives, the Italian-American collection is a product of the choices of specific people acting in particular historical, political, and social contexts (Gabaccia, "The Immigration History Research Center"). The IHRC itself arose out of the 1960s social turmoil that fostered a new generation of historians interested in reconstructing the lives of previously neglected immigrants and inserting them into the historical narrative of the United States. The focus of these "new social historians" was on the so-called "proletarian mass migrations," or "new immigrants"—primarily from Europe—that arrived in the years between 1880 and 1930. Collecting by University of Minnesota scholars began as part of a research project, funded by the Ford Foundation, on Minnesota's Iron Range—a mining area that attracted a large immigrant workforce, including Italians, at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the first decade after its founding in 1965, the IHRC sought to collect and preserve materials related to southern, central, and eastern European immigrants to the US. At that time, children and grandchildren of the dying immigrant generation began reassessing both their own identities and the value of old boxes and folders stored in attics, basements, and community centers. Early collecting efforts focused on 24 groups which, besides Italian immigrants, included those of Finnish, Croatian, Hungarian, Slovenian, Latvian, Polish, Ukrainian, Czech, and Near Eastern origins. Of these collections, the Italian American collection is one of the most extensive. IHRC Research Archivist Daniel Necas estimates it at 1,600 linear feet.

The IHRC's focus on the mass transatlantic migrations generally, and on Italian Americans in particular, is a product of the archival vision and research interests of longtime director, Rudolph Vecoli. Vecoli arrived at the University of Minnesota in 1964, soon after he published his influential critique of Oscar Handlin's work that inaccurately depicted European migration to the U.S. as uprooting, alienating, and victimizing. Utilizing southern rural Italians as an example, Vecoli pointed to the cultural particularities and complexities that mark the differences between and among ethnic groups, and the ways in which migrants used traditional values to adjust to new lives in America. Like Vecoli, immigrant historians of the 1960s were often immigrants or children of immigrants; they

articulated insiders' histories of particular immigrant groups "from the bottom up." Social history and Vecoli's research agenda, which focused on both labor and ethnicity, left a permanent legacy: the IHRC's Italian American collection holds especially rich materials on Italian Americans' working-class experiences, labor and radical movements, and complex organizational lives.

The collection documents in depth Italian Americans' involvement in organized labor and anarchist and socialist groups. The IHRC owns microfilms of early twentieth-century newspapers such as *Il Proletario*—the official organ of the Italian Socialist Federation under the direction of Carlo Tresca—and the *Cronaca Sovversiva*—representing the radical, anti-organizational, anti-unionism anarchist voice led by Luigi Galleani. The papers of major labor leaders, including Anthony Capraro, the antifascist labor organizer of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and Brazilian-born Italian Angela Bambace, responsible for the 1933 walkout of 75,000 dressmakers in New York City, chronicle other labor mobilizations. Records, such as the local papers of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, which holds the Executive meeting minutes of the Local 48 Italian Cloak, Suit and Skirt Maker's Union in New York from 1920 to 1965, and the Italian Actors Union, which includes membership information, correspondences, essays, contracts, and other materials related to the Union's activities during the mid twentieth century, add detail and diversity to Italian Americans' labor activities.

Vecoli also nurtured what became the largest section of the Italian American collection in the IHRC—the records of Italian American fraternal and ethnic organizations. The flagship piece of the Italian American collection is the archives of the Order Sons of Italy (OSIA), the largest and oldest Italian fraternal organization in the US. At almost 1,000 linear feet, this collection describes in detail the organization's activities at the local, state, and national levels. The Dominic R. Massarò OSIA Collection, a recent acquisition, holds an impressive amount of materials including correspondences, meeting minutes, reports, and records related to Judge Massarò's activities and responsibilities in state and national OSIA offices. Also represented in the IHRC are the records of the National Italian American Foundation (NAIF), UNICO, and the American Italian Historical Association (AIHA). According to Library Supervisor, Halyna Myroniuk, who

began working at the IHRC as a part-time student in 1966, Vecoli's scholarly and personal contacts with such organizations and their leaders underwrote IHRC's collecting successes. Because financial support from donors is almost always needed to process documents and make them accessible, well-funded organizations are often in a better position than individual donors to assist in the collecting and cataloging process.

For 40 years, the breadth and diversity of materials in the Italian American collection has attracted a steady stream of international and US-based scholars, including historians, anthropologists, and sociologists, as well as graduate students, undergraduates, and genealogists from Minnesota and elsewhere in the United States. Early publications by social historians included community studies of Italians in the US and examinations of the Italian American working class, such as John Briggs' *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930* (See also Pozzetta). Historians from Europe also arrived as researchers in Minneapolis: French historian Bénédicte Deschamps has used IHRC materials to write on anti-Italian sentiment and racial formation, as well as on the Italian-American press (Deschamps, "Le racisme anti-italien aux États-Unis (1880-1940)"). In more recent years, scholars have examined unexplored collections and revisited commonly looked at materials to expand and diversify depictions of Italian American life. Thomas Guglielmo's *White on Arrival*, for example, uses the personal papers of Italian journalists, editors, and labor leaders to study constructions of whiteness as a social and racial status for Italians in Chicago. Scholars have also found extensive materials on Italian immigrants in other IHRC collections. Maddalena Tirabassi's *Il Faro di Beacon Street* drew heavily on the International Institute Records to discuss Italian immigrants' interactions with social workers in Boston in the first half of the twentieth century. Others have used oral histories and immigrant autobiographies in the Italian Immigration to Michigan's Upper Peninsula Oral History Project Records, the Batinich Collection, and the Italians in Chicago Oral History Project Records to explore the emotive, subjective world of immigrant self-fashioning (Mancina-Batinich). The IHRC also contains at least 18 Italian-American autobiographies, including those of Clara Grillo, Luigi Turco, and Robert Ferrari (See for example, the work of Ilaria Serra).

Scholars have utilized parts of the Italian American collection in conjunction with materials on other ethnic groups, often housed in the General/Multiethnic collection, the largest collection at the IHRC. Donna Gabaccia's *We Are What We Eat*, a study of how ethnic foodways transformed US culinary traditions, and Franca Iacovetta's *Gatekeepers*, which examines immigration and meanings of citizenship in Cold War Canada, combine Italian-related materials with documents from other IHRC collections. The current Digitizing Immigrant Letters pilot project, led by Donna Gabaccia and Sonia Cancian, aims to make public digitized and translated letters from multiple IHRC collections for scholars and students interested in studying emotion and intimacy among immigrants. Included materials from the Italian American collection are letters from the papers of Diego Delfino, an Italian American immigrant physician, and from the radical anarchist and journalist Alessandro Sisca (<http://ihrc.umn.edu/research/dil/index.html>).

New research agendas continue to open. Italian researchers Davide Grippa, Fraser Ottanelli, and Marcella Bencivenni have used the collection to explore Italian anti-fascism and Italian American radical culture. While working on her book *Living the Revolution*, Jennifer Guglielmo utilized IHRC manuscript collections and Italian language newspapers to analyze Italian women's diverse forms of labor and political activism in New York City. The papers of early twentieth-century Italian character actor Eduardo Migliaccio or "Farfariello" are becoming one of the most frequently used Italian-related collections, evidenced in Nancy Carnevale's award winning book, *A New Language, A New World*, in which she explores the role of language in Italian immigrants' lives. The papers of author Pietro di Donato and other collections also offer rich evidence on Italian American song, dance, literature, and art. Recent research by Ph.D. students Danielle Battisti and Maddalena Marinari and by 2008 Fulbright visiting scholar Matteo Pretelli examine the years after World War II.

Reflecting on the constructed quality of the national German archives, Europeanist Peter Fritzsche wrote: "The archive is the production of the heirs, who must work to find connections from one generation to the next and thereby acknowledge the ongoing disintegration of the past" (16). New "heirs"—directors, staff, researchers, and immigrants—will continue to shape and mold the

IHRC's Italian American collection. Interdisciplinary initiatives such as the Minnesota's Global REM (Race, Ethnicity, Migration), a collaborative project between the IHRC and Minnesota's Institute for Global Studies, promises that the Italian American collection will continue to serve scholars exploring new ways to enhance our understanding of Italian immigrant life.

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