

SEARCHING FOR . . .

by Josephine Toscano

I was born in Santa Cristina D'Aspromonte in Reggio Calabria. S. Cristina was last re-built in 1783 after an earthquake destroyed 'il paese vecchio'. My father, Stefano came to Melbourne in 1952 and began to work at Robinvale. He joined three of his brothers. I followed with my mother, Francesca, in 1956. This was a fairly common pattern of family migration in the 1950s. I am currently working as a teacher in the Department of Information studies at Swinburne University. My husband, Bryan Murphy, has a fairly extensive family tree and I originally began work on my 'family tree' to balance the work done by the 'Murphy side'. My two children, Anna-Maria and Cristina are still in primary school.

I was very lucky when it came to a search for my ancestors. First of all my parents were from the same town of Santa Cristina D'Aspromonte, [80kms from the city of Reggio Calabria] and secondly, all of my ancestors had very considerably not wandered from the town between the years of 1806 and 1863.

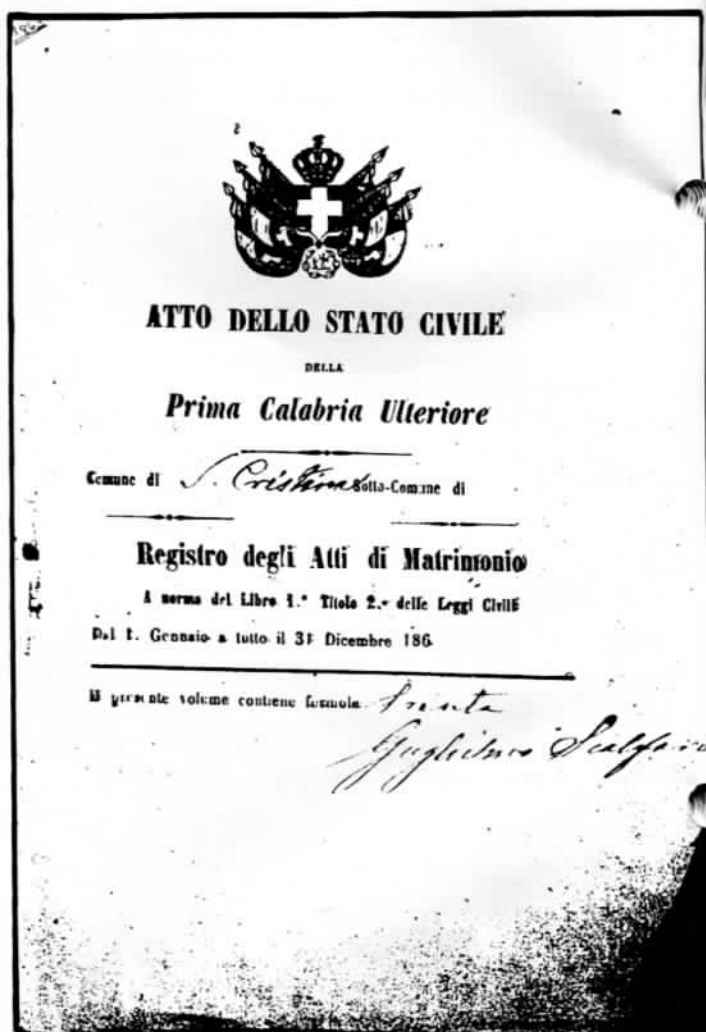
Betty Maiuto's book, *How to trace your Italian ancestors*, was an excellent first step for my research. It directed me to a Family History Centre (FHC) run by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints - commonly known as the Mormons. The volunteers at the FHC pointed me towards the International Locality Index and there I found that a very large part of the State Archives of Italy had actually been microfilmed by the Mormons. Once armed with the appropriate film roll number, these films can be ordered and then viewed at the FHC.

The records of Santa Cristina D'Aspromonte consist of the "Registro dello Stato Civile" from the State Archives in Reggio. The microfilms contain the Births, Deaths, Marriages and "Atti Diversi" records for the period 1806 - 1863.

The significance of 1806? In this year Napoleon Bonaparte ordered that these records be kept by the state. The significance of 1863? This is still a mystery - but it has been suggested that Italy has a 100 year "freeze" on the release of state records and the microfilming was done in 1963.

Using only these records I was able to get back to 1730. For example, in the Registry of Death for one ancestor in 1823, it gives the names and occupations of his parents and from this I was able to calculate their dates of birth in 1730.

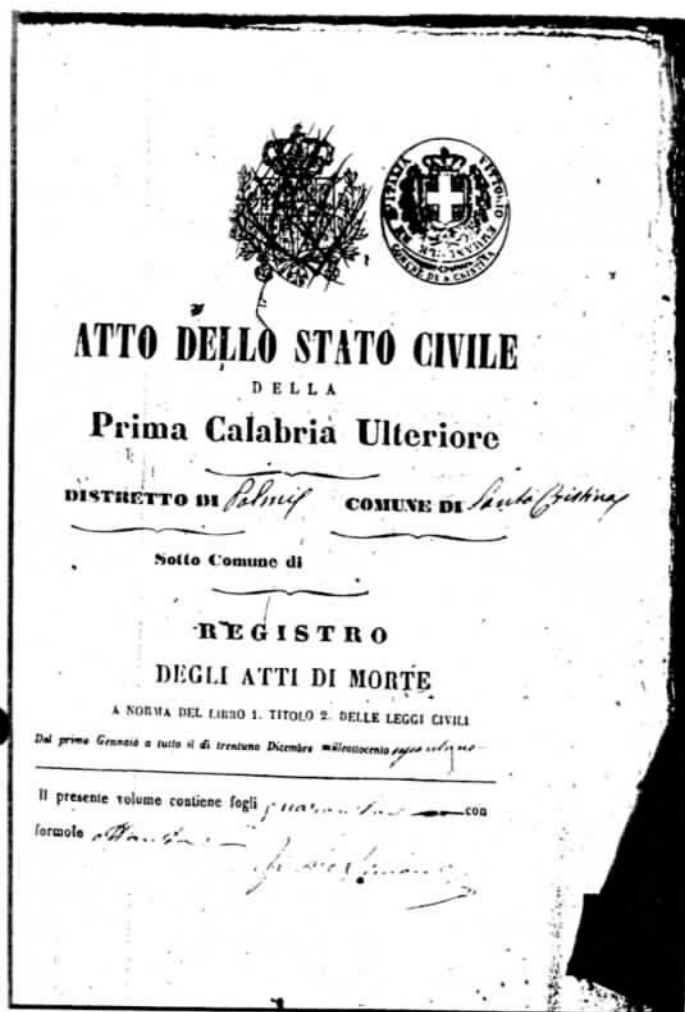
Given that the actual search for the names was very easy in my case, why am I still working at



Register of Marriages of the Comune of Santa Cristina. (From FHC microfilms)

it? Certainly not just for a list of who begat whom and when.

First it is interesting for me to understand the historical context in which my ancestors lived. I would like to be able to understand, for example,



Register of Deaths of the Comune of Santa Cristina for 1861. (From FHC microfilms)

1861 one emblem is crossed out and the new emblem is imposed of VITTORIO EMMANUELE RE D'ITALIA. Then in 1863 it changes again. What happened in 1863? Wasn't unification in 1861? When was Calabria part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies?

Secondly, the search has enabled me to appreciate the Italian language. The occupations listed for my ancestors range from: *bracciale*, *bracciante*, *contadina*, *contadino*, *lavoratore*, *filatrice*, to "*vaticale*". Some terms are easy to translate, while some like "*vaticale*" are still being hotly debated on PIE - an electronic bulletin board on the Internet. One question springs to mind though. What is the difference between a "*contadino*" and a "*lavoratore*"?

Thirdly, although on the face of it, my grandparents lived and died in the same town as they were born, they were actually part of the flood of Italian immigrants to Ellis Island in New York in the early part of the twentieth

century. I have now found records of both of my grandfathers who disembarked in New York and the changing coat-of-arms on the Registers. Ingave as their address Hester Street - a street known as part of Little Italy in New York. They list their ultimate destination as Marlinton, West Virginia. Looking at the ship's manifests my grandparents were not the only young men from Santa Cristina to go off to America as at least 20% of the ship's steerage passengers were also from Santa Cristina.

Another reason that I am still "at it" is that I have discovered PIE (Pursuing Italians Electronically), a bulletin board where people interested in Italian genealogy hold discussions on topics as diverse as: What is the significance of "la zona greca"? Which towns have an Albanian (Albaresh) heritage? Which towns are likely to reply to genealogical queries? What was the recipe for "Bagna Cauda"? Has anyone seen the journal BRUTTUM?

In America there is also an organisation called POINT. (Pursuing Our Italian Names Together). This organisation produces a regular newsletter with interesting genealogical articles. It also includes a listing of the names and towns the members of the organisation are researching. This can save literally days of work. In my case the name TEDESCO was being researched, but unfortunately not from the region of Reggio. Someone on PIE wanted to know if anybody knew of anyone who would like back copies of their magazine. Does anybody want to go halves? The fact that the magazine is American-based is not really a problem. After all the Italo-Americans' roots are exactly the same as ours - they end up in places like Santa Cristina, Viggiano etc.. My theory is that *our* parents came to Australia in search of "L'America" that *their* parents had told them about. They are the product of a generation that had either been to America themselves or had friends and relations that had done so.

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