

## **PRESERVING THE PAST**

### ***Fultonville Man Works to Expand Italian Citizenship Project***

***Friday, March 24, 2006***

**By Jason Subik**

**Leader-Herald Reporter and Assistant Editor**

**The Leader-Herald (Gloversville - Johnstown, NY)**

[www.leaderherald.com](http://www.leaderherald.com)



*Fultonville resident Peter Farina works with databases as part of an Italian citizenship project recently at Nicolino's Restaurant on Route 30 in Amsterdam. He is a full-time night manager at the bar.*

Cultural heritage entrepreneur Peter Farina has copied and indexed the citizenship records of all the Italian immigrants who came to Fulton and Montgomery counties.

Farina said he has reviewed more than 10,000 citizenship records at the county clerk's offices in Fulton and Montgomery counties and is expanding his indexing into Hamilton, Schoharie, Schenectady, and Saratoga counties.

In his computer index, he lists the first and last name of the immigrant, the town where that person was from, and which province [and] region in Italy that the town is located in.

Farina said it can be slow and difficult work compiling the information.

*"I flip through these dusty pages and then, all of a sudden, there is an Italian. I then write down the last name, first name, the town, and normally the town is spelled wrong, and then I write down the province and the region and that's not [in the citizenship records.] After working at the county buildings, I come back home and use the Italian white pages and a list of all the Italian towns [to complete the index,]"* he said.

Many of the original citizenship documents for immigrants include phonetically spelled attempts at spelling the towns that the immigrants came from. Most immigrants were illiterate when they traveled to the United States and were unable to explain to the notary who compiled their documents how to properly spell the names of the town where they were from, Farina explained. He said he takes some satisfaction in helping to preserve and correct the original records.

*"Nobody's ever done this before,"* Farina said.

The original citizenship records include information such as who was married to whom and the original streets people lived on when they first came to local cities and towns like Amsterdam, Gloversville, and Johnstown. The old records also include information about what jobs the immigrants did when they came here.

*"They all came over for the glove mills. I mean every single one of them... You see, they were leather cutters,"* he said. *"It really shows the industry that was here."*

Farina said it can sometimes be difficult to determine where a family settle because the records predate the incorporation of [the city of] Gloversville.

*"The old records are all Johnstown and then all of a sudden, everybody lives in Gloversville,"* he said.

Farina showed in his index that the first Italian ever to apply for citizenship in Fulton County was Arcangelo Torsici, who applied on September 28, 1878, in the town of Johnstown. Today, there are no Torsicis in the local phone book. Farina said that the goal of his project is to revitalize interest in cultural heritage among Italians and other ethnic groups.

*"When you talk to people, whether they are Czechoslovakian, Greek, Irish, German, Italian or whatever, fourth or fifth generation, they kind of lose touch with their heritage and where they came from,"* Farina said.

He said he is going to post his indexes on one of his many Web sites, [www.italyMONDO.com](http://www.italyMONDO.com). He plans to take a trip to Italy in April to take pictures of various villages and towns in Italy. After that, he said that he will create pages and links on his Web sites to allow people to view digital photos of the town and villages where their ancestors came from.

Amsterdam Mayor Joseph Emanuele is a third-generation member of the Columbian Social Club, one of the last Italian organizations in Amsterdam. He said he has known Peter Farina since Farina was a pupil in his seventh-grade [advanced] math class. His wife Tina's Family, on her maternal side, comes from the same village as Farina's family in the tiny village of Guardiaregia [in the province of Campobasso.]

*"All I can say for Peter is 'Bravo,'"* Emanuele said. *"I have already visited his site several times. I've always been interested in my family and my roots. It's a very proud heritage that we have as Italians."*

In Johnstown, Paul Cuttica is one of the co-coordinators of what was once called the *"Italian Festival"* at the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. Because of the consolidation of the Catholic churches, the festival has been renamed the *"Summer Festival."*

Cuttica said that although his own father emigrated from Italy to the New York City Area, and not Fulton county, he said that he thinks that many Italians would be interested in Farina's work.

*"I think it's wonderful,"* Cuttica said. *"I think that most people develop an interest in where they come from at some point in their lives."*

Farina said that he expects to have the citizenship indexes posted online by August. He said his top priority now is cataloging the citizenship records in Schoharie County as fast as he can due to recent concerns about the Gilboa Dam breaking that could place those records in jeopardy.

*You can contact Leader-Herald Reporter and Assistant Editor Jason Subik at [jasonsubik@hotmail.com](mailto:jasonsubik@hotmail.com)*