

Searching for My Maternal Grandfather

Erasimo Liguori, my maternal grandfather, was born in the little hill town of Corbara in Salerno Province in Italy on January 17, 1892. His father's name was Sabato Novi and his mother was Rosa Liguori.

Here is a record of his birth:

ATTI DI NASCITA	
<p>Numero <u>9</u></p> <p><u>Novi Erasimo Sal</u></p> <p><u>Salerno</u></p>	<p>L'anno milleottocento <u>novantadue</u>, addì <u>sedici</u> di <u>gennaio</u>, a ore <u>sub. meridiane dieci</u> e minuti <u>quarantadue</u>, nella Casa comunale.</p> <p>Avanti di me <u>Saverio Gambino segretario del Comune di Corbara con al</u> <u>to del Sindaco del 23 settembre 1891, debitamente approvato</u></p> <p>Ufficiale dello Stato Civile del Comune di <u>Corbara</u></p> <p>è comparso <u>Salvo Novi</u> di anni <u>sette</u>, * <u>contadino</u> domiciliato in <u>Corbara</u>, s' <u>il</u> quale mi ha dichiarato che alle ore <u>dieci</u> e mi- nuti <u>quarantadue</u>, del dì <u>sedici</u> del <u>quarto</u> mese, nella casa posta in <u>Via Piazza</u> al numero <u>...</u>, da <u>Rosina Liguori</u> d' <u>Alfonso</u> <u>la sua legittima moglie, scolaro e contribuente</u></p> <p>è nato un bambino di sesso <u>maschile</u> che <u>oggi</u> mi presenta, e a cui <u>da</u> i nom, di <u>Erasimo Salistano</u></p> <p>A quanto sopra e a questo atto sono stati presenti quali testimoni <u>Filippo Giordano</u> <u>figliano</u> di anni <u>quarantadue</u> <u>prospiciente</u> <u>Domenico Rosta</u> <u>figlio</u> di anni <u>quarantacinque</u>, entrambi residenti in questo Comune.</p> <p><u>Letto il presente atto agli interuenti, il</u> <u>meo</u> <u>soffo</u> <u>metto</u></p> <p><u>Novi Sabato</u></p> <p><u>Filippo Giordano teste</u></p> <p><u>Domenico Rosta testimone</u></p> <p><u>Gambino</u></p>

How my grandfather came to use his mother's surname rather than his father's is a long story which begins with Erasimo's maternal grandparents, Alfonso and Filomena Liguori.

The 1900 US census provides the following information about Alfonso and Filomena, who are there identified as Alphonus and Phelomelo Legari. He was born in Italy in April 1840. She was born in Italy in Dec. 1847. They were married in 1870. Their son Cardelo was born in May 1872 and Dominic in Dec. 1879. (On his WWI draft card, his birthdate is listed as April 27, 1879.) Since they emigrated to the United States in 1880, their daughter Rosa, who stayed in Italy, was probably born sometime between 1873 and 1878. Cardelo and Dominic emigrated with their parents. It is not known why Rosa, who was still a child in 1880, did not emigrate with her family.

The 1890 US Census would probably have provided additional information about the family but, unfortunately, almost all the records from this census were destroyed in a fire.

At the time of the 1900 US census Alfonso and Filomena were probably living with their two sons in a rental unit at 525 Madison St. in Hoboken NJ. Alfonso and Cardelo are identified as junk dealers and Dominico as a rag dealer. Alfonso and Cardelo are both recorded as naturalized. Philomela and Dominic are not. (The naturalization status of foreign-born women was not listed in this census.)

In the Jersey City Business Directory for 1901 an Alfonso Liguori and Son are listed for a business operating at 525 Madison St., 533 Adams St. and 531 Jefferson St. in Hoboken. The son's name is listed as Robert and the business on Jefferson St. is listed as "rags." These business records clearly link with the Alphonus Legari living at 525 Madison St. in the 1900 US census. At first glance, the reference to a son named Robert is puzzling, but this is probably Cardelo. "Cardelo" is a diminutive form of the name Cardo, which was used in Italian as a shortened form of Riccardo. So perhaps Cardelo went by Robert in the United States.

The family also appears in a census recorded by the State of New Jersey in 1905. By this time the family is living in a house at 513 Jefferson St which they own. Alfonso, Cardelo (Cattleo) and Domenico are all listed as naturalized and are working as rag salesmen.

In significant details this census differs slightly from the 1900 US census. Here Alphonso is listed as born in Aug. 1839 (not April 1840 as in the US census). Philomela is listed as born in Feb. 1848 (not Dec. 1847 as in the US census). Cattleo's birthdate is here Dec. 1873 (not May 1872) and Domenico's is Feb. 1880 (not Dec. 1879). According to the NJ census Alfonso has been living in the US for 15 years, Philomela for 12, Cattleo for 10 and Domenico for 15. In the 1900 US Census they had all arrived together in 1880. Here they arrive in 1890, 1893, 1895 and 1890 respectively.

While it is possible that the Legari family listed in the 1900 US census is not the same as the Liguori family recorded in the 1905 NJ census, this is unlikely. There is enough overlap between the two listings to suggest that this is the same family. It is very likely that the family of four did emigrate in 1880, as the 1900 US census suggests, and that the "arrival" dates in the 1905 NJ census are actually the years that the individuals were naturalized.

The NJ census also listed several additional family members: Elsie Liguori (probably Cattleo's Italian-born wife), their infant son Alphonso, Frances Liguori (Domenico's Italian-born wife), a 54-year-old Italian-born woman named Anna (probably Alfonso's unmarried or widowed? sister, recently arrived in the US), and a 13-year-old Italian-born boy named Cosma (Cosmo?), listed as attending school. According to this census, Cosma was born in Jan. 1892 and came to the US seven years before, i.e., in 1897.

Cosma is listed as Alphonso's son, but this is not correct. I think he may actually be my grandfather, Erasimo, whose birthday was Jan. 17, 1892. It would not be difficult for the census taker to hear Erasimo as Cosmo/a. And Liguori family tradition recounts that Erasimo was raised by his maternal grandparents.

So how did my grandfather wind up living with his maternal grandparents in Hoboken in 1905?

The family story is that he came to America with his father, Sabato Novi, when he was 3-years-old. I think he was actually a bit older when he came to the US because the "Italians to America Passenger Data File" in Ancestry.com lists two males named Novi, from the town of Corbara in Italy, traveling in

steerage on a ship named La Normandie out of Genoa, and arriving in the US on Dec. 22, 1897, with a designated destination of Hoboken NJ. No first names are included in these records, but one of these males was born in 1862 and the other in 1891. I am convinced these two are Sabato and his son Erasimo. My grandfather said that he was very sick on that crossing. Perhaps that is one reason he never returned to Italy.

The family story is that Sabato came to Hoboken to work in his wife's family rag business and earn enough money to bring his wife Rosa to the United States. But Sabato "did not like the United States" (or maybe he didn't get along with his in-laws?) and went back to Corbara when my grandfather was still young. Sabato never returned to the US.

My grandfather never saw his parents again after that. He attended school in Hoboken and became so fluent in English that he no longer spoke Italian. When he was enrolled in school, so the story goes, school officials listed his last name as Liguori, not Novi, because he was living with the Liguori family. When my grandfather registered for the draft in 1917, he listed his name as Enrimo Onovo Anthony Liguri. Eventually he dropped the Novi/Onovo entirely and was known for the rest of his life as Erasimo Anthony Liguori, Rossi for short.

Another family story is that when Rosa saw Sabato returning without Erasimo, she died of a broken heart. Sabato and Rosa certainly had two more children, Domenico and Maria, before Rosa died. Sabato remarried after his wife's death and had one more child, Rosa. I met both Maria and Rosa on my first trip to Italy in 1974. Maria married a man named Mauri and had two sons, Vincenzo and Salvatore. When Sabato died, my grandfather as the oldest surviving son was technically the heir of the family farming plot, but my grandfather said "What am I going to do with a farm in Italy?" and signed the

property over to his siblings in Italy. The family in Italy was forever grateful to him for this.

Sabato Novi with three of his children.
From l. to r.: Maria, Sabato, Rosa and Domenico



So that is why my grandfather Erasimo was living with his maternal grandparents in Hoboken in 1905. While 1905 is the latest possible time that Sabato returned to Italy (since he is not listed in the 1905 NJ census), I suspect that it was at least several years before the time of this census. Unfortunately, I can find no census records for either Sabato or Erasimo in 1900.

In the 1910 US census Alfonso and Philomela are still living at 513 Jefferson St. and Alfonso is listed as the proprietor of a junk business. At some point this business was located at 515 Jefferson St., which was always referred to in the family as "the shop."

This census, however, provides more puzzling information. Alfonso's year of immigration is listed as 1891 and his wife (Filimio!)'s as 1892. Neither of their sons is recorded as living with them. Their other family members are a daughter named Frances (probably actually their daughter-in-law, Domenico's wife), a 3-year-old granddaughter named Filimio, a 2-year old grandson named

Thomas and an unmarried 19-year-old son named Arsoma who immigrated in 1897 and is listed as a driver in the “junk” industry. Judging from his age and year of immigration, this Arsoma is probably Erasimo.

Alfonso died in Dec. 1911 and is buried in Holy Name Cemetery in Jersey City.

In the 1915 NJ census, the inhabitants of the Liguori household are listed as Domenico, his wife Frances, their three children, Filamena, Catello and Teresina, plus his widowed mother Filamena. Cardelo, his wife and son are no longer living at 513 Jefferson and I can find no further references to them. Nor is Cosmo/Arsoma/Erasimo listed.

Filomena, Domenico’s mother, died on July 6, 1916.



Erasimo Liguori with his wife Harriet and their infant daughter Rose, c.1918

In the 1920 US Census, Domenico and his family are still recorded at 513 Jefferson. Also listed as living there is Erasimo, now married to Harriet Smith, with two small children, Rose and Sabato (named after his parents). They are renting an apartment from his uncle Domenico. His occupation is “chaffuer” (sic) to a private family. I think this means that he was driving vehicles in the family business for which he worked his entire life. The census records that the paperwork for his naturalization had been submitted. His birth year is listed as 1893 and his year of immigration as 1894.

So much for census accuracy!



Some Descendants of Alfonso and Filomena Liguori
Top from l. to r.: Jim Aiello, Tessie Liguori Aiello, Joseph Marino, Frances
Liguori, Paul Liguori.
Bottom from l. to r.: Corrado Marino, John Marino, Harriet Liguori,
Minnie Liguori Marino and Erasimo Liguori.

While Erasimo's family eventually moved from 513 Jefferson, Domenico and his family continued to live there for the rest of their lives, except for Catello (Cal), who had moved away by the time of the 1940 US Census. I never met Frances. She died before the 1940 US Census in which Domenico is listed as widowed. I do remember Domenico, whom my family always referred to as Zizzi, i.e., *zio* "uncle" in Italian. He died in 1965. His older daughter Philomena (known to the family as Minnie) married Corrado Marino and had two sons, John and Joseph. Minnie died in 1960. Her younger sister Teresina (Tessie) married Jim Aiello. They never had any children. She died in 2006.