



ITALIAN AMERICAN COLLECTION

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The Andreatta Family and the Language of Music

The History Center has a number of objects in its collection brought to the United States as a result of an individual or family's migration. The items transported during immigration varied and were limited to what migrants could pack or carry on their journey. Some things were functional, others sentimental, and everything served as a reminder of the life left behind in the homeland. In the Italian American Collection, we have many examples including clothing, embroidery, linens, devotional items, tools, and trinkets. At the end of 2019, we acquired another family collection that crossed the ocean by steamship with a story unlike any we had previously documented.

Aspects of the Andreatta family's migration story are similar to other accounts during the interwar years. Paolo Andreatta and Maria Bailoni had four children: Josephine, Paolo "Paul," Mario, and Virgil. Paolo moved to America in 1922 and, three years later, declared his intent to become an American citizen while working as a laborer in Minnesota. This action paved the way for his wife and four children to immigrate in 1928, which is when the family of six reunited in Ambridge, Pa. But this is where

their story deviates from the standard Italian immigration narrative.

The Andreatta family hails from Levico in the region of Trentino, an Alpine area of Italy in the northeast of the country. Trentino has a unique history; it was ruled by Austria from the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) until the end of World War I, after which it was returned to Italy in 1919. Culturally, it is a crossroads of Italian, Germanic, and other European traditions and this history is reflected in the experience of the Andreatta family. An investigation of the archives in this family collection speak to this history of shifting borders and cultural exchange; though Paolo and Maria never left their Italian hometown prior to 1922, two of their children are documented as born in Austria, while the other two were born in Italy. Papers in the collection issued by government agencies and other organizations appear in Italian and German,

demonstrating that the family lived in an area where both languages were in use.

Even the objects in the collection tell a story of the family's multilingual and multicultural experience. The oldest son, Paul, carried two musical instruments to America, a clarinet and a flute, in a wooden case. The case has a carving on the lid featuring the emblem for the Levico City Band flanked by portraits of Dante Alighieri and Christopher Columbus, two figures associated with Italian history. Inside the case stuck to the lid is a small pin of an edelweiss flower, a symbol of Alpine heritage used by many nationalities around the mountain range including Swiss, Austrian, Slovenian, and German. Also inside the instrument case is a box of clarinet reeds manufactured in France with packaging and instructions in French. Like the archives in the collection, this object and its contents indicate an intersection of cultures and languages in Trentino.



This concertina is likely a German design as the square shape was common among German makers of the instrument. Anglo and Anglo-German concertinas are typically hexagonal.

HHC Collections, gift of Christine Andreatta Neal, 2019.133.1 a. Photo by Carrie Hadley.



Andreatta family with their instruments, c. 1925. From left: Mario, Josephine, Virgil, unknown man, Paolo, Paolo "Paul," and a cousin.

Levico City Band, c. 1926. Paolo "Paul" Andreatta played in the Levico City Band from 1924–1928. He is seated in the second row, fourth from the left, holding his clarinet.



Music was clearly important to the entire Andreatta family, as it was to many Italians in the 19th century. Music can be a point of contact between strangers and the practice and performance of music established bonds within groups, no doubt a reason why many nations form military bands. Prior to their emigration, the Andreattas played music together. The flute, though stored with Paul's clarinet, is believed to have belonged to Virgil as evident from a family portrait showing the youngest son holding the instrument. In this photograph, the patriarch of the family can be seen holding a concertina, a bellowed instrument related to the accordion with origins in Germany and England, also donated to the Italian American Collection. The conclusion I draw when looking at all the pieces of this collection is that, along with Italian, dialect, and German, the Andreattas were conversant in the language of music, a valuable asset in the era of mass European

migration. The knowledge that came with musical abilities may have been a factor in helping the family adapt to their changing environment. At the very least, it provided them another language to converse in. ✨

Maria Bailoni's passport, 1928. Maria's youngest child Virgil traveled to the United States on her passport.

HHC Detre L&A, gift of Christine Andreatta Neal, 2019.0277.

