

# Chapter One

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ITALIAN RECORDS

### PARISH RECORDS

The earliest records available to us date back to a 1563, when the Roman Catholic Church established rules governing the creation and maintenance of parish registers. The decree included instructions for recording the date, place, and type of ceremony performed. The names of the principals and witnesses or godparents were also recorded and each entry was closed with the signature of the officiating priest. Most of the parish records were written in Latin. Although other recording systems were eventually introduced in Italy, Catholic parishes continued to maintain records.

### CIVIL REGISTERS

In 1803 civil registers were created. Because Catholicism was the official state religion until 1984, civil registers contain both the civil registrations and the Catholic sacraments. These Italian registers (called *Registro Civile*) kept by all municipalities were written in Italian.

### INDEXES

Most Italian civil registers and the more recent parish registers contain indexes. These indexes, made yearly or every 10 years, normally consist of the date of the ordinance, the names of the principals, and the names of the parents. Extraction indexes are used mainly to verify spelling of names and correctness of dates. When an index is the only record extant of a certain locality it can be extracted.

### EXTRACTS

An extract (*estrato*) is a certificate for birth, marriage or death. Extracts were written by a town registrar or parish priest (at the registrar's request) to verify a birth, marriage, or death. These are not extracted, but they can provide additional information such as a groom's or bride's birthplace or marriage date.

## EXTRACTION PROCEDURES

As an extractor you will be using microfilm copies of the Italian *Registro Civile* and parish registers. You will work most frequently with christening and marriage records. Occasionally you may also work with death records, indexes, and extracts.

Fortunately, the Italian *Registro Civile* is recorded on a pre-printed form. Although some differences in layout and vocabulary exist from one locality to another, each format contains key words or phrases which easily identify a particular part of the record. Those words that do change are mostly extractable information, such as names and dates. By being able to identify each part of the format, you will be able to locate the information to be extracted.

Occasionally, handwritten entries have been inserted into the register at random. These are more challenging because they contain many handwriting styles, unfamiliar words, and abbreviations. Inkblots, bleed through, torn or worm-eaten pages, misspellings, words run together, missing grammatical marks, and strange sentence construction all combine to make these more difficult to read, but you will eventually be blessed with the ability to extract these records.

## FOCUS OF EXTRACTION

Extracting is not copying everything from a record, but recording the information that is really needed for ordinances to be performed. Most records contain a great deal more information than we need. Your job is to sift through that information to determine what is essential and what can be ignored.

**Essential information.** The kinds of information you will extract:

Individual's name

Sex

Age (when this will help you calculate a birth date)

Date of event (such as birth, christening, marriage)

Place of event

Parents' names

Grandparents' names

**Nonessential information.** The kinds of information you will not extract:

Page and order numbers  
Names of officiators  
Names of witnesses  
Occupations of persons involved  
Time of day when event took place  
Identity of other participants not part of the family  
Signatures of witnesses and officials

**ACTIVITY 1. FINDING ESSENTIAL INFORMATION IN A RECORD.**

The English version of an Italian *Registro Civile* below suggests the information, phrasing, and punctuation you will typically encounter in old Italian records.

Underline the ESSENTIAL information in the record below. Ignore everything else.

Order Number 23.

The year one thousand eight hundred twenty seven, the 29th day of May at 10 o'clock, before us Giuseppe Gambale, assessor delegated functionary of the mayor and official of the civil state of Perano, province of Abruzzo Cilra, has appeared Sebastian Giordanoi, son of deceased Sebastian and Anna, of years twenty seven, of profession, workman, residing in Perano, whom to us has presented a female child according to what we have visually recognized and declared that the same was born of Teresa Odorisio of years twenty and of the declarant of years twenty seven of profession workman, domiciled in Perano on the day twenty eight of the above noted month at 11 o'clock in the home of their own on Bianca Street. The same, moreover, has declared to give the infant the name of Maria. The presentation and declaration aforesaid was made in the presence of Francesco dall'Agata, of profession chronicler, native residing in Perano and of Eugenio Cosenza, of profession goldsmith, residing in Perano, witnesses to the present act. The present act was read to the declarant and to the witnesses, and afterwards it was signed by us and the witnesses. The declarant has assented to not knowing how to write.

(Signatures) Giuseppe Gambale  
Francesco dall'Agata  
Matteo Cosenza

*[When you have completed this activity, compare the words you underlined with the key on page 221.]*