Proving Naturalization Dates or Lack Thereof

The following guide is specific to the United States.

If your Italian-born ascendant is still living and not a U.S. citizen, it suffices to present the ascendant’s Italian passport and current U.S. permanent resident card (aka “green card”) or visa. Otherwise, please see the following list.

1. The Ascendant’s Original Certificate of Naturalization
   If an applicant has his or her Italian-born ascendant’s original certificate, the date of naturalization on that certificate requires no further documentation. The applicant must present the certificate at his/her citizenship appointment. Please note that in most cases, the certificate of naturalization bears very few identifying details; in most cases, only the applicant’s name and date of birth are listed, and because many immigrants Americanized their names when they naturalized, these data points are often insufficient to link the ascendant to successive generations. Therefore, if you are going back many generations and/or there are discrepancies, we strongly suggest applicants for citizenship also bring a certified copy of their ascendant’s Petition for Naturalization from the National Archives.
   
   Note: This is the only document that the Consulate will not retain for their records after they accept a citizenship application.
   
   Note: If your Italian-born ascendant is living but does not have the original certificate, a new certified copy can be requested from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly the INS) by your ascendant (and ONLY your ascendant)

2. USCIS Naturalization Records
   U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis](http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis) is the only federal agency empowered to definitively state whether or when an immigrant naturalized, and the only federal agency that can issue a new copy of a naturalization certificate.
   
   A. You may request your ascendant’s naturalization records through USCIS’s Genealogy Program or a Freedom of Information Act request. If your ascendant is still living, privacy restrictions may apply. If USCIS sends you a copy of your ascendant’s certificate or alien registration card, it must be corroborated by a County or NARA record (see 3 and 4 below), because USCIS will not release a certified copy except to the person who received citizenship.
      
      1 If the ascendant’s name and date of birth are not the same on the certificate as they are on the ascendant’s birth certificate, we absolutely recommend bringing a certified copy of the ascendant’s Petition for Naturalization. Otherwise, it will be very difficult to match the certificate to the rest of the ascendant’s documents.

   B. If USCIS sends you a letter stating no record exists, please follow the subsequent directions we received from USCIS and steps 3 and 4 below:
      
      To request certification of nonexistence of a specific record, write directly to the USCIS Records Services Branch at the address below. It is important that all request letters contain information to specifically identify the immigrant. For example, requests must contain the immigrant’s name (including all variants and aliases), date of birth, place of birth, and as much information as possible about when and where the immigrant arrived in or lived in the United States. Names of immediate immigrant relatives can also be helpful. In all cases the immigrant must be deceased. If the immigrant’s birth date is less than 100 years before the request date, requests for certification of non-existence must include a copy of the immigrant’s death certificate. Requests for this service should be addressed to: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ATTN: Records Operations Branch 1200 First Street NE Washington, D.C. 20529-2204

   Note: If USCIS sends you a photocopy of the record, you will asked for the envelope it came in as an informal verification. Please do not throw away the envelope.

   B. If USCIS sends you a letter stating no record exists, please follow the subsequent directions we received from USCIS and steps 3 and 4 below:
3. Local County Records

Until 1991, naturalized U.S. citizens were sworn in at a local or federal courthouse. As a result, many U.S. Counties’ courthouse records include naturalization records. Except when an applicant has his or her ascendant’s certificate of naturalization, a County record is always required. Please note that a County record must have the signature and seal of a County official.

**Note:** In the case of an ascendant who did not naturalize or whose place of naturalization is unknown, request naturalization records from:

a) the County in which the ascendant lived the longest
b) the County in which the ascendant’s child was born

*Example:*

Mario’s grandfather Luigi emigrated to the United States in 1900 and settled in Marin County, California. In 1920, Luigi moved to King County, Washington, where he lived until 1925, when his son Pietro was born. Mario should inquire with both Marin County (where Luigi lived longest) and King County (where Luigi’s child was born) as to whether any naturalization records exist for his grandfather Luigi.

If the County does not keep naturalization records or cannot find a particular person’s naturalization record, you must supply a letter saying so from the County, and then follow step 4 below.

4. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

If either USCIS or the County return letters of no record, an applicant must request from the National Archives (www.archives.gov) a full search under the ascendant’s names and nicknames, and possible dates of birth. NARA cannot supply a certificate of naturalization, but can supply certified copies of an ascendant’s Declaration of Intention, Petition for Naturalization. Either of these, if dated after the birth of the Italian-born ascendant’s child, can demonstrate that an Italian-born ascendant was an Italian citizen at the moment of his or her child’s birth. Documents from NARA must be certified copies, bearing the red ribbon and gold seal of NARA.

5. The U.S. Census (from the National Archives or the U.S. Census Bureau)

If NARA also returns a letter of no record, then the applicant must request the first U.S. Census dated after the birth of the Italian-born ascendant’s child. The U.S. Census has the following entries for citizenship: AL (alien), PA (papers filed – the beginning of the naturalization process), NA (naturalized). If the ascendant is listed as NA, the Italian government defaults to the presumption that the ascendant naturalized prior to the birth of the child. This is the official position of the government and not one that any individual Consular official can overturn without substantial evidence disproving the Census.

**Note:** The Census will never use “yes” or “no”. If you see something that looks like “no”, it is an NA that means “naturalized”.

**Note:** Either the Archives or the Bureau can issue a copy of the Census; however, the Census Bureau will only issue transcribed excerpts. Therefore, for the sake of completeness, the Consulate generally prefers that applicants bring certified copies from the National Archives rather than the U.S. Census Bureau, though we will accept either.

*Example:*

Mario’s grandfather Luigi emigrated to the States in 1900; Mario’s father Pietro was born in 1925 in King County, Washington. USCIS, King County, and NARA have all sent Mario letters of no record regarding his grandfather’s naturalization as a U.S. citizen. Mario must request the 1930 Census from the National Archives, in which, presumably, his grandfather Luigi is listed as a resident alien (“AL”).
Acceptable Combinations of Naturalization Documents
(a summary of preceding pages)

In cases where the Italian-born ascendant naturalized:
Original certificate of naturalization OR
USCIS record AND County record OR
USCIS record AND National Archives Record

In cases where the Italian-born ascendant did not naturalize:
USCIS letter of non-existence of record AND
County letter of non-existence of record AND
NARA letter of non-existence of record AND
U.S. Census dated immediately after the birth of the ascendant’s child, showing the ascendant as ‘AL’ or ‘PA’ under citizenship.

For Italian-born ascendants who did not naturalize and were born prior to 27 September 1906 (when USCIS’ records begin), it is often very useful to acquire a document, such as an alien registration file, WW1 draft card, that shows the Italian-born ascendant could not possibly have naturalized prior to 27 September 1906. If the ascendant did not emigrate to the U.S. until after 27 September 1906, a shipping manifest may serve the same purpose. All of these documents must be certified copies from NARA where possible.