## Visiting the State Archives of Benevento

I knew that I wanted to visit the <u>Archivio di Stato di Benevento</u> and research for at least one day on my recent trip to Italy, specifically to look at notary and other records <u>not</u> already available online through FamilySearch.org or the Antenati site. (Between these two websites, all of the birth, marriage, and death records for my ancestral towns of Moiano, Cusano Mutri, and Faicchio are already digitized and available locally.)

To prepare, I watched Ann's <u>video</u> and reviewed the relevant chapter in *Italian Genealogical Records: How to Use Italian Civil, Ecclesiastical & Other Records in Family History Research* by Trafford Cole. I studied the opening hours, rules, and available records (fondi documentari) on the Archive's website, printed copies of my passport and COVID card, obtained a return-mail envelope, packed white cotton gloves, and downloaded the inventory pages for the particular records that I wanted to review.

Several months beforehand (maybe too early!), I wrote an email in Italian to Dr. Fiorentino Alaia, the Archives Director, explaining my planned visit date and listing all of the records that I hoped to personally consult, agreeing to follow the rules, and asking for permission to obtain copies of records related to my family. Dr. Alaia responded the next day, saying they would be available and ready to assist me, so I brought a copy of this email with his response.





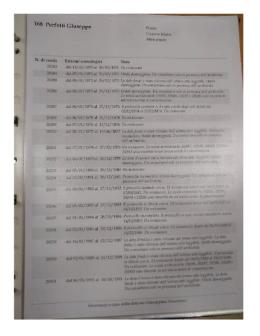


This Archivio is located in Piazza Papiniano, right next to a clothing store and Egyptian obelisk, in the heart of small Benevento. I arrived soon after their 9am opening to a deserted courtyard, so I walked up some open steps. Other Italian college students already studying in the Sala di Studio connected me with the staff person. I explained in Italian that I wanted to research notarial records, and the lady seemed shocked that a foreigner was requesting such old records. After showing her the Director's emailed response, she acquiesced, asked if I could even read them (I responded that I didn't know but wanted to try), gave me a form to fill out, and then brought in the Director. He signed the paper giving me permission, answered a few of my questions, refused the copy of my passport, and responded again to the lady's doubt about my ability to read the records, "È brava, pùo fare."

The woman led me into the Study Room and started off by grabbing the first 4 records from some storage room on another floor. There were no rules regarding drinks, backpacks, laptops, pens or pencils, and she gave me permission instantly to photograph with my phone whatever I wanted, no limits. After forgetting my gloves in the hotel, I asked for some, and she found latex gloves for me to use, and they weren't even mandatory!

I looked only at notary records, as the librarian and the other more standard books weren't available for me to consult. Between the two assistants, they probably pulled about 15 bundles of records for me total (this Archivio has no limit on the records that one can consult, just that the last pull is at the end of the day).





The Archive had an updated inventory of records, some matching the lists on their website, others with more detailed *corda* numbers. I had selected search years based on my ancestors' marriage and death dates, thinking that these would be the most likely times for contracts and wills. Focusing on records based on the years each notary worked, I settled mostly on 1815-1890 in three towns.

Notaries usually created separate books for each year, lightly penciled on the cover with their name and year; some had indexes, but most did not. Luckily, the start of each new transaction was clear with the notary's numeric notation and the involved parties' signatures at the beginning of each.







It was breathtaking to peruse these parchments, page after page. If there were covers, they were made of some animal skin, and all were bound with leather straps. Some had been through fires and floods and neglect, as evidenced by hay and debris burned onto their covers and mold spread on some pages. Some had clearly not been opened since the notary opened and bound them 200 years earlier! One had such tight binding that I didn't want to cut, so I slowly worked off the twine. Pages flaked off and dirt fell out as I turned many of the pages.







Once I found my ancestors' records with one notary, I didn't bother looking at the other notaries' records for the same years. The staff assistant confirmed that families tended to stay with the same notary through time.

I became very emotional touching the signatures of my ancestors, especially the females, since they were less often involved in business transactions and literate. Touching their signatures and the pages—even through gloves—that they once held was so emotional for me, made me feel closer to them.

I expected that the room closed mid-afternoon for lunch, but it did not, so I stayed until about 4pm, never stopping. All in all, it was a very successful visit! The staff and other students were very kind and accommodating and I found much more than I expected.



6 di 6