

Anna and Abramo Filippini's
Journey
to America

September 2009
Updated October 2018

An Embellished Biography
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Grandson of Abramo and Anna Filippini

Introduction

Over one hundred years have passed since Abramo and Anna Filippini boarded a ship in Europe and seven days later found themselves on the brink of a new opportunity in America. We often wonder what it was like to live in Italy in the late 1800's. We wonder how it felt to say goodbye to friends and family members and to their homeland and begin the overland trip to France. We stand in awe at the bravery shown while enduring a grueling trip across the ocean. We are intrigued by the fear that they must have felt as they stood in lines to process thru Ellis Island knowing that there was a 1 in 50 chance they would be sent home. And finally, we are sympathetic of the fear that must have overcome them as they stood on the brink of a new life in a strange new world called America.

The problem is that we didn't actually hear their immigration stories from Abramo and Anna. They did not talk about their experiences with their children and their children never asked. So today, over one hundred years later, all we can do is to make an educated guess as to how they managed to complete their immigration to America.

We will do just that. We will blend what we know about Abramo and Anna with general knowledge of the life and times of the people of Northern Italy in the era. The result will hopefully be the story they never told.

Abramo and Anna

Abramo Filippini was born 3 March 1874, a cool spring day, in the mountains north of Pistoia. The actual village of birth is Stabiazioni located on the road from Pistoia to Bologna, Italy. He spent his early years in this area with his five brothers and sisters.

Life was hard in the mountains. The area was thick with Chestnut trees and much of his time was spent with his brothers and sisters picking chestnuts and helping to grind them into a flour that was then used to make most of their food for the winter.

Abramo's father, Giulio, eked out a living for his family by picking and processing chestnuts and also by traveling to southern Tuscany for much of the winter months to cut trees and make wood carbon (charcoal). Abramo probably did the same when he became old enough to work.

Annina Cecchini was born in the nearby village of Case Pielì on 26 July 1886. Abramo was 12 years old when she was born. They probably did not know each other in the early years, and certainly did not know for quite a while that they would end up married to each other and living in the US.

The Cecchini family for the most part endured the same living and working conditions in the mountains that the Filippini family endured.

Anna and Abramo grew up somewhat apart until around the 1900 time frame. During this time frame they began to notice each other in the villages, and so a romance started. On 12 October

1902, they married. Annina was a mere 16 year-old girl when she married while Abramo was 28! Women married young in this time in both Europe and America.

The Filippini Family Begins the Immigration to America

In the late 1800's, Italians were migrating to America by the thousands. The reasons were many but topping the list were poverty, persecution, taxes, and war. The standard of living had been declining for years and country families were finding that they could not sustain themselves on what they could grow. As a result, disease and starvation were rampant. In addition, a disease known as pellagra was infecting residents of the northern part of the country. The conditions were right for emigration.

In the same year of Abramo and Anna's marriage, one of Abramo's cousins, Oreste Filippini, decided to venture out and so he bought a ticket and traveled to the US, ending up in Ladd, Illinois. He had followed the urging of his other friends and acquaintances who had previously moved to the US and who had migrated to and settled in upper central Illinois. Coal mining was a big industry in this area, and so they thought this might be their ticket to a better life.

It was not uncommon for the Italian families to send one family member to America to "test the waters". Some came only to work and send their wages back to their family in Italy. They came never intending to stay. In other cases, the first family member to arrive typically worked for a while in order to earn enough money to then would send for the remaining family members.



SS La Touraine

We do not know Abramo's original intent. Was it merely to work for a while and then return permanently to Italy? Or was it to set the stage for his and Anna's future life as Americans. Whatever the motivation, Abramo and Anna decided that Abramo should break away from Stabiazioni and explore life in America. By 1906, he had had enough of life in Stabiazioni. So, with Anna's approval, even though she was expecting their first child, Abramo packed a bag of his basic belongings, and with a few Lira in his pocket, set out for the port of Le Havre, France. He traveled by foot, horse drawn carts, and trains.

In LaHavre, France, he was able to buy a steerage ticket to America for about \$30, more or less. Abramo went thru a somewhat humiliating process in order to be granted permission to sail to America. Sometimes this process could take a week of isolation. He had to answer various questions presented to him by the port authorities and was screened verbally for physical and mental illness.

But, he passed all the exams and on 6 October 1906, just short of his fourth wedding anniversary, and at the age of 32, he sailed on the SS La Touraine to the USA, leaving 20 year old Anna behind to bear the couple's first child.

Abramo's ship docked at Ellis Island New York on 13 October 1906 after a 7 day trip across the Atlantic. Abramo, having a steerage ticket, didn't see much of the ocean, and ended up spending his 4th wedding anniversary in the lower levels of the ship in less than ideal conditions.

Conditions on Abramo's ship, the LaTouraine

It is clear from manifest records that Abramo traveled steerage on his trip to America. The price of first and second class tickets was probably more than he could afford.

Steerage areas onboard ships in that time frame were deplorable at best. Beds were packed in as tightly as possible. Eating areas were minimal and food was less than to be desired. Bathroom facilities were inadequate and frequently not functional, and sickness prevailed. In the earliest of trips, there was a 10% morbidity rate, but that improved over the years.



SS La Touraine passes the Statue of Liberty

Arrival in New York

At Ellis Island, he was processed off the ship and suddenly found himself all alone in New York City without the ability to communicate with anyone. But, he had been advised by his friends to proceed to the train station and to purchase a ticket to Chicago, Illinois, which he did with little difficulty.

The train trip was hard. It required 3 days to get to Chicago, and Abramo had only a coach ticket so he was forced to sleep sitting up in his seat during the trip.



Ellis Island

While the ordeal was a little scary, Abramo knew in his mind that a better life lay ahead and it was just a matter of time until he could get settled, get a job lined up, and then return to Italy for Anna. That was the plan.

From Chicago, Abramo connected to another train going south, and was met in Ladd by his cousin Oreste. Ladd was a major train stop in Illinois probably because of the coal mining industry nearby. Abramo moved into a boarding house with his cousin.

Abramo had finally arrived in the USA. In Ladd, he was surrounded by fellow Italians so he had people to talk to. He began to learn about America and about how to get a job. The biggest

employer in the area was the coal mines of Ladd and the surrounding areas. Soon Abramo went to the mining camp and applied for a job. He got one. Abramo worked about a year as a miner and saved his money. Finally, he was ready for Anna to join him in America.

Anna Comes to America

Back in Italy, Anna was just a little reluctant to leave her family, but she was ready to leave Italy and join Abramo. Unfortunately Abramo could not afford to leave his job for a month to return to Italy and then return to Ladd. In addition, the cost of such a journey was high. So, Anna gathered together her worldly possessions, which was simply two suit cases full of cloths, and began a journey to LaHavre, France. She traveled with one of Abramo's cousins, also named Abramo. After a few days of processing in LaHavre, they were able to buy two steerage tickets to America.

Curiously, the ship was also the La Touraine, the same ship Abramo had traveled on two years earlier.

Once again, Anna had to endure the nearly week long process of gaining permission to board the ship. She underwent physical examinations and mental evaluations. She received vaccinations and was disinfected at the port before boarding. She was hit with a barrage of 29 specific questions about every aspect of her life. In addition, she was required to possess a passport. Finally, with tickets in hand and having passed the various exams, Anna and her travel companion boarded the ship on 28 November 1908 and sailed for America.



On deck during the ocean crossing

The North Atlantic was cold this time of year, and the ship found itself in rough seas for most of the trip. Anna spent a little time on deck shivering under blankets, but otherwise she spent much of the trip in the steerage area below deck. Here she passed the time away by talking with fellow Italians and by studying the English language in addition to rehearsing the answers to the questions she knew she would be asked upon arrival. And, of course, she thought about the family she had left behind and she also thought often of the possibility that she could be rejected at the port of entry and be sent back to Italy.

Her ship docked in New York on 6 December 1908.

Processing through Immigration

Ships carrying immigrants to America were required to stop at the entrance to the Lower Bay of New York. Here, medical inspectors boarded the ships and performed a medical exam on each first and second class passenger. Once the medical inspections were complete, the ship would continue on into the Upper Bay and would soon come in view of the Statue of Liberty. Imagine Anna's joy when the statue finally came into view.

Passengers traveling first or second class were released into New York upon docking and were able to bypass Ellis Island.

Passengers such as Anna on this trip and Abramo before, who were traveling in steerage, still had to go through the entry process at Ellis Island. In this case, they were herded off of the La Touraine and were transferred to barges which then took them to Ellis Island. Here they entered the facility in groups of about 30.



Entering the processing center just after disembarkation

Once inside the terminal, they were met by an interpreter and were directed down a concourse to the Registry Room. Along the way, doctors were eyeing each immigrant for outward signs of physical or mental illness. Once in the registry room, they were examined by an eye doctor for signs of eye illness. Having passed this test, the immigrants were again interrogated by a final inspector. His job was to verify the data provided by the immigrant and to give the final nod of approval for the immigrant to enter the US. If they passed, they were given a “landing card”. Most immigrants passed.



Ellis Island processing center

Only an average of 2% of immigrants were not allowed to enter the US and were thus sent back home.

Anna passed all of the various exams along the way, and found herself finally at the Ellis Island Money Exchange where she converted what Lira she had into American Dollars before finally stepping into her new life in America.



Eye and physical/mental exams for all immigrants

Outside, there were a variety of merchants selling their products. Anna had her first taste of ice cream, bananas, and corn on the cob.

Anna still had to get to Ladd where Abramo was waiting. They found people selling railroad tickets, so she and Abramo purchased two to Chicago. From the Ellis Island exit, Abramo and Anna made their way by train to New Jersey, either Hoboken or Jersey City, the departure point for trains going west. They boarded the train to Chicago.



At last! Where's that ice cream?

The trip took a week or two and led them from New York to Chicago, and then the short trip down to Ladd. Abramo and Anna were finally back together after about two years. Abramo, the escort, stayed in Ladd for a short time but then he returned to New York and went home to Italy.

<< End of the Short Story >>

Continue reading below about the ship La Touraine.

S.S. La Touraine

1891 - 1923

From: <http://www.greatoceanliners.net/latouraine.html>

The French Line had started business with the name Compagnie Générale Transatlantique in 1861. Their first vessel was a Spanish ship, which they bought on the stocks. They named her *Lousiane*. In time, CGT grew to become one of the most distinguished shipping companies operating on the North Atlantic. Their liners became famous for their elegance and superb service – not their size.

By 1890 the largest ships in CGT-service were the four liners *La Champagne*, *La Bourgogne*, *La Gascoigne* and *La Bretagne*, all with a gross tonnage of roughly 7,500 each. Compared with the tonnage of the largest ship ever built at the time – the *Great Eastern* at 19,000 gross tons – these four French liners were quite small. If the French Line wanted to compete with these figures they firstly had to solve one great problem; the waters of Le Havre harbour were just about enough to receive the *La Champagne*-class liners.

When CGT decided on a new ship, they wisely did not aim for size. Instead they intended to continue the tradition of elegance and service. This ship would however be somewhat larger than the *La Champagne*-class with a gross tonnage of around 9,000. With this ship, the French Line had reached the absolute limit of what the harbour of Le Havre could handle.

On March 23, 1890, the new ship was launched and christened *La Touraine*. At the time she was the sixth largest ship in the world ever built after *Great Eastern*, *City of Paris*, *City of New York*, *Majestic* and *Teutonic*. The following year on June 20, *La Touraine* completed her maiden voyage between Le Havre and New York as the flag ship of the French Line. She managed the distance in a mere six days, seventeen hours and thirty minutes.

La Touraine quickly became one of the most popular liners on the North Atlantic. She became known for her handsome lines and the two widely spaced squat funnels. Passengers seemed to favour *La Touraine* before many other ships not only because of her appealing appearance – she always managed excellently well in rough weather, and was soon known as the ‘Steady Ship’. This steady ship was also a fast ship – during a July-crossing in 1892 she clocked up a record speed of 21.2 knots over the measured mile.

In order to even further stabilize the ship, CGT had *La Touraine* overhauled twice in 1900 and 1902. Bilge keels were fitted to the bottom of the hull, making *La Touraine* as smooth as an iron over a linen cloth. The overhauls also included removal of one of the original three masts, and a passenger increase in third class from 600 to 1,000. The overhaul resulted in a decrease of the ship’s gross tonnage – it had gone down to 8,429.

In January 1903, *La Touraine* was damaged by a very serious fire at Le Havre. The grand staircase, the first class dining saloon and the first class deluxe cabins had been entirely destroyed, and had to be rebuilt. When *La Touraine* returned to service some time later, she entered the North Atlantic more dashing than ever – the new first class areas became immensely popular.

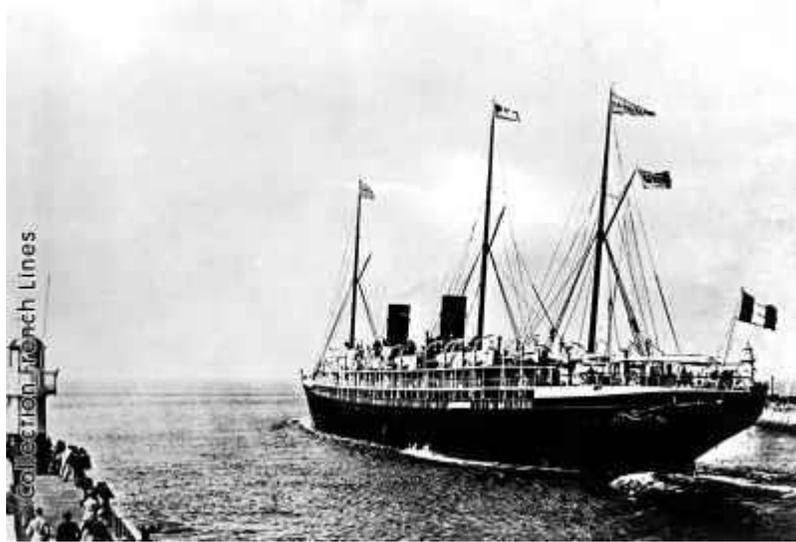
La Touraine was one of the first French ships to boast an outstanding kitchen. Just as on the much later *Île de France* and *Normandie*, she attracted gourmets from all over the world. She was also one of the first French liners to be called ‘a piece of France itself’. The company slogan at the time

was ‘You are in France as soon as you cross the gangplank!’ *La Touraine* was also the first ship with the modern Cabin Class – merging first and second class in 1910. In the old days, the term ‘Cabin Class’ was associated with old, surpassed vessels, but now it started a new era. Together with the new CGT-liners *Chicago* and *Rochambeau*, *La Touraine* sailed into many more successful years of French service.

In 1912, *La Touraine* made some special Canadian voyages between Le Havre and Halifax and a year later she was placed on the Québec and Montreal summer service. During World War I, *La Touraine* served as an armed merchant cruiser and later as a troop ship. When the war was over she continued for some years in French Line service, but as the ship began showing signs of age in 1922 she was sold and became a grey-hulled hotel ship in Göteborg, Sweden during the Industrial and Agricultural Fair. For this occasion *La Touraine* was renamed *Maritime*. In August she was again offered for sale, and that October she was sold to the breakers at Dunkerque.

The La Touraine - Specifications:

Length:	536 feet (163.7 m)
Beam:	56 feet (17.1 m)
Tonnage:	9,047 gross tons
Engines:	Steam triple expansion engines powering two propellers.
Service speed:	19 knots
Passengers:	1,090 people



The La Touraine
http://www.frenchlines.com/ship_en_276.php



On the deck of the La Touraine, ca 1896