

NATIONAL PERIOD

One Family, Two Worlds: An Italian Family's Correspondence across the Atlantic, 1901–1922. Edited by SAMUEL L. BAILY and FRANCO RAMELLA. Translated by JOHN LENAGHAN. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988. Illustrations. Maps. Charts. Tables. Photographs. Appendix. Index. Pp. xv, 251. Cloth. \$35.00.

Few European immigrant groups to the New World have received such comprehensive scholarly attention over the past 20 years as Italians, yet the effort has suffered from a curious deficiency. Immigrant letters have played almost no part in this research initiative. As a result, historians have often struggled to provide the interior, subjective perspectives on the immigrant experience that letters can so effectively supply. This superbly edited collection of letters from an Italian immigrant family, therefore, is especially welcome.

The letters are from the Sola family of Biella and Valdengo, northern Italian (Piedmont) communities with long traditions of migration. Covering the years 1901 to 1922, the writings are primarily between two sons, Oreste and Abele, in Argentina and their aged parents in Italy. The editors have generally been able to supply both sides of the correspondence, thereby revealing the two-sided nature of the migration experience.

The letters demonstrate the remarkable power of village, kin, and family networks in shaping and facilitating migration. No detached, uprooted individuals emerge from these missives. Though stretched across thousands of miles, the Solas were bound together by strands of information, support, and affection. The Sola family reacted to a multitude of events—migration, war, economic depression, floods—within the context of a wider immigrant universe. Various themes emerge clearly—the centrality of work, a restless probing for opportunity, the sense of obligation to parents and kin, the impact of personal motivations and ambitions. Whatever comprehensiveness is lost by focusing on a single family is adequately compensated by the depth of understanding and length of coverage gained from this evocative portrayal of a 21-year migration experience.

The letters themselves are always interesting and often moving. An added bonus is that this excellent volume supplements the extraordinary work by Valerio Castronovo et al., *L'emigrazione biellese fra ottocento e novecento*, which has followed Biellese emigrants around the world. The editors claim that the Sola letters constitute “a major contribution to the literature on Italian migration to the New World and to migration literature generally.” After reading them, one can only agree.

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