



# Two Worlds, One Story

A Living Guide to the Chinatown & Little Italy Historic District





# A Shared History, A Single District



In 2010, a chapter of New York's history was formalized. Two distinct neighborhoods, Chinatown and Little Italy, were declared a single National Register Historic District, acknowledging their long and common history.

Both communities were forged in the same dynamic period of American history. Immigrants fled civil unrest and dwindling economic opportunities, settling along Mott and Mulberry Streets in the 1870s. They shared parallel experiences: choosing to live among fellow countrymen for cultural and linguistic support, and bringing distinctive food traditions that would profoundly influence American cuisine.



# Mapping a Century of Transformation



# Mulberry Street: The Heart of the Matter

Then



Now



Mulberry Street is the principal thoroughfare and historic heart of Little Italy. Once an insular village re-created on these shores, it remains the center of the neighborhood's cultural expression.

Along this street, history is tangible at sites like the **San Gennaro Shrine** (109 Mulberry), home to the statue carried in the annual procession, and the historic **Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral**, New York's second Catholic Church (1809).

# The ‘Bloody Angle’ Reimagined

Then



*“Known as the ‘Bloody Angle’ for numerous gangland battles in the late 19th & early 20th century.”*

The crooked path of Doyers Street formed the core of historic Chinatown, originally confined to Doyers, Pell, and lower Mott streets.

Now



Beyond its notorious past, it was a hub of culture and ideas. The **Chinese Opera House** (5 Doyers) opened here in the 1890s, and in 1911, it hosted Chinese revolutionary leader Dr. Sun-Yat Sen.

# From Notorious Slum to Community Sanctuary

Then



Before it was a park, this area was Mulberry Bend, the “foul core of New York’s slums” as described by reformer Jacob Riis. His powerful photographs exposed the harsh conditions of the Five Points.

Now



Five Points. In the 1890s, the city replaced the tenements with a public park, designed by Calvert Vaux. Dedicated as Columbus Park in 1911 to honor the Italian community, it now serves as a vibrant center of Chinatown community life.

# Pillars of the Community



**Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 60 Mott Street**

The "town hall" of Chinatown since the 1880s. The current building was designed in 1960 by Poy G. Lee, Chinatown's premiere mid-century architect.



**On Leong Tong / Chinese Merchants Building, 83-85 Mott Street**

A character-defining modern pagoda erected in 1948, featuring distinctive Chinese architectural motifs.



**L'Ordine Figli d'Italia, 203 Grand Street**

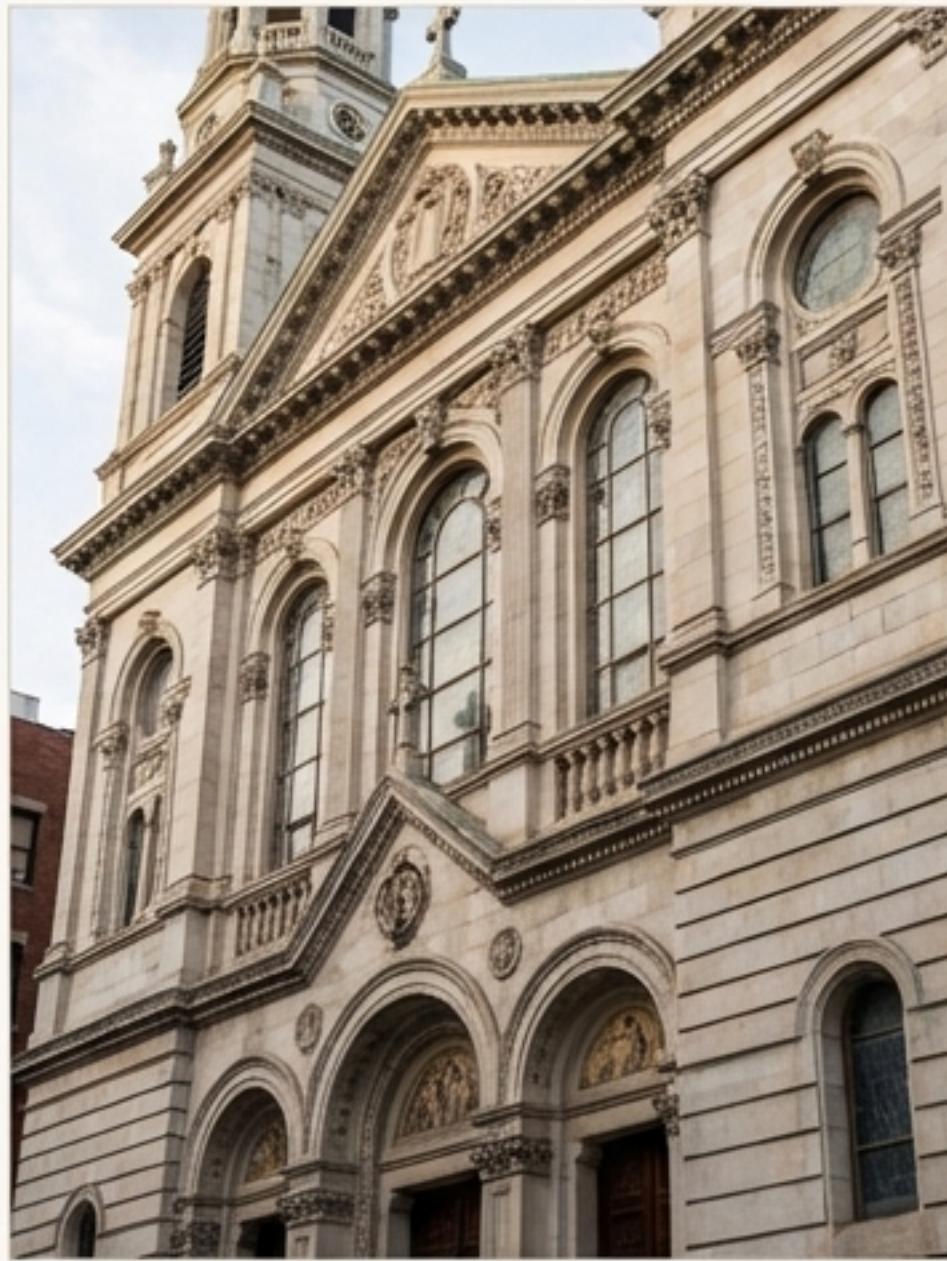
Established in 1905, the "Order of the Sons of Italy" was a crucial support system assisting immigrants in their transition to American citizens.



**Greek Revival rowhouse, 189 Grand Street**

Housed in a Greek Revival rowhouse from ca. 1835, this bank was vital for the Italian immigrant population. It is now the home of the Italian-American Museum.

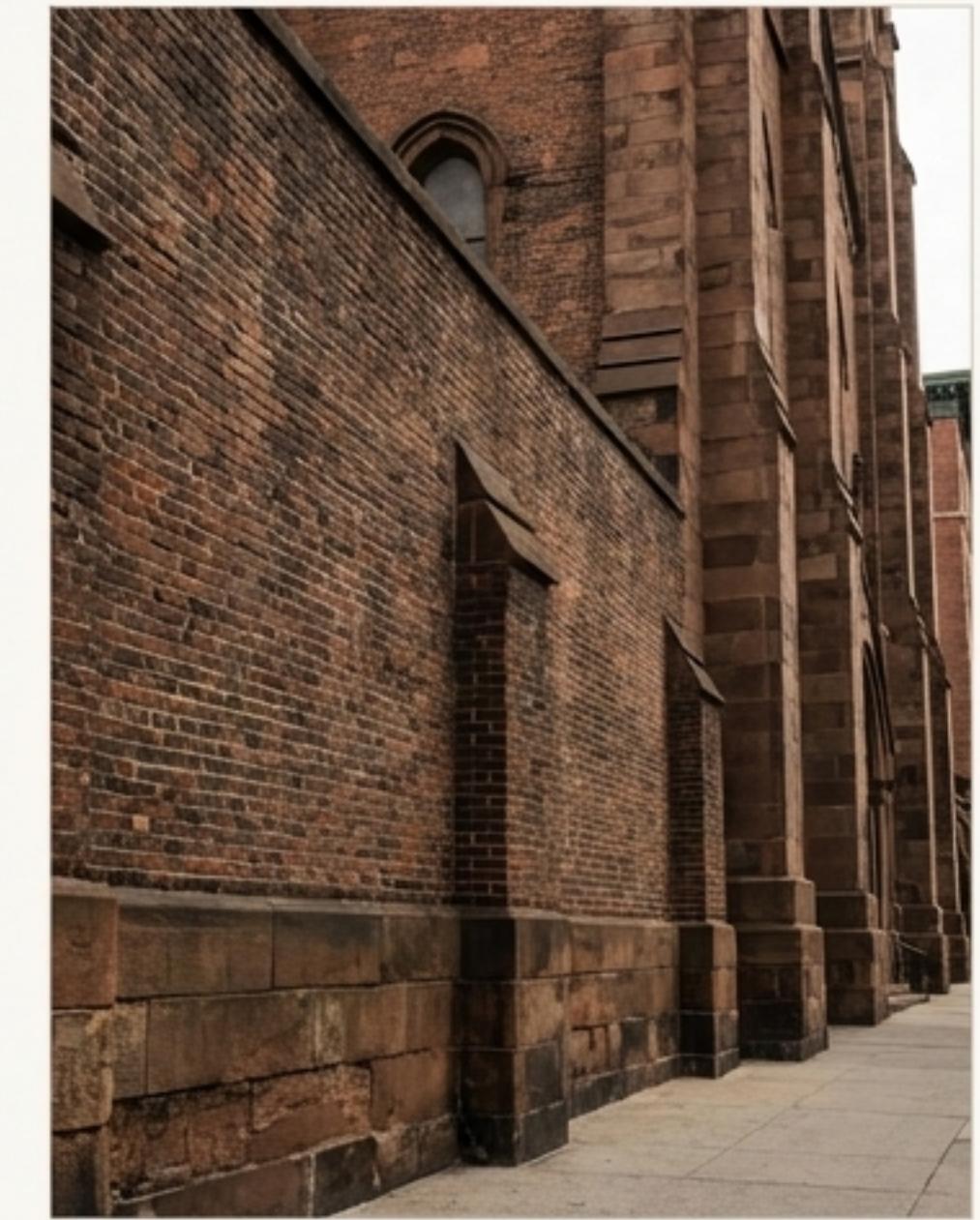
# Sanctuaries of Faith and Refuge



Begun in 1891 by the Scalabrinian Fathers, this church was founded specifically to serve the growing Italian immigrant population.



One of the district's oldest religious structures, this ashlar and brownstone church was built ca. 1801.



The brick and brownstone wall surrounding New York's second Catholic Cathedral was erected in the 1830s to protect the church and its community from anti-Catholic hostilities.

# The Feast of San Gennaro: A Street Corner Becomes a Stage

What began in September 1926 as a one-day religious commemoration by immigrants from Naples has evolved into an 11-day street fair—an annual celebration of food, drink, and Italian-American culture.

The festival centers on Mulberry Street and culminates in the Grand Procession, where the statue of San Gennaro is carried from its home in the Most Precious Blood Church through the streets of Little Italy.



# Flavors That Shaped a City



Both Chinese and Italian immigrants brought distinctive food cultures to New York that have profoundly influenced American cuisine.

Traditions like the Feast of the Seven Fishes on Christmas Eve originated here in the late 1800s.



Legacy businesses carry on this tradition.

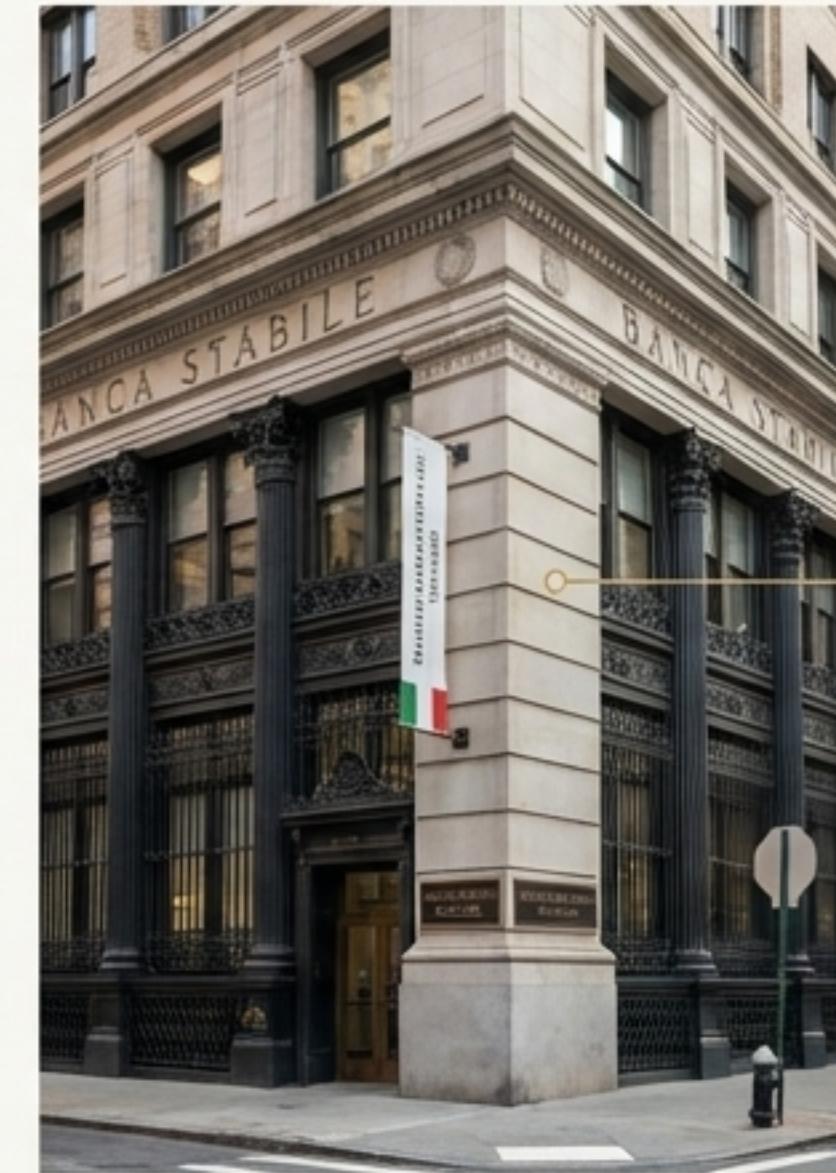
For generations, Di Palo's on Grand Street has been a landmark for Italian delicacies, while Alleva Dairy, founded in 1892, was the oldest cheese shop in America until its recent move.



# Preserving the Past for the Future



Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA)



Italian-American Museum

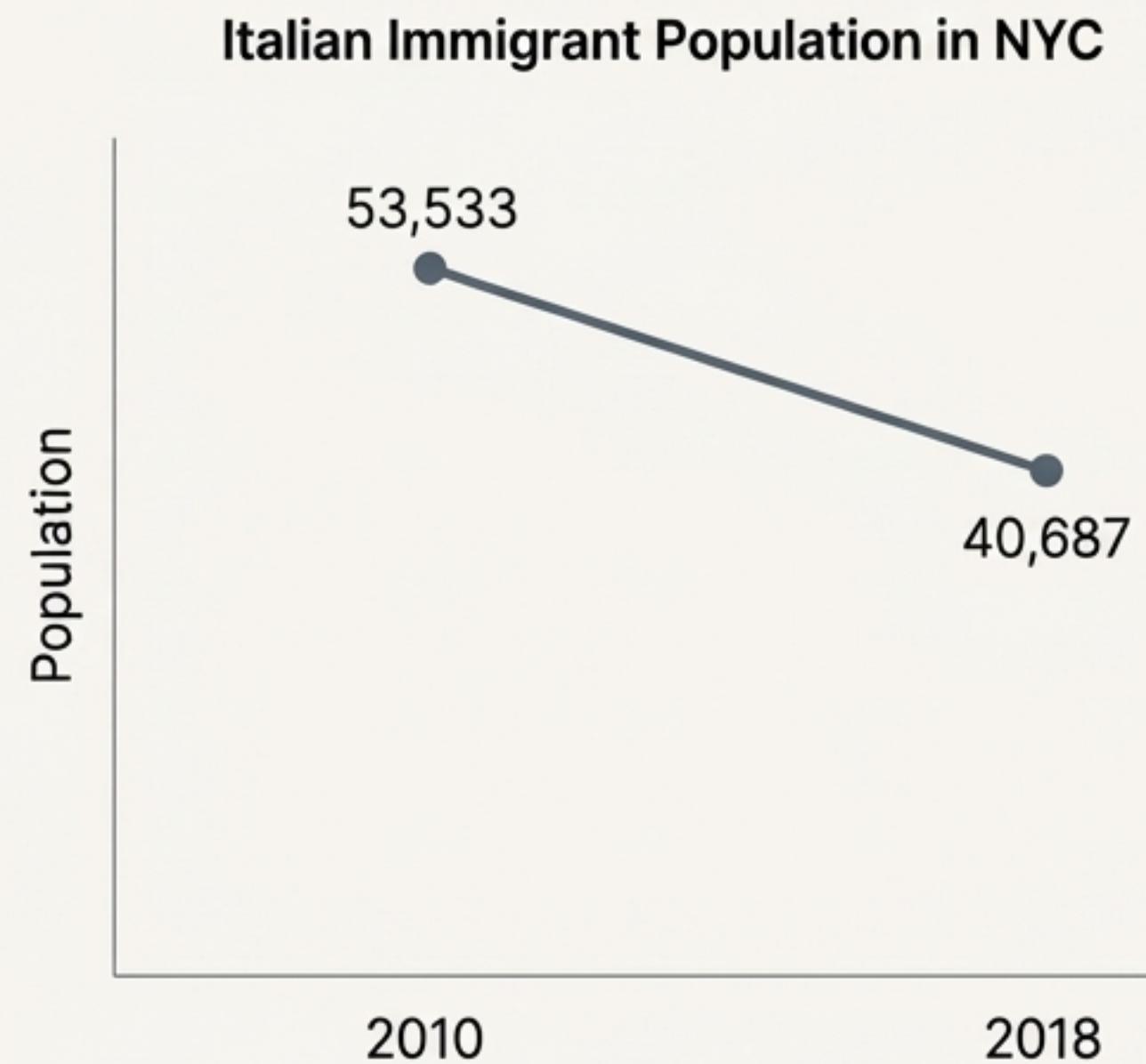
Housed in the historic Banca Stabile building.

The stories of these communities are actively preserved by dedicated institutions. MOCA provides a crucial lens into the Chinese-American experience, while the Italian-American Museum offers a portal into the lives of the immigrants who built Little Italy.

# A Neighborhood in Transition

The story of Little Italy is also one of transformation. After World War II, residents began moving to other boroughs and suburbs in search of more spacious living conditions. As one historian noted, “They became American, they melted into mainstream America.”

- At its peak (c. 1910-1920s), Little Italy spanned about 50 blocks.
- Today, its cultural core is centered on three blocks of Mulberry Street.
- A 2010 census survey found that 5% of residents identified as Italian-American, and none were born in Italy, reflecting a broader trend of assimilation and evolving immigration.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

# The Past in the Present

THEN



NOW



The Ravenite Social Club, former headquarters of mob boss John Gotti.

The neighborhood's evolution is driven by powerful economic forces. The northern section has been rebranded "Nolita" (North of Little Italy), attracting art galleries, brunch spots, and upscale retail.

Soaring real estate prices have made it difficult for longtime residents and businesses to remain. With an average condo price of \$2.1 million, Little Italy is one of the city's most expensive areas.

# An Enduring Spirit

Though smaller, the neighborhood remains a vital cultural touchstone. It thrives on “ethnic tourism”—attracting not only descendants of immigrants but all who want to experience an authentic urban village.

The spirit is kept alive by merchants and community leaders dedicated to preserving tradition in the face of change. As author Emelise Aleandri explained, “Right now, there is just enough of a population to keep up traditions.”





# Two Worlds. One Story. A Shared Future.

The Chinatown & Little Italy Historic District is not a museum piece. It is a living testament to the immigrant story—a story of adaptation, resilience, and profound contribution. Its streets tell the ongoing story of how two cultures shaped a neighborhood, and in doing so, shaped New York itself.