The Early American Years: 1848 - 1880s

1850s The first wave of Italian immigrants arrive for the Gold Rush. By 1850, there were 229 Italians living in San Francisco. Those who came for the Gold Rush quickly moved into real estate and service industries. Also during this period, Italian societies are formed, much like French mutual aid societies. There is a strong connection to the French immigrant community thanks to the efforts of Nicola Larco. Additionally, Italian Jesuit priests found the University of San Francisco.

1851 Italian opera is brought to San Francisco.

1859 *L’Eco della Patria*, the first full-fledged Italian newspaper in San Francisco, is first published.

1860s The largest number of Italian immigrants in the United States live in California. As late as 1890, there were more Italians in the Pacific states than in New England. Additionally, Italian stone and marble cutters become in high demand in San Francisco, and Sicilian fishermen begin to move to California in large numbers for the first time. Italians begin to move to the valleys to grow grapes and citrus, and truck gardening becomes a common occupation in San Francisco.

1863 Domenico Ghirardelli produces his first large batch of chocolate.

1869 The first Columbus Day celebration is held in Little Italy, San Francisco.

1870 Augustus Splivalo, a prominent San Francisco attorney, is the first Italian American to be elected to the state assembly.

1876 Fr. Joseph Neri illuminates San Francisco’s Market Street using three arc lamps.