A message from the IASA 2022 Conference Committee:

The theme of this year’s IASA Annual Conference is “Mining the Diaspora: Italian-American Materialities, Archaeologies, and Intersections.” No doubt a reference to our region’s storied history as a mining and manufacturing mecca in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this year’s theme also references the rich, raw materials found in our communities, which detail the local histories that enrich understanding of the Italian Diaspora experience. For decades, institutions such as museums, universities, libraries, and community centers have unearthed, preserved, and shared these valuable primary resources with scholars, students, and citizens alike. And just as the major industries of the region in coal, steel, and glass built the physical structures of our city, the narratives, recordings, and records of our community provide evidence that enlivens our scholarly investigations.

Throughout this year’s conference program, you will find a variety of presentations engaging this year’s theme. You will also find additional programmatic activities to introduce (or re-introduce) you to the city of Pittsburgh, a place with deep immigrant roots. The IASA conference was last held in Pittsburgh in 1996. A lot has changed in our city since then; the industrial sector has shifted towards medicine, technology, and robotics, with our region leading the globe in organ transplantation, self-automated vehicles, and artificial intelligence. New migrant communities from India, Bhutan, Nepal, Somalia, Ethiopia, Syria, and Central America are building hamlets, sharing food- and folkways, and becoming American citizens as our Italian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, and Jewish migrants once did. Our Conference venues embody these same themes and trends. The Heinz History Center is housed in the former Lake Chautauqua icehouse and located near what was the city’s largest produce terminal; these spaces have been repurposed but retain their commitment to the region’s past. The Cathedral of Learning was built with Pittsburgh’s ethnic communities in mind; it was those community leaders who became fundraisers and creators of the Cathedral’s landmark Nationality Rooms. These committees still act as stewards of their respective rooms, but their main task now is to raise scholarship funds for students wishing to study abroad, in many cases retracing transnational routes taken by their forebears.

Even as time passes and neighborhoods change, our local population remains grounded in the histories, values, and folk traditions from the past. The working class still influences our vision as we remain a region of working people seeking to create a better future for the next generation. The impact of notable Pittsburghers such as Fred Rogers, Bruno Sammartino, and Franco Harris, who built brands on kindness, humbleness, and service, provide positive models for our community. With the conference occurring during the fourth anniversary of the senseless slaughter of 11 individuals during services at a synagogue in Squirrel Hill on Oct. 27, 2018, we recognize our population’s mindset that we are “Stronger Than Hate” and how this attitude has strengthened inter-faith and inter-ethnic bonds across the city. The fact that we gather just as the world marks 100 years since the rise of Fascism in Italy—and a month since a sweeping national victory for the Italian hard right—reminds us of just how urgently and carefully we need to tend to those bonds today.

During your time at the IASA Annual Conference, we encourage you to explore our city, interact with our communities, and experience the unique culture of Pittsburgh that we hold dear.