

**The Genoa Chamber of Commerce Historical Archives:  
The Restoration to the Original Order of Selected Record Groups**

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**Premise**

The Fondazione Ansaldo ([www.fondazioneansaldo.it](http://www.fondazioneansaldo.it)), in collaboration with the Centro per la cultura d'impresa ([www.culturadimpresa.org](http://www.culturadimpresa.org)), coordinated the restoration to the original order, and the drawing up of an inventory of the records held in a depository of the Genoa Chamber of Commerce.

Most records concern the years from the 1920s to the 1960s, with some exceptions going back as early as 1918 and as late as the 1970s. The largest part dates from 1926 on – 1926 having been a year of radical change for the archives of the Genoa Chamber of Commerce, when it was replaced by the *Consiglio provinciale dell'economia corporativa di Genova* (Genoa County Council for Corporative Economy). In 1937, this new governing body called for county-wide enforcement of previously issued ministerial circulars, which required that any records older than 1927 were to be deposited in the archives of those cities that were also seat of the State Archives, or a Section of the State Archives. As a result, the oldest records of Chamber of Commerce Archives are currently held by the Genoa State Archives.<sup>1</sup> (<http://archivi.beniculturali.it/ASGE/asge.htm>).

Generally, the historical archives of all Italian Chambers of Commerce contain three main record groups that reflect any Chamber's principal functions: first, that of certification (mainly the Company Register, later called the Business Register, but also all other professional lists). The second group regards. The third group concerns the administration and management of the Chamber itself.

The restoration of the archives to its original order was carried out, if only partially, on all of the three groups, except for the Business Register. Even so, the work covered only one of the chamber's depositories, plus parts of the historical archives held by the chamber itself or by external agencies. Therefore, this partial action should be viewed in perspective of the entire records production of the Chamber.

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<sup>1</sup> Guida agli archivi storici delle Camere di commercio, a cura di E. Bidischini e L. Musci, Roma 1996, p. 52. Also online at the URL <http://www.camerecultura.it>

### **Records organization: the filing plan**

The Chambers of Commerce first standardized records processing in the 1940s, when the existing Ministry of Corporation issued a circular (n. 105 27/10/1942)<sup>2</sup> in which a standardized filing plan was suggested in order to achieve uniform organization of Chamber Archives throughout Italy. This plan included categories for all the subjects dealt with in the Chamber's records.

However, a filing plan had been operative in Genoa since the 1920s, and other Chambers also used "local" plans. It is clear that the Italian government simply formalized a practice already in use by several Chambers in Italy – in 1963, the Department of Industry followed in their footsteps (circular n. 1607 15/07/1964).

### **The content of the records**

The restoration its original order of such a large volume of records – about 4600 pieces – highlighted two main subject areas: the first pertains specifically to Genoa and its activities as a maritime city; the second more generally concerns the structure and organization of Chamber Archives as such, regardless of their territorial context. From this latter point of view, it is worth focusing on some recurring issues with an eye to the processing, organizing and exploiting of a record group.

Generally speaking, the Genoa Chamber of Commerce archives is similar to those of other Chambers of Commerce in terms of functions like training and support for business activities – from agriculture to industry – as well as the promotion of exhibits and trade shows. However, one core activity stands out: the Chamber's role with respect to the multiple activities of Genoa's port.

In the filing plan, a whole category is dedicated to the *Consorzio Autonomo del Porto* (the Port Cooperative), and much of the activity recorded in the archive concerns maritime transport, free port organization and customs duty collection, storage and warehouse organization etc. The maritime role in the Chamber's activity is also underlined by the organization of registers (see, for example, the shipping agents' list), and by some of the offices of the Chamber, such as the Chamber Section for Tourism, as well as the Maritime Section.

### **The Bonded Warehouse/Free Port Archives**

During the work the Genoa Chamber of Commerce Archives, a peculiar associated archive was processed as well: the Bonded Warehouse/Free Port Archives. It holds records produced by an agency operating in Genoa from at least 1841, and regulated through a law passed in 1876, which allowed ethical and private bodies to create bonded warehouses in the main sea towns in agreement with the Chamber of Commerce and the Town Council they referred to.

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<sup>2</sup> M. Guercio, R. Guarasci, L. Fiorentino, *La valorizzazione del patrimonio documentale degli enti camerali: l'organizzazione e la gestione degli archivi*, Roma XXXX

### **The Bonded Warehouses**

The bonded warehouses were considered to be outside the customs' jurisdiction. An authorization by the customs office was required in order to deposit goods in a bonded warehouse. The custody and transfer of merchandise were exempt from formalities. The Chamber of Commerce managed the bonded warehouses through a special committee, ran an inspections office, and hired guards to protect the warehouses.