Fiermonte Brothers

OCTOBER 20, 2016  LEAVE A REPLY
WRITTEN BY: MMONCUR2

While working through the 1920 and 1940 U.S. Census, I came across an interesting family—the Fiermontes. James and Tony Fiermonte, two Italian immigrants, ran a store in Alexandria Virginia. These two men peaked my interest; not only because they are two brothers living together, but also because of their financial situation.

While the U.S. Census from 1940 states that James Fiermonte owns a store, it is his older brother Tony who peaks my interest. Although the census names Tony as a clerk at his brother's store, it also says that he is not making any money. One would assume that because Tony is employed, he would be making some amount of money. I found it extremely confusing that Tony claimed that he was making no money. By 1940, the two brothers had been living in the United States for forty years, so one would think that they would be well established. One finds it hard to imagine a man who is sixty-four not having a penny to his name. When I saw Tony Fiermonte's finances, I knew that I had to research a bit to find out what was causing this money mystery.

My confusion was solved with some simple research. While I was looking through the internet, I found a newspaper article from August 15, 1911. This article states that Tony Fiermonte is filing a divorce lawsuit against his ex wife, Helen. After reading this article, it made sense to me why Tony was not forthcoming about his finances. Divorces can be extremely expensive, and Tony was probably trying to protect his assets. This also explains why it states that he is living with his younger brother in the census. What I had assumed to be a simple lack of information turned out to yield a pretty interesting discovery. I was surprised that a local newspaper would print an article about a divorce hearing, but without that piece of writing the questions that I had about the Fiermonte brother's finances would have never been answered.

A second piece of information that I was able to find was Tony Fiermonte's death certificate. Tony passed away on February 16th 1953 at the age of 75. What was also interesting was that sometime between the year 1940 and 1953, he had remarried. His certificate of death lists that he is widowed, and lists his wife's name as Rosie Spinks. I find it amazing that the last thirteen years of Tony Fiermonte's life were so turbulent. Within that time Tony married his second wife, suffered through her death, and became a United States citizen. Once my research was complete; I felt as though I knew the Fiermonte family on a much more personal level, and solved some of the mystery behind their withheld information.

[i] 1940 census data, Alexandria Virginia

[ii] 1940 census data, Alexandria Virginia

[iii] Louis Duffey, "Post From the County Court Clerk's Office," Alexandria Gazette, August 15, 1911.

[iv] 1940 census data, Alexandria Virginia

In *Italy’s Many Diasporas* by Donna R. Gabaccia, she writes, “in the years between 1870-1940, three generations of Italy’s poor saw their lives transformed by repeated experiences of migration, life abroad, and return.”[1] Joseph (Giuseppe Fernando) Corsi is an Italian immigrant that left Italy during the “Workers of the World” (1870-1914) time frame of Gabaccia’s book, but breaks the mold because he never returns to Italy.

Corsi was born on December 8, 1903 in Carpineto, Italy just south of Rome.[2] At the age of eighteen, Corsi left with his older brother from Naples, on the *S.S. Dante Alighien*, arriving in New York City in 1921. [3]

Gabaccia names New York City as a common place for Italian immigrants to enter and settle in America; however, many moved elsewhere, depending on jobs and family/friends.[4] In 1930, the U.S. Census recorded Joseph Corsi as living in New York City in a home valued at $3,000. [5] Corsi has begun filing his naturalization papers and probably has no intention of returning.[6] Italy’s political climate with the rise of Benito Mussolini combined with the Great Depression, which Europe also experienced, might have impacted his decision to stay. He was employed as a moulder by the steel foundry. [7]

It is unclear why, but by 1935 Corsi moved to Alexandria, Virginia, living at 704 N Columbus Street. This address was located in Ward 3, which is where most of the single Italian immigrants lived in boarding houses. At this point, Corsi was working as a contracted night watchmen.[8] It can be assumed—because of his living arrangements—that he was not
planning to stay in Alexandria.

Soon after the 1940 U.S. Census was recorded, Corsi enlisted in the U.S. Navy and began working at the U.S. Naval Air Station, also known as FLloyd Bennett Field, in Brooklyn. Although the United States had not officially entered the war, the country was mobilizing for the inevitable, and Corsi was part of it.[9]

Corsi's journey after enlisting in the U.S. Navy is difficult to follow; however, based on a marriage certificate in 1948, Joseph Corsi married Martha Lee Vasto in Barbour County, West Virginia.[10] Vasto was born and raised in West Virginia. There is limited documentation following their marriage, and it is unknown exactly where the couple settled for the remainder of their lives.

Joseph Corsi was an Italian immigrant on the move. He left Italy after World War I. According to Gabaccia, the rise of fascism pushed many Italians to leave the country.[11] Corsi left his home in southern Italy and lived in New York, Virginia, and possibly West Virginia and probably countless other undocumented places. This particular Italian immigrant seemed to have no intentions of returning to Italy, but pursued American citizenship.
The residents of the Italian peninsula have been among the most migratory peoples on the earth. According to Donna R. Gabaccia, Italy's Many Diasporas (Seattle: U of Washington, 2000), 81.


[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.


Gabaccia's *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 16.6 million peoples departed Italy from 1871 to 1921. This departure was part of a much larger global population shift tied to industrialization and transportation improvements. The majority of Italians came to the United States to fill the jobs in factories, mines, and railroad industries.

Arriving in the United States in 1908, Anthony Ciuffreda was part of this large immigration trend. According to the New York passenger manifest, Anthony departed from Napoli (Naples) on the passenger ship *S.S. Conte Rosso* and arrived in New York City a few weeks later.

Previously residing in Monte San Angelo, Anthony settled in Alexandria, Virginia. Anthony married Helen Orndorff, an eighteen year old from Colorado, on March 20, 1918 in Washington D.C. In December 1925, Anthony petitioned and became a naturalized citizen. The 1940 U.S. Census shows that once settled in Alexandria, Anthony became the proprietor of a garage, and owned property worth $8,400.

Once arriving in the U.S., Anthony immediately attempted to immerse himself in the experience, getting married, applying for naturalization, and becoming the proprietor of a business.
With the outbreak of World War I, Anthony registered himself for the draft. However, it is interesting that Anthony did not register for the draft until June 5th, 1918. According to the national archives military records, the U.S. government did not apply a draft for the third registration, which was held on September 12, 1918, for men age 18 through 45 until much later in the war. This registration would have included Anthony.


[ii] Ibid., 58.

[iii] Ibid., 59.


Reading Donna R. Gabaccia’s *Italy’s Many Diasporas* motivated me to reconsider my former ideas about the ways in which people migrate and the complexities of their movement. This great migration of people occurred from 1871 to 1921, whereby 16.6 million inhabitants departed Italy.[1] Italians came from all parts of the peninsula, with some staying permanently in the U.S., while others traveled back and forth, and still others gradually returned home. Gabaccia suggests that, to understand the migration further, one must look to the wider world and consider the anti-imperialist revolutions in the Americas during this time. This created sparsely populated states along with millions of jobs for artisanal and industrial workers.[2] It was the global market fulfilling the needs of peasant families (and vice versa) with humble skills looking for work. Perhaps this is precisely why Domenico Oresto Colangelo appears on the passenger list of the *Duca degli Abruzzi* whereby he arrived on April 16, 1920 in New York City, with plans to go to Pittsburgh, PA. [3]

Domenico was born February 2, 1901, to Felice and Angela, in Abruzzo, Italy, in the village of Ateletta. He traveled to the U.S. on April 16, 1920, searching for work and settled ultimately in Alexandria, Virginia. He appears on the 1940 U.S. Census along with his wife, Virginia, and children. The census records indicate a total of 4 daughters and 3 sons residing in the household at 308 Cameron Street.[4] The records likewise show Domenico working in construction for a steam shovel company originally. By 1959, the local city directory confirms his upward mobility to President of Anco Builders Incorporated. [5] On November 20, 1955, *The Washington Post* announces the purchase of a large land tract by Anco, adjoining the Belle Haven Country Club for the building of new homes.[6]
When migrating, many Italians turned to familiar faces for information and advice. They depended on other migrants who returned home to Italy to help them navigate their own journey. This may have very well been the case with Domenico, as his own father, Felice, once traveled to the United States in 1893 as a laborer.[7] It was with certainty that Domenico asked his father’s advice when making his own personal journey 22 years later.

Domenico married Virginia Giammittorio, who was born on December 24, 1906 in Lynchburg, Virginia to David and Rosina. Both of Virginia’s parents were Italian immigrants who came to the U.S. in June 1906, just 6 months prior to Virginia’s birth.[8] David Giammittorio applied for naturalization September 19, 1921, and took the oath of allegiance becoming a U.S. citizen on January 4, 1922.[9] Interesting as well, the 1940 U.S. Census confirms that Virginia’s parents lived at 313 Calvert Street, just a few doors down from their daughter and her family.

Cultural and personal identities of Italian migrants are uniquely defined and vary among those individuals—Italian migration was not a one size fits all. Some Italians returned home like Domenico’s father while others made new and permanent lives in the U.S. Often, Italian families who made a permanent home in the U.S. stayed close by one another, as was the case with the Colangelos and Giammittorios. It is special to know that Domenico Colangelo played a part in building up the city of Alexandria as evidenced in the Belle Haven community, which still stands today. This is the case with many Italians who aided in building this country and by making it great.
According to Donna R. Gabaccia in *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (2000), "millions of laborers migrat[ed] in an out of Italy between 1870 and 1940." The vast majority of these Italian migrants were men who sought employment in the myriad of unskilled labor positions that became available as foreign nations industrialized. Many Italians specifically came to the U.S. in the late-nineteenth century in order to fill the jobs that had been recently abandoned by emancipated slaves, and other labor positions within factories, mines, and railroads.

Antonio Pulzone was one of the four-million Italians that Gabaccia estimates to have migrated from Italy between 1896 and 1905. Pulzone was born to Angelo Pulzone and Rose Walla on April 25, 1887, in Montepagano, Italy. According to the S.S. Balilla’s passenger manifest, Pulzone last resided in Bellini, Italy, before he arrived in New York City on May 8, 1901. The manifest also reflects that Pulzone was a laborer, paid for the trip across the Atlantic Ocean himself, possessed just five dollars, could read and write, had not previously been to the U.S., had never been in prison, was in good physical health, and that he came to the U.S. to join his brother-in-law in an unnamed city in New Jersey. Based on this information, Pulzone matched Gabaccia’s profile of a typical Italian immigrant who went to a foreign country for employment purposes and lived with already-established relatives or friends.

Records indicate that as early as 1914, Pulzone had become a resident of Alexandria, Virginia. According to an article in the Alexandria Gazette on September 2, 1914, "William A. McGreen et al ha[d] sold to Antone Pulzone a lot at the northeast corner of Madison and Columbus streets." Two days later, a subsequent article appeared in the Washington Herald, and specified that the property purchased by Pulzone was part of John W. Green’s estate sale and included four building lots. Though the amount that Pulzone paid for the property was not disclosed in these articles, this information demonstrates that Pulzone was able to save up enough money while in the U.S. in order to obtain a mortgage, or
purchase outright, the four lots in Alexandria. Additionally, after comparing the Sanborn Maps from 1912 and 1921, it is quite possible that these four building lots were vacant and without structures at the time of Pulzone’s purchase.\[ix\] Therefore, assuming that this inference is correct, it is equally impressive that Pulzone was able to afford the additional costs of new construction on top of the purchase price of the four lots.

The 1912 and 1921 maps are juxtaposed to show the differences in structures found within the lots that were purchased by Pulzone in 1914. Click on the middle cursor and drag from left to right to see these differences. (Maps courtesy of ProQuest, LLC. Juxtapose created by Dino Reschke using JuxtaposeJS, which is available through the Northwestern University Knight Lab).

Meanwhile, city directories over the next quarter-century disclosed that Pulzone was employed as a mechanic in the booming railroad industry.\[x\] Pulzone was listed as a car repairman for several different railroad companies, including Armour Car Lines, Fruit Growers Express, and the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad.\[xi\] According to a 2009 article by the Alexandria Times, Fruit Growers Express “constructed and repaired refrigerated railroad cars ... [it] was formed as a separate company in 1920 after the federal government ordered Armour and Company to sell its fruit-shipping subsidiary following an anti-trust decision.”\[xii\] Based on these facts, it is likely that Pulzone continued to work in the same position and location even though his employer’s name changed as a result of government intervention and changes in company ownership.
An assortment of documents reveals that Pulzone made Alexandria his permanent home. Pulzone married Alexandria-native Effie Ellen Simms on April 6, 1916, in Elkton, Maryland. The 1920 U.S. Census reported that Pulzone and Effie owned their residence at 807 North Columbus Street, located in Ward 3 of Alexandria. The 1920 U.S. Census also recorded that Pulzone worked nearby as a mechanic at Potomac Yards, that his citizenship status was "unknown," that Effie was unemployed, and that they had an infant daughter, Carlie. The 1920 U.S. Census was the only U.S. Census in which Pulzone's name appeared; however, city directories confirmed that he stayed in the Alexandria area because his various home addresses were 211 West Peyton Avenue (Del Ray) in 1934, 827 North Columbus Street in 1938, and 807 North Columbus Street in 1940. The 1930 U.S. Census did not list Pulzone as residing in the same home as Effie, but "Coralie" (11) and another daughter, Francis (7), appeared under Effie's name. Though Effie was still unemployed, she was recorded as having owned her home, which was valued at $2,500. Both Pulzone and Effie were absent from the 1940 U.S. Census. Based on the abstract of divorce decree from November 11, 1947, which listed the cause of divorce as "desertion," it is likely that Pulzone and Effie had an estranged marriage for quite some time and he had left the family.

Interestingly, though Pulzone was not an American citizen, he participated in both U.S. World War drafts. Pulzone's World War I draft card from June 5, 1917, reflected that his citizenship status was "alien" and that he was 30 years old, short
Pulzone was the antithesis of an Italian immigrant from this time period. While the majority of Italians who immigrated to the U.S. either returned to Italy or permanently resided in the U.S. and applied for U.S. citizenship, records indicate that Pulzone stayed in Alexandria for the remainder of his life but never submitted an official petition to become a U.S. citizen. Indeed, according to their certificates of death, both Pulzone and Effie died in Alexandria. Effie died from breast cancer on March 27, 1952, and Pulzone died from pneumonia on June 12, 1969. Both were buried in separate lots in Ivy Hill Cemetery in Alexandria.
404. That’s an error.

The requested URL was not found on this server. That’s all we know.

(Created by Dino Reschke Using GoogleMaps)


[ii] Ibid., 59.

[iii] Ibid., 58.


[vi] Ibid. The name of Pulzone’s brother-in-law is listed on the manifest, but it is illegible, and the city in New Jersey was not provided.


[viii] ”Site Selected for Alexandria Hospital: Building to be Erected on Square Bounded by Columbus, Alfred, and Wythe Streets; Will Collect All Pledges,” *Washington Herald*, September 4, 1914, 8.


[xi] Ibid.


Migrants oftentimes have a difficult job of "assimilating" in the face of a new culture and nativism in their new home. While that is the case with most migrants, the English had an easier time than most. Using primary sources, such as the U.S. Census, historians can learn the forgotten past of people in the United States. With this practice, the Cogan family's obscure life in Alexandria, Virginia became more pronounced. [1] William Cogan was born in London, England in 1828.
Along with his mother and father, William emigrated to America when he was a young child. It is possible that Cogan had no recollection of England, and the United States was all that he had ever known. Like most migrants, William did not remain in one place. Instead, he moved to Philadelphia and then to Alexandria, Virginia. William learned his craft as a gas fitter from his time in Philadelphia.

According to the *Alexandria Gazette*, Cogan became a gas fitter in 1848. William opened up his own plumbing and gas fittering business called Cogan Wm & Sons on 15 North Royal Street. William married Virginia Barton from Fairfax County, Virginia. Virginia remained in their home until her death in 1912. The couple had eleven children together.

William Cogan, and his business, suffered through the Civil War war. There are no records of William Cogan fighting, even though he was only in his 30s. Due to health problems, his children succeeded William Cogan in his business. At the age of 60, William Cogan died. Cogan created a life for him and his family by learning a trade and creating a business.

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[3] Ibid.


[5] Ibid.


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An English Immigrants Experience: The Success of Edward Green

SEPTEMBER 30, 2016  LEAVE A REPLY
WRITTEN BY: NGEORGE

Out of all the immigrant groups that came to the United States in the nineteenth century, English immigrants are often overlooked. Unlike other immigrant groups, the English were able to adjust to life in the U.S. with fewer problems–
including anti-immigrant persecution and language acquisition. As a result, historians frequently ignored their experiences.[1]

English immigrants have often been overlooked but that did not mean that they did not find success. In 1859, Edward Green of Alexandria, Virginia, for example, worked for the Manassas Gap railroad in Alexandria.[2] He started out as an accountant and worked his way up.[3] By the time of the 1860 U.S. Census, Green had been promoted to treasurer of the Manassas Gap Railroad.[4] Whenever the railroad announced when different trains were leaving, his name was attached to it.[5] Green having his name constantly in the paper would have elevated his social standing in the community. Green was worth $3,000 in 1860. Green was married to Ann, and they had five kids together.[6] By the time he died on January 25, 1864, Green had prospered.[7]


The Independent Life of Ann Fisher: Exploring the Historical Documents of an English Immigrant in the 19th Century

SEPTEMBER 30, 2016  LEAVE A REPLY  WRITTEN BY: NATALIEGRIFFITTS

A common narrative in American women’s history has been that women were passed over for inheritance. They were trophies, assigned husbands, and expected to breed children. Teachers maintained this narrative, declaring that this “traditional” life for women in the United States remained the same until they were eligible to vote in 1920. Intentional or not, Virginia standards of learning do not require that the experience of women throughout American history be included in the classroom except for their influence in colonial Jamestown in elementary school and a discussion of the suffrage movement roughly four times in high school.¹ The reason that this is worth mentioning is because Virginia students are unaware of the impact of women in the United States unless teachers are inclined to add them to the curriculum and teach beyond a test.

One example of this oversight can be found in Alexandria, Virginia. The 1860 U.S. Census shows a seventy-two-year-old white, English immigrant female with $2,000 of property.² This woman, Ann Fisher, presented an interesting new angle to the continuous erasure of women in U.S. history. The family in the home consisted of Jacob Roxberry and his wife, Elizabeth Roxberry, and their four children: Asa, George, Virginia, and Alice.³ This family was born in Virginia but Ann Fisher was the head of household.⁴ The Roxberrys were tenants at Fisher’s property with $100 in taxable income.⁵
Research through newspapers clarified that the property was hers when there were months of unpaid property taxes that resulted in the sale of her property.\(^6\)

Newspapers also announced her death, and noted that the property was given to her. The announcement was brief and released the morning after her death, stating she passed away at the age of eighty-one and was the "consort of the late Robert Fisher."\(^7\) The obituary, released four days after her death on August 14, 1868, clarified that she had lived in Alexandria for fifty years, attended Old School Baptist church, and died without family.\(^8\) The obituary for Ann Fisher, declaring she died "surrounded by sorrowing friends" and was beloved by her church members, shows that she was involved and respected in the community of Alexandria.\(^9\)

These two documents allow further research into her life by searching the church and her spouse. Unfortunately, in terms of newspaper articles, there are few other mentions of Ann Fisher. One instance is a call for someone to take unclaimed mail in her name before it was sent to the dead letter office.\(^10\) Another instance was her will being filed almost four years after her death.\(^11\)

Robert Fisher, Ann Fisher’s husband, was also an English immigrant and died in Alexandria, Virginia in June 1849 of rheumatism.\(^11\) There are more details about his arrival to the United States than Ann’s. He arrived in Hampton, Virginia from a London or Portsmouth at the age of thirty-two on a ship named **Henry Clay** in May 1820; his occupation on the ship manifest was "farmer."\(^12\) The logs for his arrival did not contain a passenger named Ann, or a variant of that spelling. Moreover, mathematically, she had settled in Alexandria at least two years before Robert Fisher arrived in Virginia. Unfortunately, mapping out their purpose for immigrating to the United States is not perfectly spelled out, but scholarly research, such as *Invisible Immigrants* by Charlotte Erickson, allows certain theories to be made. Robert Fisher came alone as a farmer and possibly first settled in Alexandria.
Erickson created three generalized groups of English and Scottish immigrants: immigrants uncertain of staying in the long-term, immigrants that intended to stay regardless of hardships, and those heavily connected to home while feeling disoriented. These three categories often correlated with one's socio-economic class.

Though it may seem like the details are lacking, the fact remains that Ann Fisher lived a life surrounded by people with common interests and was valued and welcomed in Alexandria. She had a substantial amount of wealth in her name after her husband died and rented her home to a local family when she could have chosen to live alone. Moreover, Fisher was unique. She did not own or rent slaves and of the seventy-three white Baptist women in Alexandria, she was one of three from the United Kingdom and one of three in the third and fourth ‘declared wealth’ brackets. With no record of children, Ann Fisher stands as a successful counter-example to the stereotypes taught in Virginia public schools of women in 19th century America and immigrant women.

Endnotes


3. Ibid.


5. Ibid.


Using the Voting Viva Voce website, the percentage of English immigrants, who voted either for the Democratic or Opposition ticket, were nearly equal in Alexandria, Virginia in 1859. Of the 109 English immigrant men, only 34 men were either eligible to vote or chose to vote.[1] The low turn out rate for voters was reiterated in the book, Invisible Immigrants, in which Charlotte Erickson declares that English immigrants “showed little interest for participating in government.”[2] Most English immigrants traveled to the United States to escape economic stagnation and an overbearing government apparatus; they wanted as little government intervention in their day-to-day lives.

By studying patterns in voting habits in 1860, I was able to figure out two things. First, English immigrant men living in Alexandria were almost evenly split between the two parties on the 1859 ticket. 44% of men who voted chose the Democratic nominees, while 50% voted for the Opposition candidates. [3]
voters owned or rented slaves compared to the Democratic voters.

There was one Democratic voter that stood out from the rest of the voters in the party. John Crockford was born in England in May 1840.[4] When Crockford was 22 years old, he and his young wife, Ellen, boarded a ship named “President” in London to come to New York City.[5]

As written in the 1860 U.S. Census, Crockford’s total estate was $60,000.[6] He was one of the richest English immigrants in Alexandria, as well as the richest recorded Democratic voter in this group. As a slave owner, he might have particularly invested in the Democratic party.

While it is difficult to pinpoint why exactly Crockford voted for Democratic candidates when others voted for the Opposition, he proves to be a very interesting man to research. He obviously was a very successful railroad contractor and made plenty of money. According to Erickson, cultural differences between English and Americans “were often masked by language similarities [7].” One can assume that if Crockford was not English, he likely would not have been as successful as he was if he emigrated from another country. Because of the similarities between English and American cultures, Crockford was able to get far in his job and make a good living.


One common misconception about immigrants is that once arriving in the United States, they remained in one place; however, it was quite common for immigrants to move from place to place. Often immigrants would either move farther West or along the East Coast. One family that represents this migration pattern is the Gibson family. William Gibson was born in County Armagh in Northern Ireland while his wife Margaret Mahaffey Gibson was born somewhere in the British Empire, although the exact place is unclear. [1] William immigrated to the United States from Northern Ireland via Liverpool, England on May 2, 1849. [2] They married on March 20, 1852 in Philadelphia at the Eleventh Street Methodist Episcopal Church. [3] William would go on to become an allopath (a doctor who practices allopathic medicine), and Margaret is listed as a housekeeper in the 1880 U.S. Census. [4]

In addition to getting married in Pennsylvania, two of their children Matilda Emily and Henrietta, were also born there. [5] Their next child, Thomas Samuel, was listed in both the 1870 and 1880 U.S. Census as being born in Illinois, thus illustrating that the family moved. [7] One interesting fact about the Gibson family is that by 1860, William and Margaret sent their daughter Matilda Emily to live with Margaret's parents, the Mahaffeys, in Alexandria, Virginia. [8]
In the two years following Thomas Samuel's birth, the Gibson family moved to Alexandria, Virginia where they lived for the remainder of their lives. [9] During their life in Alexandria, they had six more children in addition to Thomas Samuel: four sons and two daughters. At the time of William’s death in 1903, the Gibson family was well established and respected within the local community. [10]
[1]. It is hard to know with certainly exactly where Margaret was born. On the 1870 Census, her place of birth is listed as Canada. But on the 1880 Census, her birthplace is listed as Scotland. Complicating matters, her father’s birthplace is recorded as Scotland, while her mother’s is listed as Canada, making both places a possible birthplace of Margaret.


[5]. 1880 U.S. Census, Alexandria Virginia, “Matilda Emily Gibson and Henrietta.”


