

THE HISTORY OF THE FESTIVAL OF ST. MARY OF CARMEN IN NEWTON

In the village of Nonantum, in what had been an Irish immigrant community for a generation, the last of the great European immigrations came from Italy to America, with the hopes and dreams of a better life. In adopting their new homes, they found bits of their new culture lacking in traditions, as well as finding American organizations to be often exclusive with their memberships. Hence from 1900s through the 1930s, Italian ethnic and religious organizations saw a dynamic increase in these new communities and neighborhoods. These organizations helped to maintain a connection with their churches, and Italian villages and towns far across the sea.

MANY REGIONS, MANY SAINTS

What is not clear is why the newly formed Italian community decided on St. Mary of Carmen as the patron saint of the Nonantum Italian community. One could theorize that St. Mary of Carmen, being of great popularity throughout Italy, could of been a simple conclusion or that the influence of some of the founding members who had St. Mary of Carmen as their patron Saint in their hometowns in Italy. Regardless of the process, in July of 1935 an informal but obviously successful prelude had taken place. This most likely was the catalyst of the society officially being founded November 1935.

The founding members actively recruited a core group of community people (representing almost all the regions of Italy) to take on the arduous task of the formulation of this

new organization. Officers had to be elected; an application to the commonwealth of Massachusetts had to be submitted to receive its charter, besides honoring the saint. The articles of the incorporation founded a "mutual benefit society" which offered disability insurance and a modest death benefit which in 1936 was enough to pay for a wake and burial. Bylaws also had to be written, the planning of this new community event would be no small undertaking.



Members gather before removing the saint from the church in 1937



The first women's procession in 1937

THE DEVOTION OF THE COMMUNITY



It must be stated that this was all taking place during the great depression. Money was scarce, just getting your family fed was a struggle daily which didn't always happen. The members knew the center piece of this organization would be the statue of our revered saint. At this point, the newly initiated members would go out in twos and threes to friends, family and other members of the community soliciting donations. Donations came in, a quarter, half dollar and for those that could afford more, even dollars. A great portion of these monies were accumulated in small change.

Members in 1945

When approximately nine hundred dollars were raised, a few representatives were chosen to go off to Boston to find an artist, someone who would sculpt and then cast an image worthy of St. Mary of Carmen. The artist committed to the project and worked tirelessly for a great deal of time. The finished statue was beautiful and worthy of honoring our saint. It was also twice as large as any festival statue in the greater Boston area, which just added to the membership's enthusiasm and pride in the organization.



In the processions of 1936 and again in 1971, the statue was carried by hand

A FESTIVAL FOREVER IN OUR LIVES



Another interesting dynamic, unique to our festival, is as the children of these immigrants grew older and started their own families, whether they had moved to a nearby village, or to a neighboring city or town, they would still make the pilgrimage back to Nonantum for this great community gathering. We are now looking at a legacy of five generations who return, some come from as far away as Florida and California on an annual basis, making their vacation plans around the event dates.

The festival we enjoy today has grown and evolved in many ways, but what has not changed is that it is foremost a religious festival with Italian ethnic traditions, culminating in a spectacular community celebration.

Roger A. Marrocco, Jr. Historian

Photo taken by Elvira Cerrone at 15 Cook Street circa 1940

A LEGACY OF FIVE FAMILIES

The Legacy Families of St. Mary of Carmen are the only families with concurrent membership, each represented with three or four generations from 1935 to present.



Pasquale Leone

Pasquale Leone was a founding member and festival chairman. His son Nunzio was a revival member and also Festa chairman in 1967. Then his sons Mark and Mike joined in the early 1980's and Mike's son Mark joined the junior lodge in 2010.

In the Marrocco family, **Pasquale Marrocco** joined as a founding member in Nov 1935. His wife Giovanina also a founding member of the women's order in 1937. Their son, Roger Sr. a revival member served as recording secretary and a festival Vice Chairman. His sons Roger Jr. and Gerry joined in 1981. Patrick joined in 1987.



Pasquale Marrocco

In 2011, Pasquale Marrocco's grandson Carl Pasquarosa joined. Roger Marrocco Jr's daughter Alixandra and brother Patrick's two daughters Mikala and Vanessa restarted the women's lodge in 2012. Carl Pasquarosa's daughter Dominique also joined in 2013. Roger Marrocco Sr.s son-in-law Peter Marini joined in the fall of 2012. Roger Sr.'s wife Ruth and daughter Valerie joined the women's lodge in 2013.



Cesidio Gentile

Cesidio "Joe" Gentile was a founding member in 1935 until his death in 1955. His son Tony Gentile was a revival member, joining in 1967. He is our President Emeritus and an active member. His two son's Tony Jr. and Marcello and his two son's-in-law Ron and Carl trickling in as members through the 1980's and 1990's respectively.

Domenic Battista joined St. Mary of Carmen in early 1937 and remained a member until his death in 2012. He held many offices through the years. His nephew Mario joined shortly after immigrating to America in 1952. Mario's son Frank "Bubba" followed in 1987, and his daughter Vanessa joined the newly revived women's order in 2013.



Domenic Battista

Annino Gentile was a founding member in 1935, and active through the 1970's. Anthony, his son, has been a member since 1983. His two sons Anthony and Tommy joined in the mid 1990's and are members in good standing.



Annino Gentile

*Roger A. Marrocco, Jr. Historian
6/24/15*

MAYORAL PARTICIPATION THROUGHOUT THE YEARS



Edwin O. Childs

Newton's Mayors have historically been supporters of the Society of Saint Mary of Carmen, and have participated in the Festa. **Edwin O. Childs (1914-1929)** was a Nonantum resident. His photograph at left was featured in the first festival program book (the program cover—or what remains of it – is pictured at right) in 1937. During his service as Alderman in 1899, he was profoundly affected by the poverty of some of his constituents, and he founded what is now known as the **Nonantum Christmas Party Association.**



Taking part in the Festa parade has always been a tradition for Newton Mayors.

The three photos of the parade at right, taken from almost the same spot, show:



Paul M. Goddard (1940-1947)
wearing the fedora...



Theodore R. Lockwood (1948-1953)
wearing the straw hat...



Howard Whitmore, Jr. (1954-1959)
braving the elements uncovered
(second from right).



Monte G. Basbas

Mayor Monte G. Basbas (1966-1971) was particularly encouraging during the Society's revival years 1967 to 1971.



Theodore D. Mann

Theodore D. Mann (1972-1994) was an enthusiastic supporter of the Society, and for the Festa in 1972 issued the proclamation shown at right.



Thomas B. Concannon, Jr. (1994-1997) is shown here with State Auditor and Society life member A. Joseph DeNucci.



Joe DeNucci (left) and Thomas B. Concannon, Jr.

David B. Cohen (1998-2009) shown below, standing on the parade route with Marilyn Petitto Devaney of the Governor's Council.



David B. Cohen



Setti D. Warren

Setti D. Warren (2010-) pictured above with members Tino Digisi and Joe Caruso, issued a proclamation in 2010 declaring Nonantum to be Newton's "Villaggio Italiano"

