

## East Sacramento's 48th Street Italians

### Italian Roots Run Deep in East Sacramento: The Little Italy Recognition Project

**PHOTO BELOW:**

*East Sacramento 48<sup>th</sup> Street Italians hold a Reunion in 2003. Pictured are: Nini Lazzarini, Bill Skarles, Frank & Kay Ghilarducci, Willie Da Prato, Dick Sambucetti, David, Trish & Gina Mori, Deno Paoli and other street residents.*



#### *Italian roots run deep in East Sacramento.*

Italians were among the earliest pioneers of Sacramento and began settling here with the Gold Rush of the 1850's. During the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century a large concentration of Italians settled in the East Sacramento district of the City. Originally a rural area, by the

1920's Italian immigrant families and truck farmers were settling in and developing the area. Eventually, the continuing immigration of Italians into the area from the 1920's through the 1960's gave it a distinct Italian flavor and identity into the present.

### ***Little Italy Emerges before World War II***

The geographical heart of this "little Italy" neighborhood is generally identified as the 24 square block zone between 48<sup>th</sup> street and 59<sup>th</sup> street which is bounded by J Street and Folsom Boulevard. Folsom Boulevard and J street become the main business streets for the Italian businesses in the area.

By World War II the Italians were the largest immigrant group in the United States and in California. In East Sacramento, they established a thriving business district to serve their needs as a community. They also created social and communal institutions like St Mary's Church, built in the area in 1948, established Bocce leagues in East Portal Park which continue today and created a number of Italian community organizations which are still active.

The Italian presence in the historic Italian heart of East Sacramento represents over a century of Italian American history embedded in the roots of the area. Generations of Italian Americans have grown up and lived in the area and the Italian presence continues with longtime residents and businesses.



#### **PHOTOS ABOVE:**

***ABOVE LEFT:*** Louise Da Prato, Gloria Da Prato Tomei, Willie Da Prato, Peter Tomei,  
Lorraine Sambucetti

***ABOVE RIGHT:*** Laura Roberti, Kay Ghilarducci, Carl, Bob Dinelli, Rose Cooper

### ***The 48<sup>th</sup> Street Gang***

One of the early streets settled in the area by the Italian immigrants was 48<sup>th</sup> Street. The two-block long section of 48th street between J Street and Folsom Boulevard was predominately Italian from the start as many Italian families settled there during the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's. By World War II, nearly two dozen Italian families lived on that section of the street. It is estimated that some 80 Italian adults and children resided on those two blocks during the early years.

At the time, some 20 of the 48th street teenagers who hung out together, both boys and girls, and who were children of the immigrants, referred to themselves as ***the 48<sup>th</sup> Street Gang***. We are fortunate that some of these kids still are alive and proud of their story which they have shared with the Society. While many are in their 90's, they provide us with a living memory of the original Italian immigrants who settled the area. In 2003, some 50 of these Italian old timers came together for a reunion celebration and to share memories. Several photos of that celebration are contained in this article.

#### **PHOTOS BELOW:**

***BELOW LEFT: Carl Mori and Willie Da Prato***

***BELOW RIGHT: Laura and Deno Paoli***



### ***The Italian Families***

Based on the information given by some of ***the 48<sup>th</sup> Street Gang*** we have identified many of the families that lived on the street by name and the houses they lived in.

From 1931 to 1944, the Louis Market, founded by Louis DeFazio, operated at the Corner of 48<sup>th</sup> and J street. The Louis Market was a prime employer for many of the Italians in the area.

Among the families living on 48<sup>th</sup> street during this era which we identified were the **Gianino, Malerbi, Gianini, Da Prato, Belli, Sambocetti, Baruffaldi, Sambocetti, Mallegni, Barsetti, Stefani, Paoli, Ghilarducci, Mori, Da Prato, Sorocco, Cottini, Tornatorre, Dinelli, Gaddi, and Gerbi families.**

Many of these families immigrated from the Lucca area of Tuscany which is one of the main Italian regional groups in Sacramento. Other streets in East Sacramento have also had similar concentrations of Italians.

*The Italian Cultural Society would like to give special recognition to Gloria Tomei and La Verne Baruffaldi Britton for providing the information and photos about the 48<sup>th</sup> Street Italians contained in this article, Both are now in their 90's and reside in Sacramento.*



**PHOTO ABOVE:**

**Catherine Giannini, Rosalie Giannini, Dora Da Prato**

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### *The Little Italy Recognition Project*

The amazing story of East Sacramento's Little Italy neighborhood and the Italian people that made that story needs to be claimed and told and kept alive to inspire the future of the Italian Community.

Tens of thousands of Italians live in the greater Sacramento area and they need to know

about how bands of Italian immigrants who settled in Sacramento neighborhoods across the city forged a vibrant Italian American community. One whose legacy is still with us.

We are fortunate that the sons and daughters of these early pioneers to the city have left us with a record and a memory of those people and their accomplishments. There is much more to the story that needs to be told. In 1992, the Italian community created an exhibit documenting the early Italians of Sacramento. Part of that exhibit is on display at the Italian Cultural Center in Carmichael. But more needs to be done.

In order to continue the progress that has been made to celebrate our local history, A "Little Italy" planning committee has been organized to work with the City for recognition of the historic Little Italy District in East Sacramento. Some of the goals of the committee are to establish banners and signs that highlight the area to show off its Italian roots. Other goals include collecting more of the history of this place and its Italian people.

*For more information contact Bill Cerruti at the Italian Cultural Society at: [italy1@surewest.net](mailto:italy1@surewest.net).*

**You're Invited to READ "Reclaiming Little Italy in Sacramento" for more information about this project.**

*Click on photo or button below to access the article.*



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