

Italian History of Sacramento's Little Italy

Italian Americans were the largest immigrant group to come to the United States through Ellis Island and one of the largest immigrant groups to settle in California. By World War II in 1941, they were the largest immigrant group in California.

Italian roots run deep in Sacramento. Italian Americans were among the earliest pioneers of Sacramento and have been settling here since the Gold Rush. They settled in many parts of the City with concentrations in South Side, Oak Park and East Sacramento. In the 1930's and 1940s almost half the households in Oak Park had come from Italy, particularly along 39th Street then called Carmello Boulevard. Many moved to East Sacramento with the building of the St. Mary's Church there in 1948.

East Sacramento was originally a rural area but by the 1920's the East Sacramento area was home to many Italian immigrant families and truck farmers who developed the area. **The stone farmhouses of the past - "The Stone Sisters" – built and lived in by the early Italians still stand out as they border the districts neighborhood park.**

The high concentration of Italian families throughout the district gave the neighborhood a distinctly Italian flavor and identity. Many streets in the area have been predominately Italian from the start such as the two blocks of 48th Street between J Street and Folsom Blvd where some two dozen Italian Families lived between 1920 and 1950. Many Italians continue to reside in the district.

PHOTOS BELOW:

(L) Italian Cultural Society Dancers

(BELOW) ICS Director Bill Cerruti and Family (R) Councilmember Jeff Harris and Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg





The geographical heart of the "Little Italy" neighborhood is identified as the zone located between 48th and 59th Streets, and bounded by J Street and Folsom Blvd.

Here the Italians established a thriving social community and business district to serve their needs as a community. Folsom Boulevard and J street became the main business streets for the Italian businesses in the area. Italian businesses, including grocery stores, nurseries and restaurants, funeral home, barber, hardware and auto shops and others continue to operate in the zone along Folsom Boulevard.

The Italians also created social, religious and community institutions that continue to the present. In 1948, the Italian church, Saint Mary's, was built in the district by the Italian community as an Italian National Catholic Church to serve the needs of the Italian people with Italian priests conducting masses in Italian. Later the Italians built Giovanni Hall adjacent to the Church for parish events.

Italian community organizations from the past including the Italian Catholic Federation, the Italian Cultural Society, the Piemonte Reale, the Dante Club, the Marsala Lodge, the Sons of Italy, the Arberesh of Sacramento, and the East Portal Bocce Club, still operate in the area.

The St. Mary's elementary school and St Francis High School in the district are among the few city schools that have offered Italian classes. Popular Bocce leagues are held in the neighborhoods East Portal Park Bocce court complex. The office of the Italian Vice Consulate of Italy for Sacramento was located in the zone at 54th Street and Folsom Boulevard to serve the needs of the Italian immigrants until as recently as 2015.

The Italian presence in the historic 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. The Italian presence in the historic "Little Italy" district continues with longtime residents and businesses.

Italian Americans have played an integral role in the cultural and economic landscape of Sacramento since its inception. The enterprise and contributions of these Italian pioneers and their descendants is a unique legacy and one shared by us all. It is important to preserve the local memory of Little Italy and the Italian history of the neighborhood. The story of East Sacramento's "little Italy" neighborhood and the Italian people that made that story deserves to be kept alive and recognized.

The designation of the "Little Italy Historic District" highlights the culture and history of the Italians in East Sacramento and promotes the area's historic identity and still living part of the heritage of the City. It also creates a wonderful opportunity to develop and protect the neighborhood quality of life.

PHOTOS BELOW:

(L) Balliamo Dance Troupe

(R) Patrizia Cinquini Cerruti, ICS Travel and Language Director, hands out cake to guests

