

# ALTRE VOCI

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NEWSLETTER OF THE ITALIAN CULTURAL SOCIETY

## CLAIMING OUR HERITAGE:

### *Little Italy In Sacramento*

**Italian roots run Deep in Sacramento.** Italians were among the earliest pioneers of Sacramento and have been settling here since the Gold Rush. Generations of Italian-Americans have helped shape the cultural and economic landscape of Sacramento. In the period between 1850–1870 Italians were concentrated along the City's Embarcadero. By the early 20th century they were concentrated in Southside, Oak Park, Land Park, Midtown, 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.

After World War II, the largest concentration emerged in the East Sacramento area when Italians moved from the other city neighborhoods to East Sacramento with the construction of the new St Mary's Church in 1948 at 58th and M Street after a major fundraising campaign by the Italian community. St. Mary's Church has served as a spiritual, social and ethnic hub for the Italian community since 1906 when it was founded at 8th and N street and later moved to 7th and T street in 1916. As an Italian parish church it was staffed by Italian Priests and masses were held in Italian.

By World War II, the East Sacramento area was home to many Italian Truck Farms and already populated by Italians. Some of the Stone Farm Houses built by the Italians still exist around East Portal Park in the heart of the neighborhood. The five existing stone houses are called "**The Stone Sisters**" and were originally inhabited by Italian families named **Reali, Guidotti, Carli, Belluomini** and **Brida**. In 1946, across the street from the park on Rodeo Way, 20 homes were built on Anthony Zito's produce farm and lived in by Italian Families with names like **Defazio, Luigi, DaPrato, Pane, Puccinelli, Stefani, Grida, Guidotti, Procida** and **Reali**.

The high concentration of families throughout the zone established the neighborhood with a distinctly Italian flavor and as the core of the city's Italian community. Many Italian-Americans still live in the area and one can still hear Italian spoken.

The Little Italy neighborhood, generally identified as concentrated between 48th and 59th Streets and bounded by J Street and Folsom Boulevard, continued to grow and thrive through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970's and into the present. The Italians established many communal institutions in the neighborhood like St Mary's Church and Giovanni Hall, a Bocce club in East Portal Park which today has 65 league teams, a number of Italian-American organizations which operate in the area and Catholic



**St Mary's Catholic Church at 58th and M Street (2020)**

schools; St Mary's Elementary and St Francis High, which generations of Italian-American children have attended and which offer classes in Italian.

Italian-American organizations operating in the area include the *St Mary's Italian Catholic Federation (ICF) Branch #45 (est. 1936)*, *The Dante Club (est. 1923)*, *Marsala Lodge (est. 1911)*, *The East Portal Bocce Club (est. 1970)*, *The Piemonte Reale (est. 1888)*, *Arberesh of Sacramento (est. 1990)* and the *Italian Cultural Society (est. 1981)*

The Italian presence in the historic "Little Italy" district continues with longtime residents and businesses. Italian businesses grew up around the Italian neighborhood to serve Italians. Many businesses have operated in the historic area along Folsom Blvd and still dot the area. Grocery stores with Italian goods have been a staple of the area such as *Corti Bros (59th & Folsom)* (Corti family), *Quality Market (51st & Folsom)* (Brida family) and *Italian Importing Company (51st & Folsom)* (Velo Family).

Other important businesses catering to the Italians were the *Square Deal Restaurant-Stefani family (58th & Folsom)* and *Espanol Italian restaurant (58th & Folsom)*, *Relles Florist (52nd & Folsom)*, *Lagormarsino Seed (51st & Folsom)*, *Pietro Tallini Nursery (56th & Folsom)*, *Italian Law Office (49th & Folsom)*, *Pesce Locksmith (53rd & Folsom)*, *Nicoletti Funeral home (54th & Folsom)*, *Frank Lettini's Automotive (52 & Folsom)*, *Bertolani Travel (57th & J)*, *Mario Duchini's Gas Station (57th & H)*, *Archie Bugatto Hardware (56th & J)* and *Affinito's "Italian Corners" shopping complex at 51st & Folsom Blvd*. A Bank of America branch that served Italian neighborhoods and staffed by Italian branch managers operated at *53rd & Folsom* as did an Italian Vice-Consulate office at *54th & Folsom*. Many of these businesses continue to maintain the Italian heritage of the area.

**The 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.**