

Local Italians Save the Marble Steps of St. Mary's Church



St Mary's Church is located on 58th and M streets in the heart of Sacramento's "Little Italy Historic District."

Once the Italian National Church of Sacramento, it was built by the Italians as a communal center of their Catholic religious life. Many of the Catholic Churches that served the Italian immigrant communities were founded by the immigrants who were not welcome in the American Catholic Churches. The priests were Italian, and the masses were in Italian. Many still exist and have been saved, others have not.

PHOTO BELOW: The original St. Mary's Church located at 8th and N Streets.



Originally located at 8th and N Streets in 1907, it was later moved to 7th and T Streets in 1916. In 1948 it was rebuilt in East Sacramento on 58th street.

Father Silvio Masante came to Sacramento in 1934. He helped to secure the marble used in the Italian Pavilion at San Francisco's Treasure Island World's Fair of 1939 for the new church at 58th and M Street.

There was already a large concentration of Italian families and farms in east Sacramento when the Church was built. After its construction, Italians from the other city neighborhoods moved to the East Sacramento area around the Church, making it the most Italian section of the city.

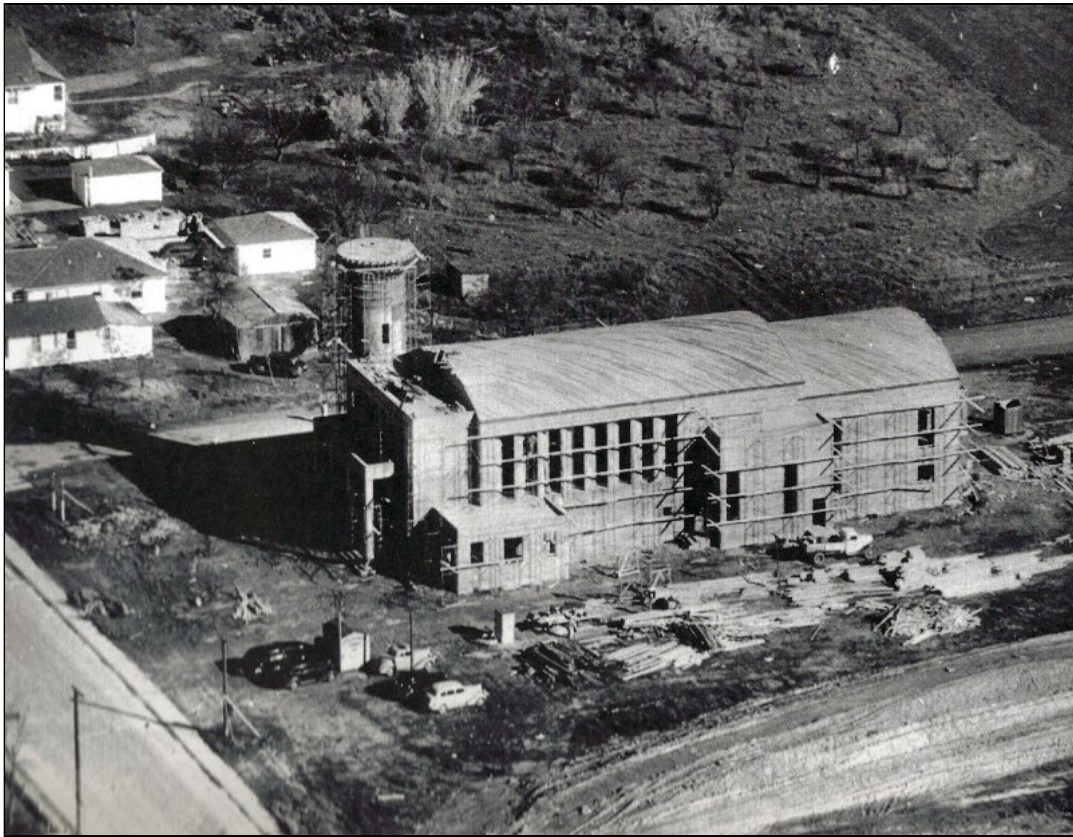


PHOTO ABOVE: The new St. Mary's Church under construction, circa 1947

The donated marble was stored at the St Mary's Church located at 7th and T Street. With the construction of St Mary's in 1948 on 58th street, the stored marble was used for the Altar and the front steps of the new St. Mary's.

A new landscaping project at the Church in 2023 included the removal of the Marble steps which were to be discarded. Janine Orsi, newly installed Local Italian Catholic Federation leader of the St. Mary's ICF chapter #45, took on the project of saving the marble steps and the Italian roots of St Mary's.

Against the odds, Janine single handily mobilized the Italian community organizations and was able to convince the new priest and parish to let the Italians salvage the marble. It was touch and go as salvaging the marble did not fit into the landscape contractor's plans. But Janine persisted. The Marble steps have been saved and are now in the hands of the Italian community.

It was a close call. Like most Italian American projects, it takes that one dedicated and passionate person to make a difference. Janine Orsi was the driving force behind saving part of our history, and part of our story, for future generations.



PHOTO ABOVE: St. Mary's Church at 7th and T Street in 1916.

The story is not over. There are more chapters to write.

The bulk of the marble has been salvaged and moved by the East Portal Park Bocce Association to its courts at east portal. The Bocce club intends to build a long-wanted patio out of the marble and dedicate a plaque to the Italian roots of the marble.

As for Janine, her mission continues. She acquired some of the marble steps for a monument at St. Mary's Church dedicated to the Italian roots of the Church. Now she must convince the people in charge to allow this to happen.

The Italian Cultural Society worked with Janine and the East Portal bocce club to achieve this success. It was a communal effort. The Society will continue to support Janine to complete this Little Italy historical project.

Many of the Italian residents of Sacramento have roots in St. Mary's Church. They can be proud that some came forward to make a difference. The Italian Cultural Society is supportive of community projects that preserve our history, promote our heritage, and tell our story. If you would like to be part of making history and supporting the St. Mary's Italian Roots Memorial Project, contact us at by email at: italy1@surewest.net.



PHOTO ABOVE: St. Mary's Church on 58th and Folsom Blvd., 2020