

**Emanuela "Nellie" Cacciatore and Alfonso Calvagna  
came from Aragona and Married in Rockford**



My name is Mario Calvagna son of Alfonso Calvagna and Emanuela Cacciatore Calvagna. They were born in Aragona, Agrigento, Sicily, Italy.

My wife is Marilyn (Swanson) Calvagna. Her parents were born in Sweden.

My father Alfonso was the only member of his family who came to America. He was born in Aragona on February 4, 1890, Son of Mario Calvagna and Rosaria Cipolla. He left them and his sisters Assunta and Francesca and brother Salvatore to come to the United States. He sailed on the ship Canada from the Port of Palermo and arrived at Ellis Island, New York, February 21, 1913; the ship had 2,166 passengers. During World War II, the Canada was used as a hospital ship and ended service in 1952.

My mother Emanuela (Nellie) was born in Aragona, Agrigento, Sicily February 8, 1899, to Biagio Cacciatore and Francesca Vaccarello.

Her father's first wife Carmela DiGiacamo had died in 1897 having two children, Anna and Gerlando Cacciatore. His second wife Francesca Vaccarello died in 1917, having five children, Emanuela, Vincenzo, Rosa, Maria and Angelo.

Gerlando came to America, arriving at Ellis Island in 1916. Emanuela came to America with her father, her sisters, Rosa and Maria and brother Angelo, on the ship the San Giovanni from the Port of Naples, arriving at Ellis Island on April 1, 1921. Her Sister Anna who was married remained in Italy; her brother Vincenzo stayed in Italy, to serve his mandatory military service in the Italian Army. He came to America on the ship the Suffren, arriving at Ellis Island on November 1, 1923.

Alfonso married Emanuela on June 1, 1924, at St. Anthony Church in Rockford. They lived in Cherry, Illinois. Alfonso worked for the St. Paul Coal Company as a miner. He was a member of the United Mine Workers of America, Local Union Number 2711. Later he worked at the Davey Pump Company in Rockford.

Alfonso and Emanuela's first child was a son, Mario born in Cherry in 1925, who died in Rockford, December 12, 1927. I was born December 26, 1927 and named Mario after my grandfather. A story I used to hear was that a neighbor friend whose mother was also having a baby, had to get a mid-wife to help with the birth, because their Doctor was busy with my birth.

As our family grew, I had a brother, Biagio, who was born 1929 and died in 1932. My sister Frances was born 1933, married Tony Barcelona in 1956: Tony died in 1993, and she died in 2003. My brother Russell, born 1935, married Gloria Johnson in 1962; he died in 2011. My brother, William (Bill), was born in 1939, married Aloma Poleziano in 1964; Aloma died in 2011. Bill died in 2015.

Our family lived at 821 Kent Street across the street from St. Anthony's Statue of the Blessed Mother. Nellie would often bring flowers to the shrine. An incident occurred one night with a drive by shooting of the statue, and the damage was unrepairable. My mother received permission from the parish, to collect money for a new statue. She made many door-to-door collections and collections from parish and Italian organizations. She died October 30, 1961. Pastor Father Maurice asked me to get a plaque made in her memory. It was put on the base of the statue.

My father, Alfonso, died October 22, 1952.

I grew up in South Rockford, attended St. Anthony School, class of 1941. I graduated from West High School, class of 1945 followed by two years in the U.S. Navy. Marilyn and I were married at St. Anthony Church on May 9, 1953. We have three sons:

Peter Calvagna

Paul Calvagna, married Lisa Waugh, they have two daughters, Meghan and Rebecca.

Phillip Calvagna, married Michele Arduengo, they have a daughter, Elena.

As the elder relatives passed on, communications with relatives in Italy was lost. In 1990 when I retired, Marilyn and I took a 22-day tour of Italy including Sicily. The tour ended in Palermo, Sicily. We had arranged to stay over, and had a car rental. We drove to Aragona where we found Calvagna first cousins and their families. We still communicate via postal and e-mail. We tried to locate relatives on my mother's (Cacciatore) side with no success. My mother's sister had relocated in Viareggio, in Northern Italy.

In 1999 we took another trip to Italy to visit Calvagna relatives. We arrived in Rome, to visit a first cousin and his family. We later flew to Palermo where we were met by cousins and spent two weeks with relatives, including attending a wedding. This gave us an opportunity to see how the Italians live. We continue to correspond with these relatives.

In 2005 a Cacciatore cousin from California was planning a driving trip through Italy. I had an old letter with an address in Viareggio, Lucca, that was from a son of my mother's sister, Anna. Our cousin visited the address on the letter and was told that the family he was looking for had sold them the house years ago but that they were still in the area. Going through a phone book they found a familiar name. As it

turned out they found an 82-year-old daughter of my mother's sister and her family. She said her uncles and aunts went to America and that she never got to meet any of them. She was told that she still had an aunt living in New York City at that time who was 97.

Later her son with whom I started communicating sent me an e-mail. He was going to take his mother to New York City to meet her Aunt. In my reply to him, I told him that her Aunt in New York had a son and daughter; however if he could also visit Rockford, there were many relatives in the area. His reply was that he would also bring his mother to Rockford on the trip. They stayed at our home during their visit and at an open house we had 70 relatives meet their Italian cousins. They visited the Ethnic Museum and St. Anthony's Church during their trip. The 2006 Festa Italiana magazine contained this story with photos.

Submitted by Mario Calvagna for the Genealogy Project for the Culture and Education Committee of GRIAA Immigration Histories of Rockford Italian Families.