

Castronovo Family



My name is Nino Castronovo and I am, the adopted son of Mary Frances Castronovo. I am writing about the Salvatore Castronovo family.

Salvatore Castronovo was born on October 16, 1889. He came to America through Ellis Island and settled in Rockford, Illinois at the age of 13. He married Maria (Mary) Audenzia Maggio in 1909, and together they had 6 children, Joe, Frances, Lillian, Mary Frances, Sam and Rose.

The family settled in south Rockford at 1427 Rock Street in 1927, and purchased the lot for \$800.00.

The first born children, Joe and Frances, died at a young age due to polio and influenza.

Rose was born on August 2, 1911, and became a piano teacher, and also worked at the AAA Motor Club, and also worked at the family business in later years.

Sam was born on September 22, 1912, and became a fashion designer and also played the violin. He often was hired to give recitals at private residences.

Lillian was born June 16, 1921, and at the age of 34 contracted cancer. Although engaged to be married, she died in 1955.

Grandma Mary died at the age of 41 on August 15, 1934 from scarlet fever.

Mary Frances was born on June 10, 1916. She had a dream to own her own dress shop. She graduated high school in 1934 – the same year that her mother died, and worked to go to design school. She worked in a garment factory in Rockford until she saved enough money to go to Traphagan School of Design in New York. Upon graduation she accepted a position at Butterick Pattern Co.

In 1937 she told her father she wanted to open a dress shop, and with \$750.00 started Castronovo Dress Shop at 323 North Church Street along with Rose, Sam and Lillian. In 1947 they moved to the present location at 722 North Main Street, and Sam moved to San Francisco to open a garment factory.

Grandpa Salvatore died on May 24, 1953, and at that time Sam came back to Rockford to help his sisters Rose and Mary Frances to run the business.

In 1959 while vacationing in Palermo Sicily, Mary Frances adopted a 15 month old boy and named him Nino. With the help of U.S. Senator Everett Dirksen, Frank St. Angel and many others from the Italian community, they were instrumental to have an emergency session of Congress to pass a bill for a foreign adoption to a single parent. On September 12, 1959 President Eisenhower signed the bill into law, and Nino became a U.S. citizen on the way to Rockford.

The family lived above the dress shop at 722 North Main Street, and finally moved to 2115 Bradley Road in 1962.

Rose died on January 27, 1966, and Sam on November 19, 1973. Castronovo Bridal Shop was then owned and operated by Mary Frances, and even after her death on August 1, 2007, is still family run by me, Nino Castronovo. Mary Frances' dream is still alive now after 78 years.

Pictured above is a 1952 photograph of Salvatore Castronovo with children Sam, Rose, Lillian and Mary Francis. The other photograph was taken of me shortly before I was adopted in 1959 at the orphanage in Palermo.

Submitted on October 17, 2015 by Nino Castronovo for the Genealogy Project – Culture and Education Committee – “Immigration Histories of Rockford Italian Families.”