

Antonino LaMendola Family



Antonino and Giuseppina (Urso) LaMendola left Aragona, Sicily in 1924. They planned to settle in Champaign, IL, with LaMendola cousins, but decided to come to Rockford, where there were better working opportunities. It was also where three of Antonino's Army buddies were living. He had served with them in Italy for seven years, and had been captured and held as prisoners of war together during World War I. He was happy to reconnect with them in Rockford, and they served as a second family to each other, serving as godparents to each other's children.

Antonino and Giuseppina rented for years at 1208 South Church St., and then bought the house at 1435 South Main Street, where they raised their two daughters, Geraldine, and me, Serafina (Sally). Antonino was first employed at Roper's Foundry, then at Ebloy Foundry, as a molder, on the 3pm to 11pm shift, until he retired. However, he found he couldn't relax, so went back to work as a janitor at Barber Coleman Co., until he decided to really retire.

Antonino and Giuseppina also kept a large backyard garden, where they grew vegetables, and made wonderful Sicilian dishes. They would get together in the early Fall to make wine with the Army buddies. My godfather, Vincent Attardo, had a Model T, and would pick up the grapes near the IC train station on South Main, and would deliver them to each buddy's house. My dad, Antonino, had the grape crusher and press, and would crush his grapes first. Then, Vincent would pick up the crusher, and go to Vincent Cresenzo's house, then to a new friend, Peter Arnone's, and then back to Vincent Attardo's house to crush. They would all let the grapes ferment, and then do the same procedure with the press. In mid-October, it was time to taste the new product! The wives prepared a grand feast, at each house. The four couples would eat, drink, sing, and enjoy each other's company and wine. Another Army buddy from Aragona, Raymond Zammuto, would be treated to bottles of wine, but was too busy running his grocery store to be able to join the celebrations.

Giuseppina (Josephine), was raised in a convent school in Aragona, Sicily. Her father died when she was seven years old, and her mother delivered her youngest brother six months after her father's death. The village would provide for one of the four daughters to be educated at the convent school, and Josephine volunteered to go. She lived at the convent for fourteen years. The school was located in an old castle, called "Lu Palazzo Principe". She enjoyed her life there, and went on to teach needlework there, until she married. She and Antonino had a son in Sicily. Giovanni, (John) was 14 months old when he died of Scarlet Fever. In Rockford, she raised my sister and I, and worked at Contour Hosiery Mills. She then worked as the deli supervisor and cook at the first Hilander Store on Wyman St. She enjoyed cooking and baking, and from mid-February to March 19th, she helped friends and neighbors prepare for their St. Joseph's altars. She also did a lot of sewing and costume making for St. Elizabeth's Social Center.

Antonino and Giuseppina enjoyed their lives in Rockford, and were active in the Aragona Club, of which Antonino was a founder.

Submitted on September 24, 2016 by Serafina (Sally) LaMendola Cicero for the Genealogy Project for Culture and Education Committee of GRIAA "Immigration Histories of Rockford Italian Families".