

The Giovanni and Maddalena Zanocco Family



Left Photo – Zanocco brothers: Angelo, Gerald, Joe Salbego, Tony and Charley.

Right Photo – Zanocco family: Giovanni (behind), Maddalena, Geraldine, Tony and Charley.

Our grandfather, Giovanni Zanocco was born in Caltrano, Province of Vicenza, in the Veneto region of Italy, May 30, 1884. At about 21 years of age he left Italy traveling to Argentina with a brother. There, sometime between 1905-1907, he found a job in a silver mine (according to a distant relative in Argentina).

On February 21, 1908 he returned to Italy to marry Maddalena Sola. Giovanni and Maddalena had two sons born in Italy; Antonio, born in Caltrano on July 16, 1910 (Angelina Sandona), and Carlo, born on October 13, 1911 (Bernice Bilanowski).

At some point Giovanni returned to America. He traveled by train to Chicago then on to Rockford where he found work at the Carrico Stone Company as a driller in their quarry. During that time he boarded with the Rossi family.

Eventually, he was able to send for his wife Maddalena and their two sons to join him in America. In 1916 they departed from Genoa, Italy aboard the steam ship Duca degli Abruzzi arriving at Ellis Island. They traveled by train to Rockford.

Our grandparents' family first lived in an apartment located at 1109 Kilburn Avenue close to the stone quarry which was located between Avon and Kilburn Avenue. About a year later John found work with the W.F. and John Barnes Co.

They moved to 1117 Green Street, in the Venetian neighborhood of Rockford, where the rest of their children were born; Geraldine (November 15, 1915) (Joseph Salbego), Angelo (July 11, 1918) (Adeline Staebler), and Gerald (March 8, 1920) (Violet Naretta).

In 1927 the family moved to their new home at 1306 Chestnut Street. Giovanni worked at W.F. & John Barnes until his retirement after 30 years of service.

The children attended St. Mary's school, though Antonio "Tony" and Carlo "Charley" had to leave school after the 8th grade to support the family.

Tony worked for a grocer at the corner of Corbin and Cunningham Streets. He lived above the store so he could be there at 5 a.m. to help with the early morning customers. He then worked for Sam Giardini at the State Street Market. Charley found work with the W.F. & John Barnes Company like his Dad.

The experience in the grocery store was a factor in the family's decision in 1932 to purchase a Royal Blue grocery store that was for sale on Rockford's east side at Adams and Revel Streets. They were able some time later to purchase the 11th Street Cash Grocery and Market in the 2900 block of 11th Street next to St. Edwards Church. The store was renamed "Charley's Royal Blue" and operated by Charley and his brother-in-law Joe Salbego. They also purchased a store in the 1600 block of Kishwaukee Street. That store was sold a few years later to open a larger grocery store. That one, located in the 2000 block of 11th Street, was operated by Angelo and Gerald.

In 1950 our uncles, Angelo and Gerald, purchased Elm Distributors, a distributor for Blue Star Potato Chips. They owned Elm Distributors for over 20 Years. It was later sold to Fairmont Foods the parent company of Blue Star. Angelo and Gerald then opened an Ace Hardware store in the Edgebrook Shopping Center. Their two sons now operate Zanocco Ace Hardware.

Our Nonno was a gentle, quiet man, very kind and soft spoken. I remember, as a young child, walking with him to a large lot he tended at Green Street and Hinkley Avenue to plant vegetables for the stores. He would ask me to come along, he'd say he needed my help. Also, (the real big deal) he let me turn the crank on the grape crusher when he was making wine. Our Nonna was a wonderful cook and baker, she made dinner every Sunday for the whole family. Janice, my sister remembers tasting her first glass of wine (a glass of 7 Up with a splash of wine) and eating the purple grapes from the vine. We were told not to eat the white grapes! In the afternoon the adults would gather around the kitchen table and play cards and visit while some of us played board games. We hold dear to our wonderful Italian traditions and our ancestors who made it possible.

Submitted on Sunday, February 21, 2016 by Bob Zanocco and Janice Zanocco Erickson for the Genealogy Project for Culture and Education Committee of GRIAA "Immigration Histories of Rockford Italian Families."