

The Lodovico Giammalva Family

By Jo Giammalva Wargo



Lodovico Giammalva, my paternal grandfather, was born in Bisacquino, Sicily. He first came to the United States in 1890 because a drought in Sicily had ruined his crops. He came to work in a sawmill in Texas to earn money and about four years later, in 1894, he returned home. Because of another drought a few years later, Lodovico again came to a sawmill, this one in Seran, Texas. On this trip, his wife, Aurelia Rosato Giammalva, accompanied him. After five miscarriages and stillbirths, they had four healthy children. The oldest was Jasper and the second was my father, Giuseppe (Joseph), born on May 10, 1901. Their two sisters were Frances and Phylis.

Because my grandmother, Aurelia, became ill in the sawmill area, the entire family returned to Sicily in 1904, when my father was only three years old. In 1912, Lodovico's crops were again not doing well, so he came to another sawmill, this one in Lufkin, Texas. This time he brought with him his oldest child, Jasper, who was twelve years old. Eventually, after working in the sawmill for several years, they made their way to Cedar Falls, Iowa, to work on the railroad in 1915.

My father, Joseph, was nineteen when he came from Sicily to join his dad and brother in Cedar Falls. A couple of years later, my Nana Aurelia, Aunt Francis, and Aunt Mary, who was born in Bisacquino in 1905, also made the long journey to America. (Phylis, who had been born in Seran, Texas, had died in Sicily when she was only five years old.) They arrived in New York Harbor on Thanksgiving Day, 1922, and eventually boarded a train to Cedar Falls. Finally, after ten years of separation, the entire family was reunited.

About six months later, in 1923, the family came to Rockford after hearing from a friend here that there were many jobs. At first, my father worked at Ingersoll, scraping machine blocks. Then, in 1926, Jasper and Joseph bought a shoe repair shop, hoping to use the knowledge and experience my dad had gained, starting at age twelve, as he learned the trade of making and repairing shoes in Bisacquino. The shop was located on North Main Street next to the Palace Theater and, thus, it became the Palace Shoe Repair Business. The business moved three times, but always remained on North Main Street. The last move was to 204 North Main and the eighty-six-year-old business is still located there, owned and operated by Joseph's oldest son, Lou, and his two sons, Dave and Tom.

On June 5, 1927, Joseph married my mother, Anna Cascio Giammalva, at St. Anthony Church. They lived on Winnebago Street, south of the viaduct, for a few years and then moved to 1701 Montague Street. Together they raised seven children: Aurelia (Rae) Ferro, Concetta (Connie) Cascio, Lodovico (Lou), Frances Marchese, Vincent, Joanne Wargo, and Joseph.

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