

## TRAPANI FAMILY HISTORY



My grandparents were, Giuseppe Trapani, born in 1876, Tuscany, Italy, passed, 1958, Rockford, Illinois, Giovanna Genussa, born, 1876, Roccomena, Sicily, 1876, passed 1876, Rockford, Illinois.

### Offspring:

Vincent Trapani, (my father), born, September 22, 1903, Louisiana, passed January 30, 1971, Rockford, Illinois

Joseph Trapani, was born, 1905, Louisiana, passed, 1955, Rockford, Illinois.

Catherine Trapani Vaccarello, born in 1907, Rockford, Illinois, passed 1992, Rockford, Illinois.

Dad, Vincent, married Maria Concetta Bruscatto (Katie). She was born on January 27, 1907, Louisiana, passed on July 24, 1983, Rockford, Illinois.

### Their offspring:

Joanne Trapani, born, March 12, 1930, Rockford, Illinois.

Joseph V. Trapani, born, July 10, 1935, Rockford, Illinois, passed March 30, 2009, Rockford, Illinois.

My grandparents immigrated from Italy and entered America at the Port of New Orleans, LA, 1895. They entered this country without papers, otherwise known as WOP.

My grandfather's original surname, is unknown. The name, Trapani was given to him, presumably because of language difficulties. His mother's maiden name was Morgan. With tears in his eyes he told me they never saw each other again.

After entering the Port of New Orleans, they discovered life in Louisiana Swamp country was unbearable; hot, humid conditions, alligators flopping under their floor and difficult work in the cotton and sugar cane fields. Life was unsustainable. They moved to Saint Louis, MO, where cousins employed them in fruit orchards. That too, became brutal, they moved to Rockford, Illinois via the Illinois Central Railroad.

Before moving from Louisiana to Saint Louis, they found a County Hospital in New Orleans, where a doctor operated on my dad's mouth cleft pallet and hair lip. (My grandmother kept him alive by mashing food and

pushing it past the hole in his pallet in order to keep him alive.) Once that surgery was sufficiently healed they moved to Saint Louis, MO.

They continued to seek quality of life they hoped to attain.

The family of four boarded The Illinois Central Railroad, arrived in Rockford, Illinois, where friends preceded them. Thankfully, they were literate, but spoke only their native Italian.

Friends gave them needed support until they became self-sufficient enough to maintain themselves.

Grandfather purchased a horse and wagon from which he sold fruit throughout Rockford. The fruit wagon morphed into a Fruit Market.

With the advent of the automobile, the Fruit Market became a gasoline station on the corner of Cunningham and Winnebago Streets, Rockford, Illinois, known as number ONE, the first of ten stations. The Home Oil Company was born.

Mortgages were needed. At the beginning of this enterprise, my dad, at age five, became Interpreter for his father, who spoke little English, and the bank officer, who spoke no Italian. Thus, they obtained the necessary first mortgages. Their smarts and risk taking ability belong to the bravest among us.

Number two station was built on Railroad property on Kishwaukee Street in Rockford. They relied on gasoline being delivered by truck and train. On the leased land, they built a station, an office and space for my grandfather's garden.

He grew Italian vegetables and a precious peach tree. This was his joy.

There were difficult challenges, the greatest among them were:

- The Great Depression (dad delivered food to those who did not have enough to eat) our stations were closed, our money was lost.
- World War II. (all men were drafted)

During the war, only one station remained open. That was number three station located at the corner of Kilburn Ave. and School Street. Dad, alone, ran that station, at the cost of his life. He sustained the entire extended family.

He worked sixteen hour days, seven days a week, for many years without vacation, through horribly, bitter-cold winters. He endured many bouts of pneumonia, raging fevers and frost-bite. He slept only to rise at 5 A.M the following morning to be at that station. He had no respite, no rest and no relief. This is a bitter part of my memory. We gave him as much love, support and home remedies as possible.

They gave me gifts of resilience, a strong work ethic and deep devotion to all of them. Whenever I think of their entrepreneurial spirit, determination, inability to speak English, and the many hardships they endured, I am awed.

In addition, dad, Vincent, had a most beautiful, tenor singing voice. Enrico Caruso's voice teacher volunteered to teach my dad, FREE of charge, after hearing him sing. Dad turned this offer down, because of his devotion to the family that needed him.

Their morals were impeccable. My deep love for them endures.

Joseph V. Trapani married Mary Sacco. They had five children: Concetta, Angela, Vincent, Mary Jo, Joseph.

Joanne Trapani married and divorced Jack Gennaro. During their marriage, they adopted two children: Charles and Mary Anne.

In the photograph taken approximately 1906 are my grandfather, Giuseppe Trapani, sitting on his lap is my dad, Vincent Trapani. My grandmother Giovanna Genussa Trapani and sitting on her lap is my uncle, Joseph Trapani.

Submitted By Joanne Trapani Gennaro on January 7, 2017 for the Genealogy Project for Culture and Education Committee of GRIAA "Immigration Histories of Rockford Italian Families