



Historically Speaking

With Town Historian
Richard Forliano

Alfonso's story: The arrival of the Italians



Contributed photos

Giuseppe DiPippo, the grandfather of Al DiPippo and son of Alfonso, who fought in World War I for the United States.

Writer's note:

In late May of 2011, we began a more detailed study of the Italian families who came to live and work in Tuckahoe and Eastchester between 1900 and 1929. After reading numerous books and interviewing many people of Italian descent, I am both amazed and awed by the sacrifices, courage, and determination of these early Italian families. In the following articles, we hope to tell the story of how these families overcame impossible obstacles and helped make this community what it is today. This project is a work in progress, and please contact the editor at mark@hometown.com if you would like to share the contribution of your family to the growth of the Eastchester/Tuckahoe community between 1900 and 1929.

This article is co-written by Al DiPippo, a direct descendant of Alfonso.

At the end of the 19th century, it became increasingly clear that the inexperienced government of the recently-formed nation of Italy could no longer support its growing population of unschooled peasants who were in desperate need of work. The first migration at the advent of the 20th century was primarily a male movement of young men in their teens and 20s from Southern Italy who planned to work, save money, and either send for the rest of their family or possibly return to Italy.

The United States was going through a period of rapid industrial expansion. By the 1890s, thousand of Italian workers – many of them unskilled and illiterate – poured into Westchester.

Mount Vernon, that up until 1892 was a village within Eastchester, had the largest Italian population in Westchester.

There were great public works that needed to be completed. Common



A picture of the DiPippo family circa 1915-1916. Standing (L-R): Cristi, Angelo, Grandpa Alfonso, John, and Paul. Sitting (L-R): Ralph, Filomenia, and Joseph. All six of Alfonso's sons were involved in the building trades in town.

laborers were needed to complete railroad, highway, and other construction projects in the area. Up until 1906, any man capable of a hard day's work was needed on the new Croton Dam in northern Westchester and after 1911, the rebuilding of the old Kensico Dam in Valhalla. Italians worked in the still active Tuckahoe marble quarries from which stones were not only used locally, but for major projects from New York City to Chicago. Many laborers were hired as labor contractors, building homes for people moving into the community.

As has been previously mentioned, the demographics of the new migration were also a predominantly male movement. The first Italian immigrants to this community were single men living in encampments, hotels, boarding houses, or inns, alone or without families. A typical pattern was for the father, brother, or oldest son to try his luck in America. If successful, they would send for other members of the family.

The story of Alfonso DiPippo illustrates the perseverance, courage, and filial devotion that characterized many of the Italian families that came to live in this community. Alfonso, age 43, emigrated from Italy and arrived in New York City three days after the fourth of July in 1902. He never returned. He was from the village of Villanova Del Battista in the province of Campagna. A year later, Alfonso was joined by his brother, Leopold (Paul) in Tuckahoe. They sent for their sister and the three lived together on Washington Street.

Alfonso was a tailor who occasionally worked in Tuckahoe. More often, his work would require him to board the train and travel to East Harlem, where friends would employ him. Each street in Harlem had Italians who came from different sections in southern Italy. The reason for this was that there were different Italian dialects. A person from Sicily found

it very difficult to communicate with an Italian from Naples. They lived on streets with people that they could communicate with easily.

Sadly, the year after he moved to Tuckahoe, his wife Josephine died in Italy soon after the birth of his youngest son (Nicola). Alfonso saved money and brought six of his sons and one daughter over from Italy; this process took nine years to complete. Nicola, his youngest, never came to America. When it was his time to come, redness was noticed around his nose and eyes by the shipping line. The alleged sickness thwarted his voyage. The shipping line would have to pay for transport back to the country of origin if that person was not allowed to enter. In reality, Nicola was not sick, but too distraught to leave his maternal grandmother who became his caregiver. Nicola was never reunited with his family in America.

All six of Alfonso's sons were involved in the building trades. None were able to attend school. The DiPippo brothers erected well-built, sturdy homes through Eastchester and Tuckahoe. In the 1920s, the DiPippo's built a number of homes on Morgan Street, west of Waverly Square. All the grandchildren of Alfonso were raised on Morgan Street, they attended the Eastchester schools, and now there is a sixth generation living in Eastchester.

The story of the DiPippo family is only one of many who came to live and work in the town. Their story is illustrative of the great courage, sacrifice, and perseverance of the families who came to work, stayed, and remained in our community. In the next series of articles, the unique experiences of the Italians who began to settle in our community will be told in their own words.

This is the second of a series of articles on Italian Americans who came to live and work in our community. "Historically Speaking" appears bi-weekly.