

Paris - Sartino Family History



Sam Paris was born Antonino Parisi on July 29, 1905, in Aragona, Sicily to Enrico (1875-1958) and Carmella Balistreri (1882-1951) Parisi. Enrico and Carmella were married in 1899 and once their family was started, began dreaming of a better life away from the sulfur mines where he worked since age 7. Enrico and his brother, Domenico, soon left Sicily to pursue their dreams in America. To them "America" was Argentina in South America, but Enrico did not like the culture so they worked their way on a ship back to Sicily after a few short months. Enrico and Domenico then sailed to the United States. They boarded the Principe de Piemonte in Palermo and arrived at Ellis Island on May 13, 1911 along with 1,900 other third class passengers. From there he settled in Ladd, Illinois, where he worked, again, as a miner in the coal mines. He was able to save enough money to bring his family over the following year. On June 26, 1912 Carmella, along with Antonino (age 6), Gerlando (age 4) and Christina (age 7 months) arrived at Ellis Island aboard the Duca de Aosta. The family grew in Ladd to include Dominic, Mary, Rose, Sarah and Peter. In 1920, Enrico brought his family to Rockford where he found employment at J.I. Case. Their first house was on Morgan Street but later moved to at 615 Kent Street where they remained.

Antonino received his schooling in Ladd but was only able to go through the sixth grade, as his help was needed at home, and as soon as he was able, he found employment. One of his first jobs was in the spool room of Nelson Knitting, and later he was a tool maker for Emerson-Burningham Co. During the 1920's Antonino took up boxing and was Rockford's flyweight amateur city boxing champion. He was also sparring partner for Sammy Mandell, the flyweight world champion. It was at this time that Antonino Parisi changed his name to Sammy Paris. Later, in 1934, when he received his American citizenship, he changed his name legally.

Living across Kent Street from the Parisi's, at 624 Kent Street, were the Sartino's. Domenico (1868-1924) and Giuseppa Scaturro (1870-1932) Sartino came to the United States from Sambuca, Sicily through New Orleans, LA in 1894 and lived in Chicago for 14 years before coming to Rockford in 1908. He was employed as an elevator operator

for B.Z.B. Knitting Co. in Rockford. At one point in time, Domenico operated a "saloon" on Morgan Street, just west of South Main Street. Dominic and Josephine, as they were later called, brought with them from Sicily four sons: Joe, Charles, Jasper and John. Their only daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was born while they lived in Chicago and Samuel later in Rockford. It is interesting to note that Domenico's last name was Scortino, but due to an error upon arrival in New Orleans, the spelling was forever changed to Sartino.

Sam Paris and Mary Sartino were neighbors on Kent Street who met, courted and married on January 8, 1928 in St. Anthony's Church. On November 29, 1930, Sam and Mary welcomed their first child, Richard. The next year, in 1931, Sammy established the Paris Auto Shop on the south side of Morgan Street between South Main and Rock Streets. Prior to that, he and a friend worked on cars in a garage in an alley near Morgan and Court Streets. In the early 40's he moved the business to the corner of Main and Montague Streets where he purchased land from Smith Oil and had the shop built.

Because building supplies were scarce during World War II, the original body shop had just four bays and no steel was used in its construction. Later, when the war was over, Sam expanded the building to include more repair bays, a paint shop, offices, a gas station and an apartment up stairs. Sam and Mary's family now included a daughter, Mariann, born May 21, 1944.

Sam worked at the Paris Auto Shop until he was 90 years old. In the beginning he handled the repairs himself and gradually added workers. He taught the art of repairing cars to many men through the years. His son, Richard (Dick), brothers, Pete and Dom, brother-in-law Nick Manzullo, several nephews, many neighborhood young men and three grandsons, Richard, Jr., Michael and Anthony Paris all learned the trade from Sam and many eventually started their own business. As the years passed, Sam tended the office part of the business and trusted his workers to handle the actual repairs. Mary was also part of the office team, handling the bookwork end.

Sam and Mary were devoted to their church, St. Anthony of Padua. Sam held many offices, served on numerous committees and generously contributed to its growth and survival. He was especially proud that he was able to serve Mass every morning as an altar boy until he was 90, making him St. Anthony's oldest altar boy. Mary worked alongside Sam at the church on the bazaars, and she also worked at the weekly bingo for many years. She was an active and long time member of the Altar and Rosary Society.

Community involvement was also important to Sam. He was a member of the Barber Shoppers Rockford Chapter, Knights of Columbus, Sierra Club, Independent Garage Owners and Blackhawk Flying Club. Sam earned his pilot's license in the early 60's. He and Mary loved taking short trips with friends, and Sam flew some longer ones to Florida and Texas, among others.

Sam passed away on March 3, 1997. Mary preceded him on December 30, 1992. Their little family had grown to include 8 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren. Their legacy lives on!

Submitted on August 24, 2016, by Mariann Paris DiBenedetto for the Genealogy Project
-- Culture and Education Committee of GRIAA- "Immigration Histories of Rockford
Italian Families"