

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XIII

6-12-91

No. 24

ROSES AND GARLIC

"DO YOU WANT ME TO GET THE BROOM?"
(The Broom as Applied Psychology)



of flannel. The baby was wrapped in this cloth like a cocoon. The old ladies said it kept the back and legs straight... Our doctor was Dr. Padelford, much respected and beloved by the Italians... First, he would kick all the women out of the room except one. Whenever he spotted an "evil eye" charm he would swear and mutter about 'this damn mumbo-jumbo!' His voice would boom through the house as he fired off orders: 'I need more light in this room!' 'Get me towels and hot water!' 'Nellie, relax!' 'No more goddam tea!'"

"Eventually we would hear the baby's cry, and Dr. Padelford would come down to the kitchen to wash and eat. He charged a dollar for a house call, including medicine, but more often than not, he would take food as payment. Since we had a store, he liked to get 'paid' in large cans of black olives, or stop at our gas pump and fill his tank.

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"The great Caruso was like a sacred figure to us. We had all his records, and exchanged with others on the street for the latest releases. My father could literally be reduced to tears listening to Caruso as he soared through musical heavens. On Sundays, we would play Caruso while we ate dinner. Whenever there was a particularly beautiful passage or dramatic high note, we all had to stop eating while my father swayed to the music, sometimes 'directing' with his fork. Once, my sister brought home a record by John McCormack, and his magnificent tenor quickly won over my father. When told that the singer was 'Airescia' (Irish), my father wouldn't hear of it. 'He must have Italian blood somewhere, or else he was taught by Italians. That's an Italian voice!' We didn't argue the point."

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"The old Italians were pretty ambivalent about religion. All were quick to avow great faith and piety, but few would let church teachings interfere with their particular vices. For example, my parents rarely went to church. My father, using quirky Italian 'logic,' felt that his presence in church was not necessary as long as his children attended. My mother, on the other hand, had long since convinced us that she talked to God directly. All of her non-negotiable demands were always prefaced by: 'God said', or 'God told me'... ('God said he punishes kids that won't eat beans...' or 'God told me you didn't weed the garden today...') If you questioned any of this you were met with much indignation and out-rage: 'I don't care if you don't believe your mother, but, you don't believe God?' So, come Sunday mornings, and, finding yourself pitted against your father, your mother and God, you decided to go to Mass."

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"Looking back, I wonder why we didn't die very young, as our diets violated every modern day health rule. Fat was 'in'. Our meats were fried, as were our potatoes, peppers and eggs. Sausage and presciutto, already larded, were 'fatted' still more by deep frying. Most of our pastry recipes started out with a large dollop of lard. We even dipped our bread in hot fat, 'pane funatta'. Some of the biggest arguments at our table came about over whose 'turn' it was to 'dip the bread'. My mother not only ate her share of fat, but dutifully cleaned up all the fat trimmings that we kids left behind. (I'm glad that cholesterol was absolutely unheard of in those days, as it would have ruined a lot of our fun, especially my mother's. She lived to be 96.)"

Roses and Garlic is the title of a very recently published book by Michael A. Charles which is: "A nostalgic and personal look at life on State Street, Holley, New York, from 1900 to 1941." In an autographed copy to me he has written "My memories of growing up Italian are so vivid to me I hope I can bring some of the color and spirit of those times to others." He indicated to me that this is not a scholarly work but rather one which is anecdotal in nature. Howard (Tony) Barry, an art teacher at Holley High School has drawn the innumerable pictures which illustrate the book. In soft cover and large type, there are 200 pages filled with amusing stories and reminiscences of the way things were for Italian families in Holley many years ago. In fact, forty-eight different families are mentioned who once lived on State Street and close to 100 different ones are mentioned who once lived uptown in Holley. It is a colorful and delightful tribute to Italian immigrants whose dreams were realized by their descendants. The book which is priced for slightly under \$10 is available at Michaelangelos Antique Shop and Small Wonders Book Store on the Public Square in Holley, the Lift Bridge Book Store in Brockport and the Orleans County Council on the Arts Center on Bank Street in Albion. I'm sure you will love this wonderful contribution to local Folklore.

Because of the copyright I have received special permission to use an illustration and several excerpts here from Roses and Garlic. They are as follows:

"My parents had a bedroom at the right of the stairs. The huge brass bed in which all of us kids were born, took up one whole wall of the room. The birthings were high excitement, with the men gathering downstairs in the kitchen, feeling awkward and useless while the old ladies ran up and down the stairs and in and out of the bedroom..."

"The house reeked of camomile tea which was fed to the expectant mother by the gallon. The midwives also had their charms ready to ward off the evil eye. An assortment of birth aids such as flannel cloths for the binding of the navel, and the "fascia" for swaddling were also made ready. The fascia was about 10 feet long, a foot wide, and usually