

Charles Colli: An Italian Immigrant's Success Story

By Mel Montemerlo

Charles Colli was one of the most fascinating and successful of the immigrants that came to Windsor Locks around the turn of the 20th Century. He was born in Italy in about 1882. He showed up in the U.S. Census of 1910 as Head of Household in Windsor Locks. In 1910, he was 28 years old. His wife Lena was 34. They had married in 1900. They had three children: Irene F. (8), Eva (7) and Charles E. (5). Charles had emigrated in 1890, when he was 8 years old. By 1910, he owned his own home, free of mortgage. His occupation was "Merchant" and his business was "meat". He was already a naturalized citizen. Here is a photo of Charles with his business wagon. Notice the sign on the house which says: "C. Colli, Meat and Groceries".



Charles Colli, Meat and Groceries Cart Store

Most of the information for this article came from issues of the Springfield Republican newspaper. Whenever information is shown from one of these issues, the date of issue is given in parentheses.

In 1911, Charles was already running for public office in Windsor Locks. His power base consisted of the Italian immigrant population of the town (Springfield Republican, 9-12-1911). His influence over this community came into play in 1912, one of the most difficult years in Windsor Locks History. The Windsor Locks Savings Bank was found to have had \$185,000 embezzled from it. The investigation went on for a long time before it was found that Alfred Wood Converse was the man who did it. In the meantime, there was a good deal of pain and suffering by the citizens who had lost much of their life savings. Mr. Colli was the person who translated for the Italian immigrants, and helped them understand what had happened. (Springfield Republican, 02-10-1912)

In 1913, bought a tenement house (Springfield Republican, 08-09-1913). He was in the business of owning rental properties. In 1913, he was listed as one of the largest taxpayers to the town of Windsor Locks (Springfield Republican, 01-19, 1913). He continued to be for a large number of years.

In 1914, he continued to be deeply involved in town government. Also in this year, he bought the Central cafe Company on Main Street, which had been owned by John Maloney, and sold his meat, grain, and grocery business to one of his employees, George Inaharolf, (Springfield Republican, 05-10-1914). Also by this year, he was an official in the Fire Department.

By 1916 he had become Chief of the Windsor Locks Fire Department (Springfield Republican, 07-01-1916). See his photo as the Fire Chief.



Charles Colli
Windsor Locks Fire Chief
1916 - 1922

In 1918, Mr. Colli bought the Burnap Block from the estate of Dr. Sidney Burnap. This was one of the largest “blocks” in Windsor Locks. It housed the Opera House, retail stores, a rooming house, and some major corporations, such as the telephone company. Under Mr. Colli’s ownership, it became known as “Central Hall”. The third floor was used for basketball games and boxing matches. That is where two of the Marconi brothers boxed. (Montemerlo, 2016, “Burnap Block and Central Hall”)

In 1920, he was driving his car, when he hit and killed Deputy Sheriff Michael Fay near the corner of North Main and Suffield Streets. Mr. Colli’s nose was broken, but he survived.

Charles Colli died in 1938, at the age of 56. In those 56 years, he had accomplished more than most people ever dream of doing.

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