

St. Oronzo of Turi, Italy and of Windsor Locks by Mel Montemerlo

The feast of St. Oronzo has been celebrated in Windsor Locks since the early 1900s, when a number of people from Turi, Italy emigrated to Windsor Locks. These people included the four Colapietro brothers (Pasquale, Vito, Leonardo and Giovanni), Tommaso Zaccheo, Vito Lefemine, and their wives. Giovanni returned to Italy, but all of the other men became businessmen in Windsor Locks. Pasquale Colapietro had a confectionary store. Vito Colapietro had the hotel. Leonardo Colapietro had the Windsor Locks Macaroni Manufacturing Business, Vito Lefemine had a barber shop. All of these businesses were on Main Street.

These emigrants from Turi were devout members of St. Mary's Parish, and they quickly instituted the annual celebration of St. Oronzo, who was the patron saint of Turi. Turi is a small town near Bari, Italy, which is in the Southeastern part of the Italian peninsula. They bought a large statue of St. Oronzo, which was carried in the annual parade for the festival of St. Oronzo. They formed the St. Oronzo Society, of which Vito Colapietro was a president for a while.

For a number of years, the festival of St. Oronzo also included a day of celebration in a park in Windsor Locks, at which there was Italian food, music, dancing and fireworks. That park is now the Bellarmine Center.

See the photo of the St. Oronzo celebration in front of St. Mary's Church.



*St. Oronzo celebration, St. Mary's Church, Windsor Locks, Conn.
Vito Colapietro, President of St. Oronzo Society standing in front of statue*

In Turi, the festival of St. Oronzo is a big event. Take a look at the photo of that celebration. The statue of the saint is in the shrine in the center of the photo.



Festival of St. Oronzo in Turi, Italy

The legend of St. Oronzo is as follows. According to a twelfth-century manuscript, a man named Justus, who was a disciple of Saint Paul, was on his way to Rome when he was shipwrecked near the town of Salento. After the shipwreck, Justus converted a citizen named Oronzo, and his nephew, Fortunatus, in the nearby town of Lecce. Oronzo's father, Publius, had been treasurer to the emperor, and Oronzo had succeeded him to this office.

Oronzo and Fortunatus were denounced as Christians, and they refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods. They were whipped and kept in jail, but later went to Corinth, where Oronzo met Saint Paul, and was confirmed as the first bishop of Lecce. When they returned to Lecce, the authorities once again persecuted them. Antonius, a representative of Nero, imprisoned Oronzo and Fortunatus, and threatened to kill them if they did not reject their new religion. The two refused, but they managed to be released. They continued to preach in Salento and in Bari. They were finally arrested again by Antoninus and executed about two miles from Lecce.

Oronzo is venerated as the patron saint of the town of Turi. Legend has it that he hid in a cave near there. The ending of an outbreak of cholera in 1851 was attributed to him.

The citizens of Windsor Locks are fortunate to have had the festival of St. Oronzo emigrate here from the town of Turi. It adds flavor and a bit of Italian culture to our town. While almost everyone in Windsor Locks has heard of St. Oronzo, not many knew where the festival came from, who brought it to our town, or what the story of St. Oronzo. Hopefully, this brief article has shed some light on this.

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