

The Evolution of Vito Colapietro's Store: 1917 - 1969 by Mel Montemerlo

Vito Colapietro emigrated from the small town of Turi, Italy, to the much bigger town of Windsor Lock in 1906. He had not finished elementary school. He only had one good eye. He was very short. He had no money. He had no marketable skills, and he didn't speak English. His brother, Pasquale, had come to Windsor Locks a few years before, and had set up a confectionery store on Main Street. He quickly helped all three of his brothers to emigrate to Windsor Locks. Vito worked in his brother's confectionery store, and also got a job working on the bridge between Windsor Locks and Warehouse Point. One day, while working on the bridge, he fell off of it, and into the river. A man in a small boat saved his life.

After being in town for a few years, Vito went back to Italy and married Anna Lefemine. Vito somehow saved some money and bought the Brusie Hotel, which had formerly been the Charter Oak Hotel, across from the Railroad Station on Main Street. He had no experience with the hotel business, but he learned fast. The story of Vito Colapietro's hotel will be told at another time. This article is about the store that Vito ran on the street level of the hotel. There were always three stores on the street level of Vito Colapietro's hotel. All three changed a number of times. Vito always used the store on the North corner of the building as his "office" for hotel business. However, the nature of that store changed a number of times between the time when Vito bought the hotel in 1917, and when the town forcibly bought the hotel from him during the redevelopment of Main Street in the 1960s.

The first type of store that Vito ran in that corner store of the hotel was identical to the one that his brother, Pasquale, owned just three blocks away. It was a confectionery store. In other words, he sold fruit, ice cream, candy, cigars, tobacco, groceries, confectionary, post cards, and toys, and imported olive oil. The man who saved Vito's life sometimes came into the store. Vito never let him pay for anything. See the photo of Vito's 1917 confectionery store.



Vito Colapietro's Candy Store 1917

By 1933, Vito changed the confectionery store to a beer tavern. See the photo of the Beer Tavern. Notice the very long cherry wood bar that Vito had at that time. Notice the sign in the upper right which declares that no alcoholic beverages other than beer could be served on the premises.



Vito Colapietro's Beer Tavern 1933

Later Vito changed back to a confectionery store. He ran it until his son, Tony, arrived back from World War II. He redecorated the store, and had a grand opening in 1950, as "Tony's Soda Shoppe". See the photo with Tony behind the ice cream counter.



Tony Colapietro at opening of Tony's Soda Shop, around 1950

Vito continued to work in the store and to use it as the office for his hotel. Tony continued to run the store until the town bought it for the redevelopment of Main Street in the 1960s. Near the end, the store had a "For Rent" sign in the window, but no-one would rent a store in an area that was about to be torn down.



Windsor Locks Hotel, after being sold to the town for Main St. redevelopment. Shut down-1969. Torn down-1971, Replaced by a CVS & a Dunkin Donut

The photo of Tony's store and neighboring stores shut down forever is a sad one. As you can see, Main Street was dead long before the buildings were demolished.

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