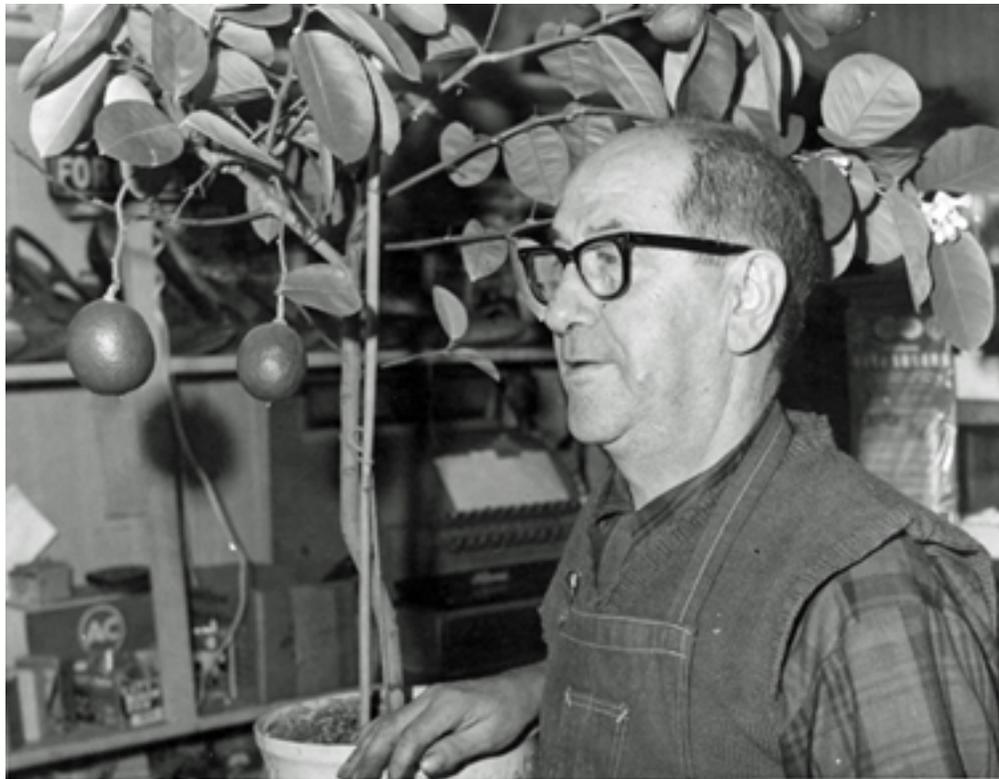


Tony Basile and his Shoe Repair Shop

by Mel Montemerlo

Tony Basile's Shoe Repair Shop was on Spring Street, diagonally across the street from St. Mary's Church in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. Those were the years before "athletic shoes" such as Nike and Adidas became so popular. The Converse Company had been making canvas shoes since 1917, but non-leather shoes were a very small percentage of shoes worn in Tony Basile's time. In those days, men and boys wore leather shoes whose soles and heels had to be replaced when they wore out. Even women's shoes needed to have their heels replaced periodically. Windsor Locks' premier shoe repair store in those days was Tony Basile's shop. It was a different time. It was a time when top craftsmen were considered professionals. Tony Basile was such a man. He took justifiable pride in his work. Here is a photo of Tony next to his lemon tree. He is wearing his apron. This is the way Tony looked in his shop.



Tony Basile

The second photo is of the interior of Tony's shop in its earliest days. Tony is on the left. At the right in that photo is Tony DiPinto, who was a friend of Tony's, and who helped out at the store.



*Interior of Tony Basile's Shoe Repair Shop.
At left is Tony Basile. At right is Tony Dipinto.*

Tony was born in Springfield, Mass. in 1905. He married Anna Christopher, who was also from Springfield. He opened his shoe repair shop at 29 Spring St. in 1929, and it stayed open for 43 years, until he retired in 1972. Tony died three years later, in 1975.

Tony and Anna had two children, a son named John, and a daughter named Mary Ann. John became an aeronautical engineer. He worked for the Chance Vought Corp. Mary Ann was a gifted singer, who excelled in high school musical plays.

Tony Basile belonged to a number of organizations. He got his fireman's badge on Oct. 19, 1951. He was a member of St. Mary's Church, a member of the Italian Fraternal Society of New Britain, and a member of the Senior Citizens Center of Windsor Locks.

What did Tony like to do on his time away from the shop? His daughter, Mary Ann Gianelli provided the following information. "He loved to visit his in-laws, the Christopher family, at their family farm in Agawam, MA. He enjoyed gardening, and spending time in his back yard. He took many vacations to Italy. When he was younger, he played clarinet at the German Club in Broad Brook. That clarinet was passed down to his nephew through marriage, Anthony Campanelli, a life-long musician who recently retired from his position as Music Teacher and Band Director for Somers Middle School, Somers, CT. Tony's father, Nicola Basile, was musically inclined, and was in a band in Italy. There is a long tradition of music in the Basile family."

Tony Basile's Shoe Repair Shop was a fixture in Windsor Locks for over 40 years. Everybody knew Tony. He wasn't only well known, he was well liked and well respected.

Note from the author: You can find and download a longer version of this article, as well as 17 of my other articles on the history of Windsor Locks on my website:
windsorlockshistory.com