

Researching My Grandfather

Subject: PASQUALE MARGOTTA

By Raymond Margotta

I never got to enjoy my Italian grandfather. He died when I was very, young, but somehow, he left a legacy that was related to me by those who knew him well. My curiosity about who he was and what he did led me to explore more about him.

My grandfather, Pasquale Margotta, was born in Calitri on October 27, 1865 to Angelo and Lucia Paolantonio Margotta. I don't know anything about his youth or what shaped his life in his native town, but he, like many men from his place of birth, took the daring step to immigrate to the United States in 1890 on the SS *Alesia*.

Grandfather Pasquale settled in Irvington-on-the-Hudson in New York State and from his early days there was known as Patsy Margotta. He must have stood out as an individual and businessman as I understand he was a colorful person and was featured a number of times in local newspapers. Those periodicals from the past, as well as the latest research available online, proved most valuable in learning his story.

The July 8, 1898 issue of the *Dobbs Ferry Register* reported that he rented a store on Main Street in Irvington and opened a candy store. Later that month, he hired a local painter and neighbor, Irish-born Peter Laffan, to give his new establishment a fresh look. My grandfather apparently sold more than candy in his store because in June of the following year, it was reported in the *Hastings Echo* that he was charged and fined for selling cigarettes to minors.

Pasquale came from a large family. In the 1900 census three of his siblings were living at the same address. They were listed under their American names: John (1872), Charles (1885), Jeanette (1865), But their birth names were actually Giovanni, Vincenzo Antonio, and Maria Concetta. They along with Jeanette's daughters, Mary and Louise Gervasi, lived on Main Street in Irvington. Two sisters, Francesca and Maria Lucia died as children, while another, Angela, settled in Newark, New Jersey.

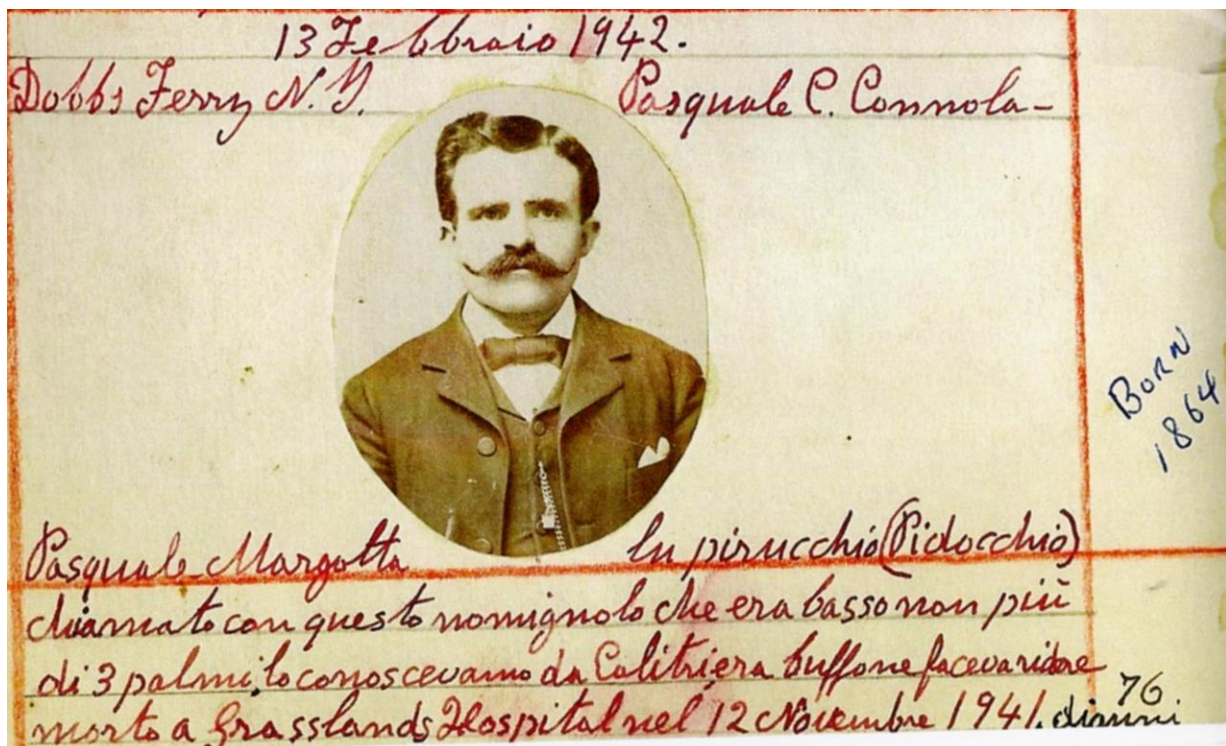
Pasquale became a father in 1901 when a son, my father Angelo, was born on April 3rd in Manhattan to 22-year-old Bertha Regelmann. My understanding is that she was a German native from Nuremburg. Unfortunately, very little is known of her. The year she arrived in America as well as when and if she married my grandfather remains a mystery. She died in Tarrytown on January 12, 1934. The 1905 state census shows the addition of another son, two-year old Vincent.

In 1904, Pasquale rented a store on Broadway in Irvington. A fire in July 1906 damaged the interior and prevented him from continuing his business. He sued John Dinkel, the property owner, for \$2,500 for not repairing the premises. The owner claimed that the fire voided the lease. In the end, according to March 28, 1908 issue of *The Eastern State Journal*, a White Plains newspaper, the court awarded my grandfather \$150. Ultimately, my grandfather moved his family and business from Irvington to North Tarrytown. The 1910 census put the Margotta family on Elm Street with two additional children: Louis age 2 and Maurice age 2 months. Elm Street had many

Italian households, including many from Pasquale's hometown. In that census, my grandfather, then age 43, gave his occupation as manager of a confectionary store. However, in the New York State Census in 1915, he stated that he was not working. In the 1920 census, he is listed as a janitor at a factory. For many years, he was head chef of the steamer *Armitage Brearly* that made daily trips from Tarrytown to New York City making a stop at Irvington to pick up freight. It seems he didn't have a consistent work life!

Various newspaper articles gave us other aspects of Pasquale Margotta's life. My father related to my older brother Robert and me that our grandfather held the title of "the smallest man in Westchester County". This honorific was mentioned periodically in the press. For example, the February 19, 1936 issue of the *Tarrytown Daily News* stated that "Pasquale Margotta, houseman at the Highland Manor School, claims the distinction of being Tarrytown's smallest man. He is four feet four inches tall and has a son six feet from socks to hat."

In a feature article in the local *Daily News* (January 20, 1933) entitled "As We Stroll Around," we have a glimpse of my grandfather's work ethic. "Patsy Margotta, Cortlandt Street, may be the smallest man in North Tarrytown when it comes to stature. Patsy is not small in ambition. He is always on the go early and late at night at his candy store. You see him there in the store working and late at night. He never seems to grow tired of working." In the August 23, 1935 issue of the same newspaper, we learn how in spite of changing times, "One of the merchants of the old days, however, still retains the old fashioned method. Patsy Margotta of Cortlandt was seen sitting on his store doorstep this morning turning his hurdy-gurdy peanut roaster on the sidewalk."



The caption below Pasquale's photo, in this memorial created by a friend, Pasquale Connola reads, "Pasquale Margotta *lu pirucchio* (the louse) was called by this nickname because he was short, not more than five palms tall; we knew him from Calitri; he was a clown, he made us laugh; died at Grasslands Hospital on November 12, 1941."

My grandfather died in 1941. Once again, the local press remembered him. Under the title “Shortest Man Is Long-Lived,” the Peekskill *Evening Star* announced “Pasquale Margotta, who claimed to be the shortest man in Westchester County, died today in Grasslands Hospital. He was 78 years old and stood just over four and one-half feet. Margotta once said he lost out by half an inch to ‘Admiral Dot,’ a White Plains hotel keeper, in a contest for a diamond ring as the shortest man in the County. Admiral Dot died many years ago.”

As a matter of family pride, I must say that Admiral Dot, born Leopold Kahn, was actually a dwarf by nature, a member of the Lilliputian Opera Company, a star attraction of the Barnum Circus, who died in 1918. I do not feel he should have qualified for this contest.

My grandfather’s funeral was celebrated with a High Mass at Immaculate Conception Church in Tarrytown. The pallbearers were six nephews including Police Judge Thomas T. Margotta, Patrolman Anthony Margotta, Charles Margotta, Angelo Margotta and Patrick Margotta of Newark. He is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.

Researching his life is my way of getting to know him and keeping his memory alive.