

From Garage to Grill in 103 Years on Water Street (Part II)

Camillo Pomponio came to this country in 1904 at the age of 16. Like so many others, he worked at the Parce Avenue can factory. In 1912 he married Marie Fassetta of John Street, now known as Lift Bridge Lane. They worked hard and saved their money, and when opportunity knocked in 1915, purchased the four year old building at the corner of John and Water Streets, then operating as the John Street Garage.

The Pomponios set up living quarters in the building, and also rented out a second apartment, while continuing to collect rent from the operator of the first floor auto repair garage. Camillo must have found the location convenient when he switched jobs and went to work at the railroad car shops in East Rochester, as the trolley went right down the middle of John Street, and dropped him off at the factory each day.



The Green Tavern as it appeared in 1960. Note the "GT" over the door.

The John Street Garage was soon transformed into a restaurant. Although the year this happened is unclear, a 1924 insurance map identifies it as such. Ten years later, in September of 1934, an advertisement in the Fairport Herald-Mail trumpeted the grand opening of the Green Tavern at 1 Water Street, under the ownership of Camillo and Marie Pomponio. A chicken and spaghetti supper was featured, along with entertainment and dancing. The early years of the "G.T." were recalled in an

interview with Al “The Hawk” DiRisio, written by John Doser in 1979 for the Fairport Herald-Mail: “The Green Tavern was the neighborhood tavern and each New Year’s Eve the entire neighborhood converged on it. We would dance all night to a four piece band playing the old time songs. Everybody knew each other.”

Marie Pomponio continued to operate the Green Tavern for several years after the sudden death of her husband in 1940. Her sons Enrico and Arthur both tended bar, while another son, Francis helped out while also working as a barber. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor and a declaration of war, both Arthur and Francis joined the Armed Forces. Marie kept the Green Tavern operating until well after the war.

Two names familiar to local residents stepped forward in the 1950s to operate the popular grill and tavern. Louis Masciangelo and Floyd Streppa took charge at 1 Water Street, each with enough family and friends to maintain a thriving business. The G.T. sponsored local sports teams and maintained an active role in the community. The popularity of the restaurant continued when Dave Cafalone took over in 1971. It’s easy to find a Fairporter with fond memories of mile-high ham sandwiches or the enormous cheeseburgers served at the G.T., and the pool table that was always in use. Over their years of ownership, the Cafalone family transformed the restaurant from a bar with sandwiches into a place where families could enjoy a nice dinner in the heart of Fairport.

Since opening in the old John Street Garage in 2004, Donnelly’s Public House has been a very successful destination for residents and canal travelers alike. Although many Donnelly’s patrons may not know of the colorful history within its walls, the brick front building is still a vibrant and important component of our community.

Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

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