



**McHENRY
MUSEUM**
& Historical Society



History Lesson

Newsletter

August 2022

Please call us at:
(209) 618-5387

Its August, and the sweltering summer heat has once again struck the Central Valley of California. It was this climate which brought a wave of Italian immigrants from Sicily to Stanislaus County, the weather felt like home. Last August, we featured a story on the Sciabica Family of Sciabica Olive Oil. It was well-received, and it became the impetus to start a tradition, let us make August the month we celebrate an Italian American Family and their history.

As the weather heats up, so many of us feel the need for a new shorter summer hairdo. For many men, and some women, the man who was known as Modesto's Barber was Augustine "Gus" Lombardo (1921-2014). Gus worked cutting and styling for close to seventy years. While he had the clippers in his hand, his wife Jennie (1923-1992) worked as a legal secretary, all the while raising their three daughters, Nancy, Eugenia "Genie", and Antoinette. The MM&HS had the pleasure to interview Nancy, Genie, and Antoinette, as well as Gus' sister Bessie Lombardo Setliffe, aged 96, whom herself was a long-time Modesto resident and working professional. Each family who settled in Modesto leaves a mark, and this is the story of the Lombardo family.

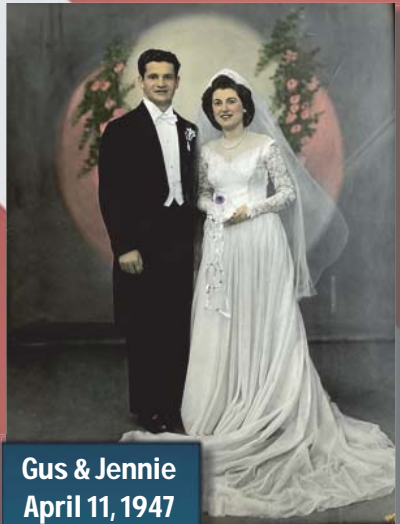


The Lombardo family hails from the Northwestern side of the island of Sicily in the town of Campobello di Mazara in the Trapani Province. Campobello is known for its wine plantations and olive orchards, traditions brought to the Central Valley of California. Vito Lombardo (1883-1963) arrived in the United States in 1904. He married fellow Sicilian Nunzia Nuccio (1889-1989). The Lombardos, like many Sicilian Immigrants, settled in the city of Bristol, Pennsylvania. It was in Bristol that the couple's first son Rocco "Tut" Lombardo (1916-1997) was born. Their second son, Augustine was born in Fairport, New York on June 7, 1921. The family was completed when daughter Biaggia "Bessie" was born on April 20, 1926. By the time of Bessie's birth, the family lived in Bristol and made a life for themselves.

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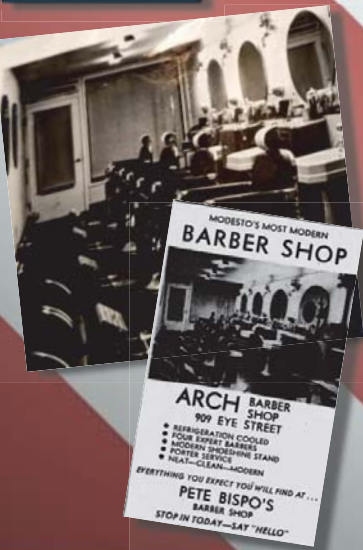


Gus, Nunzia, Vito, Bessie, Tut
March 5, 1944

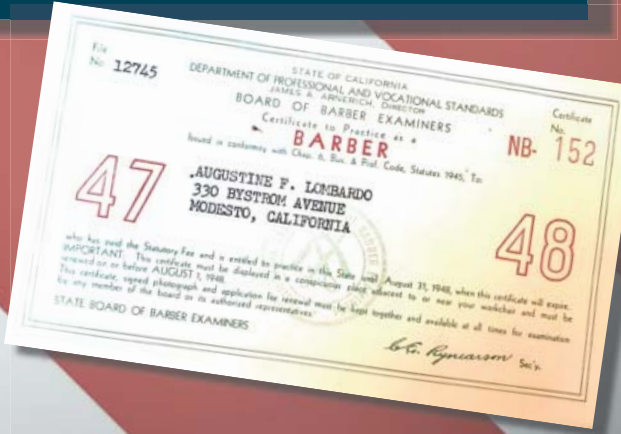


Gus & Jennie
April 11, 1947

Gus Lombardo attended the local St. Ann's Catholic School and graduated in 1938. Throughout his life, music would be one of Gus' favorite past-times as he played both the clarinet and the saxophone and performed in an orchestra. His brother Tut was his inspiration to become a barber, a profession many members of the Lombardo family who immigrated to the United States excelled. Gus became a certified apprentice in Barbering issued by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania at age fifteen in 1936. He became a certified barber in 1939. He also completed courses in bookkeeping and as World War II loomed trained in radio operations. He worked for Fleetwings Aircraft Company and trained in Los Angeles, California as a specialist in radio, television, and allied electronics. Gus officially entered the United States Army March 6, 1944. In the army, due to his background in radio, he was trained in Morse Code. Gus returned to the United States aboard the *Queen Mary* and was honorably discharged on May 19, 1946. Prior to entering the army, while playing saxophone in a band, he met a young woman named Jennie DiBenedetto. They dated for two weeks before Gus was deployed. They corresponded during his service. Upon his return, they continued their relationship. The DiBenedetto family was from Abruzzi, east of Rome, and her parents questioned his Sicilian heritage. 1946 was the year the entire Lombardo family migrated to Modesto, California. Vito Lombardo's brother Frank (1881-1954) operated a ranch. The ranch was located on what is now Lombardo Avenue off South Ninth Street. Gus brought Jennie with him to visit prior to the move, and Gus proposed to Jennie in Santa Cruz, California. They were married in their hometown of Bristol on April 11, 1947. The Lombardo family made their first home in Modesto on Bystrum Road. Gus' parents and sister Bessie also settled in Modesto, later living on Jones Street. In 1947, Augustine Lombardo was issued his certification as a barber in the State of California. In Modesto, Gus entered the Barbering profession full-time and would work cutting the hair of Modestans until he was eighty-five years old. His first chair was at Pete Bispo's the Arch Barber Shop at 909 "I" Street, located near McDonald's current location. Throughout his career, Gus either had a chair or owned the shop he worked in. He cut at Modern Style Barber Shop for Bob McCabe at 1123 K Street. He opened DeLuxe Barber Shop at 905 Eleventh Street, next to Nickel News, in 1952.



Gus, Pete Bispo, and John Santos
The Arch Barber Shop



Jennie Lombardo would never be a typical stay-at-home housewife. She was a legal secretary. In 1952, the same year Gus opened his first shop, she was installed in the Stanislaus County Legal Secretaries Association. The couple started a family when daughter Nancy was born in 1954, Genie would follow five years later, and youngest daughter Antoinette in 1963. Gus and Jennie purchased a 1932 Spanish style home at 835 Ila Way, behind the Sundial Lodge. The home was built by the prominent Modesto Lyng family. Jennie's parents lived with the family. It was the perfect situation; Jennie could continue being a working professional and her mother Anna (1899-1978) helped tremendously with her girls.

Gus became well-known in the City of Modesto. He was the personal barber of California Assembly Speaker, Ralph Brown (1908-1966), who in 1961 could not make it to Modesto for a haircut, and had Gus come to Sacramento to cut his hair in his office at the Capitol. This haircut made front page news on the *Modesto Bee*. Gus would display the newspaper clipping on his refrigerator for the rest of his life. In 1969, Gus opened his next shop in Roosevelt Center at College and Orangeburg Avenue. His next move was to McHenry Avenue at the Briggsmore Barbershop in the Briggsmore Shopping Center at the corner of Briggsmore and McHenry.

To describe Gus, the only word to use was dapper. He always wore a button-downed shirt under his barber smock. He enjoyed a good conversation and loved to entertain his friends with his love of Big Band Music and frequently play his beloved clarinet and saxophone. The Lombardo's had many friends, a large population of Italian Americans from Bristol, Pennsylvania would call Modesto home. Gus was a member of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church along with Sons of Italy, Knights of Columbus, and Holy Name Society. His other favorite past-times included hunting and fishing. His daughters remember him as a true gentleman who respected others and demanded the same respect in return. His daughter Antoinette recalls how she would always wait in the barber shop after school for her father to finish and learned at an early age that men gossiped just as much as they complained of women doing at beauty parlor's.



LEAD GROUP—Among new officers of Legal Secretaries, Inc., installed recently at Del Rio Golf and Country Club are, left to right, Mesdames Jennie Lombardo, secretary, and Berta Cozma, treasurer.—Bee Photo.

Mrs. Lombardo Is Seated By Secretaries



ARE INSTALLED—New officers of the Stanislaus County Legal Secretaries Association are, left to right, Mesdames Bernice Tabbert and Jennie Lombardo and standing, Mesdames Bertha Osborn and Doris Hazen and Miss Ann Renna.



Gus was devastated when he lost Jennie suddenly from a heart attack on Valentine's Day 1992 at age sixty-eight. She had just retired as the legal secretary and bookkeeper for the firm of Martin, Crabtree, Schmidt and Zeff. He left their home arranged just as she left it for the rest of his life. He finished his career at age eighty-five at the Style-Rite Old Fashioned Barber Shop at the corner of College and Bowen Avenue. He spent his final years with his beloved family. Augustine Lombardo passed away at age ninety-two on April 7, 2014, surrounded by his family. Daughters Nancy and Antoinette still call Modesto home. Middle daughter Genie recently moved to the San Diego Area to care for Gus' sister Bessie, who worked many years in Modesto for a title company. Bessie retired from Nieman Marcus department store at age ninety-five last year. It was an honor for her to contribute to this story on her brother. Gus Lombardo always looked his best and worked tirelessly to do the same for the citizens of Modesto. If you are reading this and your hair seems long and disheveled, get your ears lowered, Gus would expect no less. When you visit the McHenry Museum, you will see our vintage barber shop vignette on our bottom floor. As you stand there, imagine a dapper Italian gentleman waiting to make you look your best self.

Gus Lombardo

Barber

2120 'C' College Ave.
Corner of College & Bowen
Modesto, CA 95350
209/529-1813
Tues - Thurs 9 - 3

STYLE RITE

Old Fashioned Barber Shop



*Information and pictures for this Newsletter comes from interviews with Bessie Lombardo Setliffe, Nancy Lombardo Souza, Genie Lombardo (Dennis Drake), and Antoinette Lombardo Cope, July 2022. *Varies clippings come from back issues of the Modesto Bee.

Another Barber...Help From a Member



Pete Bispo

To complete this article on Gus Lombardo, we were missing one thing, pictures of him in a barber shop. When our beloved archivist, Janet Lancaster, was asked if we had pictures of any of these shops, she suggested we talk to Deanna Bispo Clark, daughter of Pete Bispo (1906-1991) who was Gus Lombardo's first employer in Modesto. Deanna, a member of the MM&HS, generously welcomed us into her home and shared photos of her father's Arch Barber Shop which he opened in 1938. It was located on "I" Street, currently the location is the drive-thru for McDonalds. Gus Lombardo and another barber, John Santos (1917-2016), worked for Peter for many years. In 1963, Pete moved to McHenry Avenue and opened the Northgate Barber Shop near Bowen Avenue. It was the first barber shop in town with electric chairs. His first customer was his ten-month-old grandson, Lane Clark. Late, John Santos opened Coffee Plaza Barber Shop on the corner of Coffee Road and Floyd Avenue, where Pete cut hair. Following the death of his wife Isabel "Issy" (1913-1987), a long-time employee at Sears in Modesto, Pete continued to cut hair when needed until his passing in 1991. Thank you, Deanna, for helping us with this article.



Deanna Bispo Clark



Gus & Pete



Northgate Barber Shop - 1963
New Electrically Operated Chair



*Information and pictures for this Newsletter comes from an interview with Deanna Bispo Clark, July 30, 2022. Various clippings come from back issues of the *Modesto Bee*.



Images from the McHenry Museum's 50th Anniversary, July 6, 2022

Updates

Wendelin Van Draanen



Maureen Lemos



Ila Loeb



Judy Israels

- On July 6, 2022, The McHenry Museum celebrated its fiftieth Anniversary with a ribbon cutting and Modesto Chamber of Commerce Mixer (see pictures on previous page). The ribbon was cut by Lois Belt, Susan Belt-Highiet, and John Mensinger, whose parents were on the steps fifty years ago during the ribbon cutting. We would like to thank the City of Modesto Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhoods and the Modesto Chamber of Commerce for all their help in making it a truly special night.
- There are too many names to thank for their help in planning and executing this event, so if you assisted in any way, we sincerely thank you.
- We would like to thank author Wendelin Van Draanen, who drove all the way from Pismo Beach to attend our event, she signed every copy of her novel, *The Peach Rebellion* which are available for purchase in the Museum Store.
- We would like to thank Maureen Lemos for attending and signing copies of both editions of her *Clarice the Red Cow* books. Books and plush dolls are available for purchase in the Museum Store.
- The artwork of Jonathan Troxler will be removed from the changing exhibit room on August 8, 2022. Please come and see it before its gone.
- The first issues of *Stanislaus Stepping Stones* from the 1970s have been digitized and are available for view on the McHenry Museum website, www.mchenrymuseum.org. The remainder of issues through 2019 will be posted shortly.
- After too long of a wait, on July 21, 2022, the McHenry Museum delivered a copy of our May Newsletter to Mrs. Ila Loeb in Atherton, California. On July 27, 2022, we delivered copies to Mrs. Judy Israels of Modesto copies of her April Newsletter. We want to both Mrs. Loeb and Mrs. Israels for allowing us to tell their family stories.
- The Board of Directors of the McHenry Museum & Historical Society will meet on August 23, 2022, at 4pm.

It's Back!

Second Saturday at the McHenry Museum is Back!

Free Local History Lectures

On September 10, 2022, Dr. Talitha Agan will present an illustrated talk: *California Grizzly Bear and the Gold Rush*.

On October 8, 2022, Rob Gleeson, a Museum Docent, speaks on the *Negro Baseball Leagues*, with emphasis on previous Modesto resident Lou Dials.

On November 12, 2022, Randy Siefkin, State Theater Resident Historian, speaks on *The Movies Come to Modesto*. The State Theater's eighty-fifth Anniversary Documentary will be shown.

Mark your Calendars!

STAY
CYCLE



Donald Howard Scott
February 4, 1937-July 28, 2022

We at the McHenry Museum & Historical Society would like to dedicate this newsletter in memory of Don Scott. Don Scott has been a part of our organization for many years, he served as President, and more recently Vice President from 2019-2021, and interim President from January 1-May 28, 2022. Our thoughts are with his wife of fifty-eight years and our fellow volunteer, Nora, and her family. We hope to highlight Don's life in an upcoming issue. He wanted so to be there for us at our annual meeting and fiftieth anniversary, but alas it was not meant to be. He was our organization's historical brain; however, he taught us well. He will forever be our most vigilant guardian angel. We miss you, Don!