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My Zambenini History By Robert Louis Zambenini

My paternal family was originally from the Trentino area of northern Italy, specifically from the Village of Sclemo, which is about 30 miles west of Trento, Italy and 40 miles north from the northern tip of Lake Garda.



My Grandfather, Pietro Zambenini, was born 17 September 1859 in Sclemo, and died at home, in Vigo County IN on Christmas eve, 24 December 1918. Death was from a stomach disorder, probably cancer.

Pietro made multiple trips to the United States until he brought the family here in 1901. My father told me that Pietro first came to Vermont to work in marble mining, but I have not found a record of this trip. On May 8th 1886 he married Maria Rizzi in Sclemo. Maria was born 31 July 1864 in Andogno Italy, a very small village near Sclemo. Her parents were Aquilino Rizzi and Leopolda Borisi.

Pietro was born to Maria Antonio Zambanini. His father is unknown. Maria Antonio's parents were Pietro Zambanini and Dominica Benigni. Based on many DNA matches, I have concluded that Pietro's father was a Morelli from the nearby village of Seo. Maria's mother died after the childbirth of Maria's younger sister. My father always said both his father and mother grew up together in an orphanage. I have never found any orphanage records in this area of Italy.



Left photo is the entrance to Sclemo. The house in the background is believed to be the family home. The animals were housed below the house which is on a steep hillside. My father said he hated the milk and when people were not looking, he would pour his milk through the cracks in the floor and watch animals below lick it up. In the right photo the aerial view, this house is in the lower right corner. In 1929 most of the roofs in these villages were straw, so with many fatal fires, the government undertook to replace all roofs with tile. The cemetery is on left of the photo, and you will find many graves and memorials of Zambaninis. The road on the upper left goes to Stenico.

Pietro and Maria's first son, Giovanni Gelsomino, was born in 1887, and died 4 months later. Their second son, John Egidio, was born on 23 April 1889.

It's important to note the economic and political conditions in northern Italy were in turmoil in later 1800s and until 1918. Austria had taken control and was exercising martial law over the many towns and villages. There was also a disease in their grape vines which decimated the wine industry. Also,

a disease was killing their silkworms which played havoc with their silk making industry. As a result of these three things, a great exodus of thousands of people trying to find work occurred. Many came to the United States, but more migrated to South America, in both mining and farming. For some, this was temporary, and they later returned to Italy. Italy regained control of the Trentino region as a result of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Next Pietro came to McAlester Oklahoma, to work in deep coal mining. On 7 January 1892 the Krebs mine exploded, killing over 100 miners. Pietro had the flu that day, and did not go down into the mine. The mine was sealed with the miners entombed. The survivors were left with no means. Pietro and others heard they were opening new coal mines in western Indiana, so they left to come to Indiana. He also told of the dire circumstances in Oklahoma, where there was little or no water, and they heard that water was plentiful in Indiana's rivers and streams. My uncle Joe Perucca told me the same story, as the Peruccas were also in Oklahoma, and had to leave because of bad, vile water.

Pietro then located in Diamond Indiana in Parke County. Others from the Sclemo area were also working in the Diamond Indiana area. He went back to Italy from time to time. My Father Isidor Valentine was born February 14, 1895.

Pietro returned again to Indiana, applied for citizenship, and was naturalized a citizen on 7 November 1896. He returned to Italy and brought Maria, John and Isidor to Diamond Indiana. They arrived at Ellis Island on the vessel St. Paul, 14 September 1901, sailing from La Havre France.

My father talked of walking from Sclemo to the train station, age 6. He said this was the hardest and longest day of his life, ever.

My Dad said they stayed briefly in New York City before catching a train to Diamond. He said they stayed with his mother's sister, but I later found she did not have a sister living at that time, so it must have been another relative. He did tell vivid stories of meeting new American kids, who all made fun of newly arrived immigrants.

People often asked about his middle name, Valentine, and he loved to tell the story of how he got this name. He said they were at Ellis Island and the immigration officer asked Pietro, "What is this boy's middle name.". Pietro said, "He does not have a middle name." the Immigration officer said, "His birthday is February 14, so we will name him Valentine.". That turned out to be a misunderstanding of what had occurred, as later I was looking at records in Italy, and found he was baptized Isidor Valentine before he ever left Italy.

At Ellis Island their name was changed to ZAMBENINI from ZAMBANINI, although both versions existed in later years, as Zambanini is on Pietro's and Maria's tombstones.

My Father, Isidor Valentine, attended Perth IN grade school, but started full time mining in his early teens. He received his Miner's License, Parke County IN, on 10 May 1911 at age 16. Mining was not mechanized and Pietro and his boys worked loading small push carts with coal. They were paid by the cart for wages.

Diamond and nearby Perth were large mining towns, with many stores and taverns. Heavy beer drinking resulted in many fights and even deaths. Maria would not let Pietro go to taverns, so he would send the boys down to the back door of the tavern with his miner's bucket, to purchase his beer.



Pietro and Maria's Family taken about 1916. Colorized later.

When Pietro, Maria, and the boys first arrived in Diamond from New York City, they stayed upstairs over the Balduzzi general store, as the Balduzzi family was also from near Sclemo. In reviewing ship manifests, many people from the Sclemo area came to Diamond, including the Foradoiis and Gregorys, and I remember visiting these families in Diamond.

They later moved to a single house in nearby Perth. There Nellie was born on 30 January 1903. Later they moved to the house in Diamond. Diamond was also known as Caseyville. After moving to Diamond, Irene was born 14 August 1906.

Pietro like many Italian immigrants did not continue to follow the Catholic Church. This is said to have resulted from the church in Italy requiring them to contribute money back to Italy. Maria continued with the church until her death. She insisted that both Nellie and Irene be baptized and attend catechism classes at St. Mary's church in Diamond. Pietro would not take them to classes so my father always took them.

Mines in Diamond and Perth became depleted and mining operations moved to the west in Vigo County in Nevins Township, and in Parke County around the town of Rosedale. Pietro found work at the Mary Mine. Mary Mine was in the north part of Nevins Township, Vigo County IN. This is the reason they moved from Diamond to the community of Sandridge, north of Coal Bluff and Fontanet, in Nevins Township of Vigo County.



House in Sandridge, where I was born in the front room.

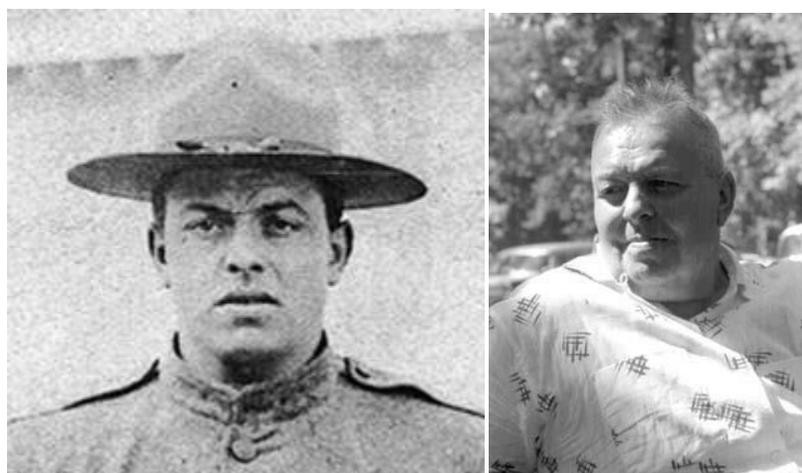
Some have said that part of this house was moved from their house in Diamond. Mines were closing in Diamond and Perth, and the towns were rapidly becoming ghost towns, as they are today.

This family property, located in Nevins Township, was give to Isidor upon the death of his mother, Maria, in 1932, as he had cared for her and his sisters, Nellie and Irene. This property of 4 acres, is shown in Abstract Title No. 52744, pages 28-34. The property was originally deeded to Amos Patterson from Jacob Kyle. This property was bought by Pietro and Mary Zambenini on July 7, 1913 from the Patterson family.

Pietro did make a trip back to Italy to see his mother in September 1911.

John took correspondence classes and became a licensed electrician. He married Anna Marietta, 21 September 1915. They had daughters Edith and Irene and son Leo George.

John and Anna moved to Chicago, where John had worked for Commonwealth Edison since 1913. In the early 1920s he was offered a job as head mine electrician in a mine in eastern KY. He received a Western Union Telegram which said he would be hired IF and only IF he changed his name to something NOT Italian, dropped the catholic religion and did NOT speak Italian. He had no choice but to do these things, if he wanted that job, so for a few years he took the name John G. Zeller. The family moved to Kentucky, and after this job, came back to IN to Spelerville, where he changed his name back to Zambenini. John was head electrician for the Saxon Mine for the remainder of his career.



Isidor served in the U.S. Army at Ft. Zackary Taylor Camp in Louisville, KY in WWI. He was a Private, 28th Company, 7th Training Battalion, 159th Depot Brigade. During training, he fell from the back of a truck and was injured. His Captain was aware that his father was ill and he was the provider for his mother and two younger sisters, so he told him he would not be sent overseas. Then his company commander discharged him as a disabled veteran on 21 Nov 1917. He was paid \$27.53 on discharge and later received a \$60 bonus, 24 Feb 1919, by congressional act. He received Veterans Disability Pension until death.

Isidor married Hazel Johnson, of Coal Bluff, the daughter of the local blacksmith, 2 November 1931. They had sons, me born on 12 December 1932 and William born on 19 August 1936.

We never spoke Italian at home but when visiting, they spoke Italian and I could not know what they were talking about.

Isidor worked at the Saxton Mine, Terre Haute IN, for 32 years, until it closed on March 29, 1954. He lived in the house in Sandridge until his death 28 November 1972. His cause of death was renal failure.

Nellie married Joe Perucca, 15 June 1925. Joe was the grocer in the mining town of Spelerville, which supported the Saxton Mine. They later moved their grocery business to Terre Haute, at the corner of Ft. Harrison and Lafayette. They had daughter Margaret, and sons Leo and Joseph.

Irene Julia married local farmer Russell Koch, 15 October 1927. They had sons Joseph, James and daughter Betty.

Maria or Mary died 4 September 1932 in the family home. The cause or death was listed as Diabetes Melititis, Valvular insufficiency.



Pietro and Maria are buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery in Diamond IN.



With my Grandparents graves in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery, Diamond IN.

Notes:

All Zambeninis or Zambaninis seem to have roots back in the area around Stenico, Sclemo and Tavodo. Migration of thousands out of this area in late 1800s and early 1900s was to South America, the United States, and Mexico, with the largest number going to South America.

Some historians believe the towns were formed after the large earthquakes north of Trento, near Zambana. The largest earthquake occurred on the 2nd and 3rd of January 1117. Many were living in the sides of the mountain, which collapsed, killing thousands. It is said that the survivors moved to the south and west, forming villages on solid ground. At that time, surnames were not common, and people took names related to their village. I have seen genealogy records back to early 1800s of Sclemo which show as many as five separate trees of Zambaninis. It is unknown how all these Zambaninis actually related DNA wise.

As these people came from Zambana they took names starting with ZAM. So there are many names starting with ZAM coming from these villages or towns, like Zamboni, Zambelliti, and many others.

The largest current town with accommodations near Sclemo and Stenico is Ponte Arche. The Terme di Comano resort is located there, and is world famous. Legend is, as Romans were returning south to Rome, they stopped for rest at what is now Terme Comano. They noted that soaking their horses in the springs, caused the open sores on their horse's legs to heal. They found these springs had great healing power, not just for the horses, but for their soldiers. For this reason, Terme Comano remains world famous.

In pursuing DNA matching, I have found many solid connections by individual chromosome plotting. While Grandmother Maria was born in Andogno, matches show her family came from nearby Villa Banale.

Many of my strong matches relate to people around Brockway PA. These families included Zambaninis, Morrillis and Serefinis. I have multiple matches with Pietro's grandmother's Benignis.

Italian names from the local records in Italy, and records as shown when arriving from Italy in ship manifests and Ellis Island immigration records, were subsequently Americanized as follows:

Pietro was usually Pietro but did show later as Peter in a few records
Maria Fortunata became Mary Florence in some records, as on her death certificate

Egilio Giorgio became John G.

Isidoro Valentino became Isidor Valentine, but he always went by the nickname Dory.

Aurelia Gioseffa became Nellie Josephine

Erina Giacomina became Irene Julia

I have made three trips to Sclemo, and my photos are on my page
www.bobzam.com