

PALUMBO'S TAVERN

RECOLLECTIONS OF ANN PALUMBO MONACO



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A chapbook from the "Vanishing Hoboken" series of the Hoboken Oral History Project

Vanishing Hoboken

The Hoboken Oral History Project

A Project of the Hoboken Historical Museum

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Contemporary photograph of Ann Palumbo Monaco by Robert Foster, 2017. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs reproduced in this chapbook are part of the collection of the Hoboken Historical Museum, donated by the extended Palumbo family.

ON THE COVER: In front of Palumbo's Tavern, 302 Monroe Street.
LEFT TO RIGHT: John Palumbo, unidentified, Anna Palumbo, ca. mid 1940s.

TITLE PAGE: Photograph of a gathering of family and friends in the back room at Frank Palumbo's Tavern, undated.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, FIRST ROW: Helen Moschello, Margie Moschello, unidentified man with Lucille Martocchia and Josie Palumbo behind him, unidentified boy, Lilly Palumbo Lisa, "Nutchie" Lisa, John Palumbo, two unidentified men. SECOND ROW: Philip Ciacia, Josephine Palumbo-Ciacia, Frank Palumbo, Thomas Palumbo, Anna Palumbo, unidentified, Charles Palumbo, Ellie Palumbo, unidentified man. THIRD ROW: unidentified woman, Amelia Traficante, unidentified woman, Nettie Martocchia, Louise Palumbo, Jeanette Curcio Palumbo, Carmella Salvano, others unidentified.

BACKCOVER: Photo of Thomas Palumbo in his Army uniform, standing before an American flag, undated.

[And the customers?] Locals who were friends with each other, who would come after work, or would just come in to talk. One of my uncles was a truck driver, so occasionally his co-workers would come and Grandma would have something for them to eat. It was just like a meeting place, like Do Drop In. And if they came in just to chat, they didn't have to have anything to drink. [They were] just there to get the latest news, and updates, whatever was going on in the neighborhood.

—ANN PALUMBO MONACO
JULY 21, 2016



INTRODUCTION

Most of the Vanishing Hoboken chapbooks begin with an interview, and the recollections direct the images we will use to enhance the story. This chapbook began with captivating photographs of a tavern on Monroe Street in the mid-twentieth century, donated to the Hoboken Historical Museum by Ann Palumbo Monaco. The lively scenes of neighborhood celebration and commemoration begged for a “back story.”

Holly Metz and Robert Foster interviewed Ann Monaco in the conference room of the Shipyard complex in Hoboken, on July 21, 2016. A transcript has been deposited in the archives of the Hoboken Historical Museum. The text for this chapbook was derived from Ann’s interview; the selected photos shine even brighter now, illuminated by her recollections.

In the backroom of Frank Palumbo’s Tavern, ca. 1942. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, FOREGROUND: Unidentified, Nick “Lead” DeLaura, and Thomas Palumbo (Ann’s father). BACKGROUND: Nettie Martocchia, Josephine Ciacia, Mickey “Brown” Vernaglia, Lucille Martocchia, Louise Palumbo, Margie Moschello behind Lilly Palumbo. Guests at side table not identified.



Starting Out in Hoboken

I was born in 1948, in the Medical Center—Margaret Hague Hospital—in Jersey City, and I've resided in Hoboken all these years. My parents, Thomas Palumbo and Jeannette Curcio Palumbo, were born and raised here.

Frank Palumbo, [who opened the tavern], was my father's father—my grandfather. He was the last of four children, and the only son, born to Archangelo and Luisia Palumbo in Sulmona, Italy, the rugged, mountainous part of the Abruzzi region. When he was sixteen, Grandpa left Italy to come to America. He had two older, married sisters—Anna and Josephine—already here. Anna Palumbo-Ciacia was in Greenport, Long Island, and Josephine Palumbo-Ciacia was in Hoboken. That left one sister, Gaetana, in Sulmona. I really do not remember my grandfather as he died in 1951.

My grandmother, Anna Vernaglia, was born and raised in Hoboken. Her parents, Carmela Caruso and John Vernaglia, were from Monte San Giacomo.

My grandparents were married on July 10, 1910, at St. Francis Church (at Third and Jefferson Streets.) Frank was nineteen and Anna was sixteen. [While living on Madison Street, and then on Harrison Street,] they had six children—Louise, Carmela (who everyone called Lilly), Charles, John, Thomas (my father), and Josephine.

Undated Palumbo family portrait—minus the eldest daughter, Louise. PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: John, Carmela (known as Lilly), Anna, Josephine, Frank, Charles, and Thomas.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Louise Palumbo with her mother, Anna Palumbo, and her uncle Philip Ciacia, with whom she lived.

Members of the Palumbo family on Third and Harrison Streets, Hoboken, ca. 1922. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: John, Lilly, Anna (in back), Charlie, Tommy (in front), and unknown friend.



[I have some pictures of my father and his siblings when they lived on Harrison Street.] You couldn't get any further out of town—and flooded, to boot. [Shows it in a photo.] Look. It's the back land. That's where the goats used to roam. [When you look at the photos,] it's like the Wild West. It puts perspective on their lives. A family that had a home, faith, and each other.

Frank Palumbo's Tavern (ca. 1928-1951)

Then they went from Harrison to 302 Monroe Street, [where my grandfather opened the tavern]. It started out as “Frank Palumbo's Tavern.” [Later, my grandmother shortened it to “Palumbo's Tavern.”]

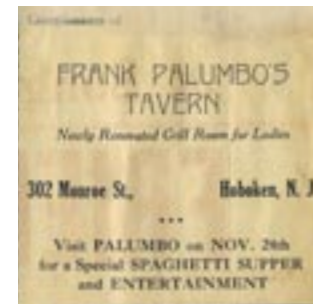
[My grandfather worked as a trucker for a time, and then as a mason. Why did he open a tavern?] I think I know what happened—he was a mason, and he had to take a trolley to get to work. One day he tripped [as he was running to catch it, and fell beneath it.] He lost his leg. That was the end of being a mason. I think he must have gotten a settlement, and bought [the building on] Monroe Street. He figured, “I have one leg, where am I going [to work]?”

So he bought the tavern—which was a blessing, but also a curse. Because of the accident—I guess he had his own issues. He had a wooden leg. My father would say that when he took it off at night, it [would be] dripping. I guess he was lucky to have one leg left. I think, [after the accident], his whole persona changed. I think he started to drink.

Palumbo brothers on the west side of Hoboken, ca. 1922. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: John, Charlie, Tommy.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: John, Frank, and Charlie Palumbo

A meeting in the backroom of Frank Palumbo's Tavern, ca. 1940. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Thomas Palumbo, Frankie Plantamura, Tony Rinaldi, Jimmy “Horn” Rinaldi, unidentified, “Tippy” Luongo, unidentified.



My grandmother was between a rock and a hard place. When she would get angry, her daughters would be screaming at her because she would say, “When he dies, I’m wearing red!” [Even] knowing he was difficult at times, to deal with—they didn’t want to hear that. But she’d lived the bad times, too.

When Grandfather lost his leg, to put a roof over their heads, he needed the business to survive. But what it did to them—tragic. My father’s younger brother, John, [ended up working in the tavern. When you look through the photos you see that] he had fundraisers in the back of the tavern—neighborhood things, or parties for people going off to the service. I think he was a kind, generous person. But my grandfather intimidated him. He never married. He didn’t need to be working gin [in] a bar, either. I think it was his curse. He died young, [four years after my grandfather]. And then my grandmother [was] left with that burden.

I guess she just did what she had to do. She had to step up. What do you do? Lose your home? It was her home. It was her livelihood. But when I think now, I give a lot of credit to [that] young girl who married young, had six children, had heartache—there was a spirit and drive in her.

In the backroom of Frank Palumbo’s Tavern, ca. 1942. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, FOREGROUND: Unidentified, Nick “Lead” DeLaura, and Thomas Palumbo (Ann’s father).

In the backroom of Frank Palumbo’s Tavern, ca. 1940. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, BACK ROW: Julia Traficante, Mrs. Carmella Salvano, Sal Martocchia, Frank Palumbo, Helen Moschello, Nettie Martocchia, Amelia Traficante, Jeanette Curcio Palumbo, Lilly Palumbo Lisa, “Nutchie” Lisa, Margie Moschello, Eleanor Rinaldi Palumbo, Charles Palumbo. FRONT ROW: Two unidentified children, Louise Palumbo, Felipe Ciacia, Josephine Palumbo-Ciacia, Thomas Palumbo, Anna Palumbo, unidentified, Lucille Martocchia, Mickey “Brown” Vernaglia (Grandma Ann’s brother. Ann recalls that his father-in-law “was the guy who sold snails and jelly apples.”).

ABOVE: Advertisement for Frank Palumbo’s Tavern, from a handbill advertising the Second Annual Song and Dance Review Tendered by the Friendly Boys at the Odd Fellows’ Hall, 227 Washington Street, Hoboken, 1936.

Palumbo's Tavern (1951-ca.1966)

[After Frank died, Anna] ran the tavern, with help from the family, and from in-laws. Her life was spent there. She lived above the tavern, and had a kitchen downstairs. The bar was in the front. Past the bar, there was a door that could get you up to the apartment or through a little hallway. You'd go into the back room, which was huge. And in that back room there was a cutout window, which opened to the kitchen. Grandma would be in the kitchen and food passed through there.

As a matter of fact, when my parents got married, that's where their wedding was held. They called them "football weddings." They had sandwiches. I hope they didn't throw them at each other! But a football wedding, they had.

[All the family events were held there.] There were communions, confirmations, birthdays. The aunts and my grandmother would cook more and more food, and just pass it through the window. My grandmother would make Italian dishes, like the pasta "fazool." Chicken, pasta. She was an excellent cook. Don't ask for a recipe, because there wasn't one. It was a hand of this, a shake of that, and the tasting. It came out wonderful.

She could probably have cared less about the tavern and more about the food. Sometimes [the food she was making in the tavern kitchen] wasn't even for sale; it was that she was



Outside of the tavern, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Josephine, Anna and Lilly Palumbo, undated.

A meeting in the tavern's backroom, undated. It may have involved a political campaign for Tommy Gallo, the seated man in the dark suit. SEATED, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Anna Palumbo, Jeanette Palumbo (Ann's mother), Mary Ann O'Shea, Grace Masselli, Tommy Gallo, Columbia Palmeri. (Ann recalled Mrs. Palmeri's husband was called "Jimmy Horn." They lived in the same building as Ann's family.) STANDING, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Edna Ryan, who lived across the street (her husband, Bobby, was a regular at the tavern), Mary Spina, Norma Cavallo, and Sam Nappi, who lived across the street.



Anna Vernaglia
Palumbo

always cooking, and if somebody happened to be around, they'd get a plate of whatever was brewing.

For some grandkids, she would make lunches. We lived right across the street, at 231 Monroe, and we had cousins on First and Monroe. It was over to Grandma's. Instead of going to Grandma's *house*, you went across the street to the tavern. My father would say to my grandmother, "This isn't a candy store, it's a tavern." [But that's where Grandma was, and] the afternoon was slow.

After school [we could] be right outside, playing. That was where we could escape to, get out in the open and be watched by everyone, all over the neighborhood. [They watch- ed us] from their windows.

[On Sundays, we'd hear singing.] Next to my grand- mother's tavern was a black church, for years, and they were the sweetest. They would shake up a Sunday. They'd get in there, they'd have their hats on. They were all gussied up, and they'd sing their hearts out.

Always Something Going On

The neighborhood was close-knit. The tenements, which were walkups—railroad apartments—were basically generations of families. And everybody watched out for everyone. They knew everybody's name.

They knew who your parents were. There was a lot of camaraderie. You went to school with their children. You knew their relatives. It was a block family, and blocks over, and blocks back. It was just different than now—everybody's busy. Nobody's home. Parents work. I think there's so much that is better, but so much that is being missed out on, because fam- ilies started to move away, and there were very few of your relatives around. You made friends, but people were not set. They were just passing through.

[When we were kids, we played games outside.] There would be hopscotch with the heel of your shoe. Johnny-on- the-Pony, stickball. You entertained yourself. You didn't have Pokemon or whatever gadgets they sit and get mesmerized by. You were out in the street. There was no harm. You didn't have to worry, because someone was always watching. You had your limits as to where you could go, and that was it. You were out with the neighborhood kids after school, played games, and then you went home for dinner. A lot of people at that time would come out and sit on the stoop, as they called it. You had a railroad apartment, where could you go?

So everybody would just sit out, and there was always something going on. There would be trucks that would come with Ferris wheels. There was a man who had a lemon-ice cart—and he sold jelly apples. He also doubled at selling "emaroot"—snails. The fruit trucks would come. I remember trucks coming around filled with watermelon, and they would yell up and down the street, "Watermelon! Watermelon!" And you'd go and select yours, and they would cut a triangle and stick the knife in it, and let you taste it.



There were so many street vendors—another man would sell tripe. I guess that's been banned now. He would come and he would yell, and people would just flock to the windows. Then the vendors would either run up [to your apartment], and give you what you wanted, or the people, especially the older people [would] come and see it. They had to touch it. You weren't going to select and give them rotten fruit, something that wouldn't last. It had to be tried and true.

A meeting of the Ladies Auxiliary of John Palumbo's S&A Club, the sports and athletics club he sponsored, ca. 1950. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, BACK ROW: Angie Vigliotti, unidentified, Roseann "Tootsie" Lisa, unidentified, Helen Lisa. SECOND ROW: Unidentified, Nettie Martocchia, Lucille Martocchia, Anna Palumbo, Josie Palumbo, Ella Ryan, Millie Caprio. FRONT ROW: Louise Palumbo, unidentified, Lilly Palumbo, John Palumbo, Edna Ryan, three unidentified women.



The Special Butcher, the Special Bread Store

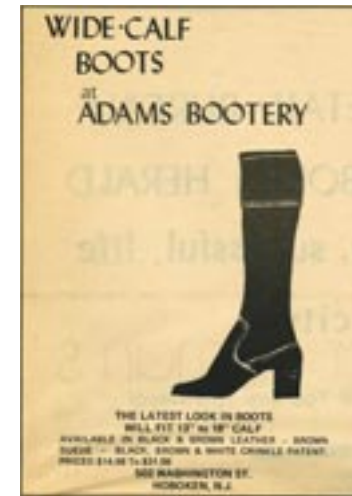
[Grandma was particular about what she bought, too.] You had to go to the special butcher, special bread store, and she let them know what she wanted. [She would send the grandkids to pick it up.] Because she sent the kids, don't think you're getting over on me.

[The bread store] was Scarpulla's at 559 Fifth Street. It's not there anymore. Do you know where Santa Febronia Church is [on Fifth Street, between Madison and Monroe Streets]? Well, it was next to that. Then there was another one—I don't remember who the baker was—but there was a

Men and boys from the neighborhood gathered on a empty lot that also hosted carnivals in the summer, ca. 1942. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: first row all unidentified; SECOND ROW, CENTER: Mr. Tuzzio, all others unidentified; THIRD ROW, THIRD FROM LEFT: Mickey "Brown" Vernaglia, FIFTH FROM LEFT: Mr. Florio, TENTH FROM LEFT: Billy Spina, ELEVENTH FROM LEFT: Tom McDonald, THIRTEENTH FROM LEFT: Joe Lisa. BACK ROW: (with arm upraised) Sam Nappi; directly behind him, Joe Sles.



Page from a souvenir program for the Ninth Annual Cabaret and Ball of the Little Tommie and Charles Monto Association, 1923, including an advertisement for Scarpulla's Pane Siciliano, 559 Fifth Street, Hoboken.



Advertisement for Adams Bootery, 502 Washington Street, 1971.

bakery that would bake bread at night and you could smell it, going by. Hot bread for sale. Or, on Second and Madison, there was Bier's. You could go there and they had these big wooden crates, with the rolls.

She didn't go to the supermarket, she went to all of these little shops. You had to come from here, there—and they were all in her neighborhood, and everyone knew her. The best, and [most] horrible, was that chicken store, where you got fresh chickens. Just go and get a fresh-plucked chicken and save the extra parts.

[She passed down what she knew about food to us.] I learned what my mother learned from my grandmother. My mother's mother passed away when she was ten. She was the oldest of three siblings. She was eighteen when her father died. My grandmother, really—even before my parents married—she was like a surrogate mother [to my mother].

My grandmother [would speak] half English, half Italian, half mixed words. I mean, sometimes, she would speak her own language! [Laughs.] But my mother and grandmother understood each other. It was just so heartwarming to see their relationship, because, at some point, it was closer than natural parents and their children. My mother lost her parents so young.

[My grandmother] taught my mother a lot of things about cooking. My father, who was picky, would say, “Oh, it

doesn't taste like my mother's,” and then my mother would cry. Then she got over that! [Laughs.] So my grandmother taught her well. She taught her well, and my father stopped complaining.

“Do Drop In”

[With the tavern,] Grandma would open around noontime. I'm not even sure if there were limits, like hours that you could operate. I guess at some point—maybe it was Sunday—it couldn't be before noon. But she was not an early riser, so I don't think there were any eight o'clock cocktails.

[And the customers?] Locals who were friends with each other, who would come after work, or would just come in to talk. One of my uncles was a truck driver, so occasionally his co-workers would come and Grandma would have something for them to eat. It was just like a meeting place, like Do Drop In. And if they came in just to chat, they didn't have to have anything to drink. [They were] just there to get the latest news, and updates, whatever was going on in the neighborhood.

[Most of them lived close by.] First and Monroe—one of my father's sisters lived there. We lived on Second and

Monroe, and Third and Monroe was my grandmother. There were people we knew well from Fourth and Monroe. We knew people from other parts of town, but [people from those blocks] seemed to be the core.

There were [also a few] people from Jackson Street, Harrison Street, that we knew, who didn't [drink at the bar], but yet were family friends, or friends of my grandmother, who would come around in the afternoon, and they'd have their little table-talk, because there wasn't much happening during the day.

They did it for years. [*Looks at photos of get-togethers at Frank Palumbo's Tavern from the 1930s-1950s.*] These were housewives, and look at the getups! Where are they going? To the back of the bar! When you look at the pictures, everybody's all gussied up. They've got the hats with the fruit on, and everybody's taking photos.

[I watched them when I was growing up—when they were older.] It was just amazing, and it was just natural. Women running around with their aprons, yelling up the block for my grandmother—and then all sitting around chitchatting. As a child, it was our normal to see these elderly women—Grandma's friends—drop in and get loud, talking.

And at night, it was the working guys, not little-old-lady chitchat.

But What Was His First Name?

[Some of the neighborhood guys are in our family photos, in front of the tavern, but I can't always tell you their full names.] You never knew anybody's right name, because everybody had a nickname.

Nicknames. Forget it. There was a wonderful guy—John Bacarich. They called him “Johnny Red”. He was a dear friend of my father's. There was a man in the neighborhood they called “Joe the Armenian”—I don't know if he was even

Armenian. But he was a big, burly guy with a great heart. When my parents bought their first house, he would come and help my father paint. And he would be in the tavern looking after my grandmothers. He worked as a bartender [in restaurants].

I'm trying to think of some other names. There was “Harry the Horse” and “Johnny Mustache.” Oh, so many of them. And you couldn't understand where they got the names from. There's something that gave them that tag. They could tell you. And if you would ask [someone about a neighbor's or co-worker's] first name, sometimes they'd have to think about it. [*Laughs.*] They would go by the nickname, and then they would use the first name. “But what was his first name?” “Gee, I don't know. We always called him ‘Shorty,’ or whatever.”

Five-cents Straight and Five-cents Box

On Monroe Street, heading towards Fourth, there was Smitty's Candy Store—a little hot spot. They used to have their unofficial lottery—the numbers, before the [New Jersey] Lottery took over. My grandmother never went to Bingo, but she used to play the numbers. She had this little snap purse, and she'd have register tape [with her numbers on it]. I don't know if it was just a thing to do. She'd have a host of numbers, and she'd give you the paper, and she would let us [grandkids] bring it down to Smitty.

Now my father [became] a policeman. He would go bonkers when this would happen. But we would give it to Smitty, and it was all taken care of. All I remember was it was “five-cents straight and five-cents box.” I don't know what you would win. But [one cousin remembered] how she would send him down to Smitty's, and he said, “I wondered why I always got free ice cream!”

Day Trips with the Grandkids

[I don't know if it was unusual for a woman to be running a tavern at that time.] But she inherited it, in a sense, [and] someone

had to keep it going. She was a character. She knew what she wanted. I mean, she was married at sixteen, had six children. Her world was not too wide; not too big. But I think she knew better. I don't know where she got this drive from.

She was very kind to us. She belonged to the Monte San Giacomo Society, the Women's Auxiliary. They would have Christmas parties. She would bring the grandkids, and Santa would give us a gift.

They [also had] bus trips, and she would take us. We would have to get the pots: she would cook. I mean, it wasn't a hotdog and hamburger affair. We weren't going away for a week—it was a day trip—but we had to lug all of this. I think we went to Haverstraw, New York, on the bus. She was delighted.

Shopping on Washington Street...

She loved to shop for people. Washington Street, in those days, had so many shops, and she knew them all. There was Henry's,

which was lamps and tchotchkes, [but] not dollar-store things. Henry's had the latest, greatest—they had fancy lamps, women in long gowns, and those powder-puff heads, and the dresses had lace around them. To clean, a nightmare, and because they were fragile, not for people trying to raise children. But she was always in Henry's buying, and if there was no one to give it to, she stored it until there [would] come a day that she could.

Then there was Madame Presby, who had women's lingerie, undergarments. [And,] a bakery, Hans Jesse, on Washington Street, that had all her favorite cakes. My father

would say, "Why can't you buy a decent piece of cake? Like a ring or something that will last through tomorrow?" [Because the cakes she bought were] always the fanciest thing. [There was one with] a beehive, a round cake, cream inside and cream on top, and crushed nuts. Tutti-frutti cakes, with fruit all over them. But she had to have them. That's what she liked.

Then there was Adams Bootery, and, I mean, for a woman her size, she knew what she wanted. She had taste, she had style. She wanted the shoes with the pocketbook to match. I think she was also curious [about fashions and trends.] And when my grandfather was gone, she was in charge. My father would say, "The cash register is not the bank." But he would let it go.

Plus, there were so many vendors that would come. There was this Mr. Meyer, a big giant of a man, and he would come with bedspreads. She had [only a small] bedroom upstairs and she'd be buying bedspreads. Everything he sold was wrapped in brown paper and had cord around it.

Then you had Louie the Jeweler, this short Jewish guy with white hair. I think he had a glass eye. She'd be buying jewelry [from him]—*for us*. She started buying charms, when charm bracelets were big, and she always [had engraved on them]—which we thought was hysterical—"Love, Grandma Palumbo." Like we didn't know her! She was the only grandmother we had! [*Laughs.*] We didn't want to insult her: "Yeah, we know you, Grandma." But she would have it inscribed, and what she did for one, she did for everyone.

...And On Madison Street...

[She shopped at] two children's stores. One was on the corner of Madison before Fourth Street. It was Esther's. Esther's would

always have, in May, the window display of communion outfits, with the crowns. Esther's also sold hosiery in boxes; when you went, they opened the box, and they'd put their hand in it to show you the color—real hoity-toity stuff!

...And in Journal Square

She'd take us on the bus to Journal Square, Jersey City. There was a store up there—Simmie's Children's Store. We would go in and she would buy Easter outfits. You had to have the hat, you had to have the pocketbook, and they had little tchotchke beads. You got the works.

[But] we had one cousin who had two brothers, so she was kind of rough. And Grandma pulled no punches. She would tell her daughter, "She's a slob. She's a pig. I'm not buying her anything white." *[Laughs.]* That was it. She figured, "I don't think she could handle the white," so she got cut from the white clothes.

[While we were in Journal Square,] she would take us for Chinese food. I mean, all the things that she cooked, she had to have Chinese food. We would go to the Canton Restaurant, up those steps, in Journal Square.

And [then] she'd take us back on the bus. I guess there were things that she didn't do, and wasn't able to do, with her children, [and now] she enjoyed taking us. She never drove. I don't know where she would be if she did, because there were no limits. *[Laughs.]* There were no limits.

The Cousins Reminisce

We try to keep together—the cousins—to keep in touch. When we were kids, our parents would do that. If the aunts lived out of town, they would come and visit Grandma.

We would see them. But, as we get older, everybody goes their own way. Who's married? Who's in college? Who's working? You see them when somebody dies or when somebody gets married. So we just thought, at some point, we just have to try to keep it together. Because now, our children didn't even



Photo of Thomas Palumbo in his police uniform on River Street, near Pier No. 3, Hoboken, ca. 1955.

know the [next generation of] cousins. So we decided, a few of us [to start organizing get-togethers.] We went out one night, just to get together, and then we gradually added the others along, because we thought we've got to combine everybody.

At Christmastime we would go to a restaurant, just to have everybody together, and reminisce. What wasn't important to [one of] us, caught somebody else's eye. [One cousin] would talk about the jar of pigs' feet behind the bar. Some of [the other cousins] looked like, "Did you make that up?" And [each cousin would] talk about the different people they knew, that were special to them. They would jar your memory, and before you knew it, we'd be laughing like loons over some of the stories.

[Like the ones told by] my cousin, Frank, who was a card. He was rough-and-ready. When he got in trouble, his mother would always call my father, so he would be chastised. He'd put him over his knee.

But he was the cutest. He had the sweetest little face, and my grandmother would roar when she would see him; she just couldn't stop laughing. She bought him a leather bomber jacket and a fedora, and he wore it. When she would see him walking up the block, she would almost wet her pants. She would dress him up, and then she laughed at him. But he was the one who could pull it off. Not a big kid, but tough.

[So Frank talked] about a family that we know from the projects, nice people. But kids are kids. Frank must have been ten years old when he fought Alvin and kicked his ass. The next day, Alvin and his friends followed him home. *[She reads from a page of handwritten memories Frank later wrote]:*

“But I didn’t go home. I went to Grandma’s. I told her what happened, and she grabbed the broom and waited. When Alvin and his friends came to the bar, they were greeted by Grandma and the broom. Needless to say, I was never bothered by Alvin or his friends again.”

Back to the Tavern

So there are memories here. Everybody has their own. After a few years, it just dawned on us: Why don’t we see if we can go back to the tavern? That’s where everything happened.

[Grandma died in 1968 and our family sold the tavern in 1970.] They sold it to a Spanish guy, [William Rivera], who was very humble, very kind. My Dad’s family held the mortgage, and this man would come faithfully, every month, to my mother and father’s house to give them the money. When he sold, his nephew, Benny, took it over.

So one night I said to my husband, “Let’s go down to the tavern. I want to see Benny.” I told him what we planned on doing [with the get-together for the cousins]. Then he said, “Do you want to see upstairs?” [At first] I said no. I don’t know who lives upstairs. [But] he told me that he lived there.

When [we went upstairs with Benny and] we opened the door to go into the hall, the same door she had at the top of the stairs was there, and I visualized the whole apartment. I was beside myself. From the kitchen they had a roof deck. It was the roof of the [tavern’s back] hall, [where my father once had his pigeon coop.]

So I tell you—it was such a feeling when I went into that apartment. I was like crazed, numb, everything all at once. I called [one of] my cousins. I said to her, “You’re not going to believe where I am.” She said, “Where are you?” I said, “302 Monroe Street.” “What!?!?” she screamed. I said, “I’m here in the apartment. It’s everything I remember.”



Photo of Tommy Palumbo in his Army uniform, holding two of his pigeons on the roof of 302 Monroe Street, where he had his coop, ca. 1942.

Palumbo Family Christmas Get-Togethers

[We had two Palumbo Family Christmas Get-Togethers at the tavern before the building was sold and torn down in July 2013. The first one was in 2008.] Oh, my God, we really should have filmed it—because I never thought this was going to happen. Everybody tripping over everybody, hysterical, laughing, crying, screaming. I remember, it was like an explosion. We did bring old pictures, laughing at the hats, the characters. It was a scream.

[We had our second—and last—get-together at 302 Monroe Street the following year. Then the place went up for sale.] Two young cousins wanted to buy it. Their parents said, “Oh, no. We lived that life before. It’s not happening.” Young guys. “Are you nuts?” They wouldn’t let them do it.

[But it] stirred those age-old urges. “Oh, what if we had the tavern!” Well, look at the sacrifice Grandma made, and times are different. Grandma tried to hold it together, with everybody’s help. Who’s going to jump in and sacrifice their life now? Bad idea. But, yet, you felt an attachment. It’s not your house, but it *is* your house.

The Flagpole

In some of the photos of the tavern, [you'll see a] flagpole outside. Well, all of a sudden, [with the sale of the building,] the fate of the flagpole became a big issue, because my grandfather erected it.

Now the place is being sold, and as fate would have it, we were at a memorial service for a friend, Al's mom. His dad and my dad were friends. I started to get weepy about the bar, now it's being sold, and I [mentioned] the flagpole. And Al said, "You want that flagpole?"

Now my husband's next to me: "What are you going to do with it?" That's the only thing he said. I said, "I don't know. We don't have a place for a flagpole in the city. Maybe one of my cousins, [who live in the suburbs], would want it." So now I'm soliciting people to take the flagpole.

Well, to his word, Al, and a guy named Nick, got the flagpole. I get a call from Al [and he said,] "You're not gonna believe it. When they moved the flagpole, something few off it." It's a copper piece.

We never heard about it before. My grandfather had it inscribed [before he installed the flagpole, in honor of the soldiers who served in World War II, including two of his sons, Charles and Thomas.] The inscription was "Dedicated by F. Palumbo Tavern, Dec. 1942."

[Nick, the guy who moved the flagpole and picked up the copper piece when it came off,] cleaned it up [and the inscription was revealed.] He said the copper was green. If somebody had come around, they probably would have sold it as scrap metal.

I said, "You know, there's a reason for this to be." I think my grandfather had a hand in it. Because we knew about the flagpole; we knew he put it up. We knew how long it was there—over seventy years. [But we didn't know about this copper piece.] Now the property's sold. I wanted the flagpole, and here's this treasure on top—a hidden treasure, hidden for all that time.

We Were Very Happy Here and We Stayed

It makes me think: Here's an immigrant, a teenager, an only son—leaving his parents, his sisters. It's a big undertaking to leave home. I don't know where you get the courage—this drive for betterment. And to have this gratitude [for your adopted country].

At that time it was such a close-knit community, [and it stayed that way for many years]. When one person came, they would pave the way for others. I recall relatives of both grandparents having family come over, and whoever was here would always look out for them. They would try to find them an apartment, get them a job; they would work at the sewing factory—give them a start, try and help them out. They paved the way for them.

For sure, many of them moved on. Other family members came; their children started to get married and move out of town. All of them left, who wanted to move to the suburbs—but us. Ironically, my father's three sisters wound up in the same town [when they moved out of Hoboken]. But my grandmother wasn't going anywhere. She didn't want to hear about it. And we felt the same.

I recall when our generation was getting married; everybody wanted a house out of town. My husband was a fireman; I became a teacher; his parents were here; my parents were here. I said to my husband, "No. Forget it. I don't want to be commuting. For what? You see people on the road. It's dark when they leave; it's dark when they come home. What did they enjoy? They sleep in their house, they don't enjoy it." So I wasn't part of that.

So many of our friends moved away. But I was very happy here. We had my parents and in-laws to help with the kids. I could walk to school. I wasn't going. And I didn't regret it. It never entered our minds to move. We were very happy here, and we stayed.

The Hoboken Oral History Project

“Vanishing Hoboken,” an oral history project, was initiated in 2000 by members of the Hoboken Historical Museum and the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library in response to dramatic physical, social, and economic changes in the city of Hoboken over the preceding twenty years, and to consequent “vanishing” of certain aspects of public life.

For much of the last century, Hoboken was a working-class town, home to many waves of immigrant families, and to families who journeyed from the southern regions of the U.S. and from Puerto Rico—all looking for work. Hoboken, close to ports of entry in New Jersey and New York, offered a working waterfront and many factories, as well as inexpensive housing. Each new wave of arrivals—from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico—found work on the waterfront, at the Bethlehem Steel Shipyards, Lipton Tea, Tootsie Roll, Maxwell House, or in numerous, smaller garment factories. Then the docks closed in the 1960s; factory jobs dwindled as Hoboken’s industrial base relocated over the 1970s and ’80s. Maxwell House, once the largest coffee roasting plant in the world, was the last to leave, in 1992.

In the go-go economy of the 1980s, Hoboken’s row houses, just across the river from Manhattan, were targeted by developers to young professionals seeking an easy commute to New York City. Historically home to ever-changing waves of struggling families—who often left when they became prosperous—Hoboken began in the mid-1980s to experience a kind of reverse migration, in which affluent condominium-buyers replaced poor and working class tenants, many of whom had been forced out by fire, through condo-conversion buy-outs, or through rising rents. More recently, building construction has further altered the face of Hoboken, as modern towers are rising up alongside the late-19th century row houses that once spatially defined our densely populated, mile-square city and provided its human scale.

The Hoboken Oral History Project was inaugurated with the goal of capturing, through the recollections of longtime residents, “Vanishing Hoboken”—especially its disappearing identity as a working-class city and its tradition of multi-ethnic living. In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the Oral History Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of “Vanishing Hoboken” chapbooks. Since 2002, thirty-one chapbooks—

including this one—have been published, with the support of the Historical Commission, the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities; and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Vanishing Hoboken Chapbooks

The editor of this series chose to call these small booklets “chapbooks,” a now rarely heard term for a once-common object. And so, a brief explanation is now required: A chapbook, states the most recent edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is a

...small, inexpensive, stitched tract formerly sold by itinerant dealers, or chapman, in Western Europe and in North America. Most chapbooks were 5 x 4 inches in size and were made up of four pages (or multiples of four), illustrated with woodcuts. They contained tales of popular heroes, legends and folklore, jests, reports of notorious crimes, ballads, almanacs, nursery rhymes, school lessons, farces, biblical tales, dream lore, and other popular matter. The texts were mostly rough and anonymous, but they formed the major parts of secular reading and now serve as a guide to the manners and morals of their times.

Chapbooks began to appear in France at the end of the 15th century. Colonial America imported them from England but also produced them locally. These small booklets of mostly secular material continued to be popular until inexpensive magazines began to appear during the early 19th century.

Although some of the chapbooks in the “Vanishing Hoboken” series are considerably longer than their earlier counterparts, others are nearly as brief. They are larger in size, to allow us to use a reader-friendly type size. But all resemble the chapbooks of yesteryear, as they contain the legends, dreams, crime reports, jokes, and folklore of our contemporaries. One day, perhaps, they might even serve as guides to the “manners and morals” of our city, during the 20th and early 21st centuries.



*Ann Palumbo Monaco
holding the copper
fitting her grandfather
had stamped and
attached to the top
of the tavern's flagpole.*



A Project of the Hoboken Historical Museum