

Ice Cream Stores of Windsor Locks, Conn.

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The citizens of Windsor Locks, Connecticut have a long-standing love affair with ice cream. Ice cream stores have been a prominent fixture in Windsor Locks since before 1900. This article presents photographs and stories about the ice cream stores of Windsor Locks from about 1888 to the 1960s. It was the 1950s and 60s when two new trends started. One was that small, locally owned stores started to be replaced by stores of large chains such as Friendly's. The second was the introduction soft-serve ice cream, such as that served by the Dairy Cream on Ella Grasso Turnpike, across from Bradley Field.

The ice cream stores which are discussed in this article are:

- **Pasquale Colapietro's store**, in the Mather Block of Main St.
- **Dominick Alfano's store**, in the Barrett building on Main St., just south of Church St.
- **Leo Viola's store**, in the Barrett building on Main St., just south of Church St.
- **Vito Colapietro's store**, which at the Main St. level of Coly's Hotel
- **The Co-op Pharmacy**, Main St.
- **Carroll's Pharmacy**, on Suffield St
- **Marconi's Luncheonette (Wuzzy's)** on the corner of Spring St and Main St.
- **Tony's Soda Shoppe**. Vito Colapietro turned his store over to his son, Tony.
- **Dougherty's Drug Store** in Dexter Plaza
- **Friendly's** in Dexter Plaza
- **Dairy Cream** on Ella Grasso Turnpike, near Bradley Field

While ice cream could be purchased in other stores such as the A&P on Main St., this article focusses on the stores to which families, groups of friends, and individuals went to relax, have conversations, and enjoy an ice cream cone, an ice cream sundae or a milkshake.

Pasquale Colapietro's Ice Cream Store

Here is a 1906 photo of Pasquale Colapietro's store.

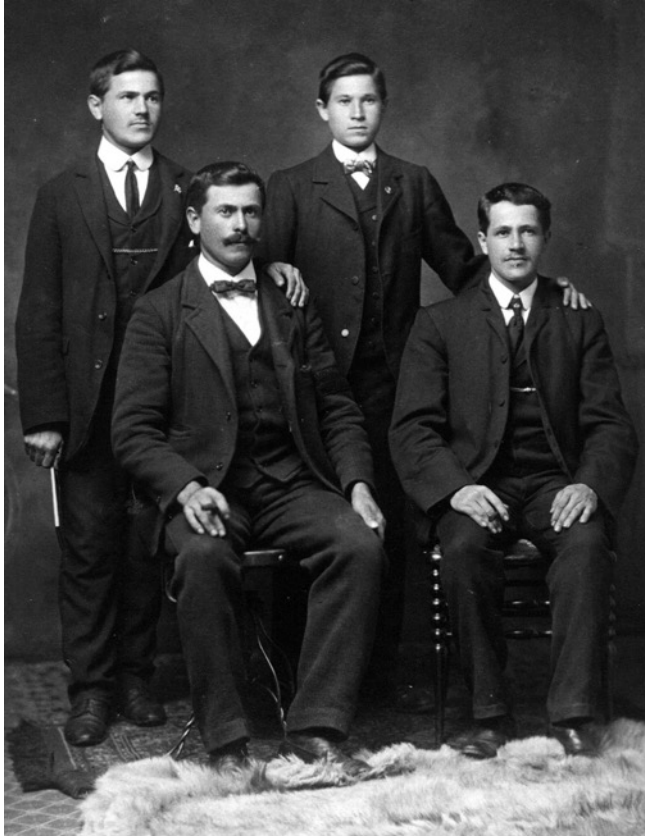


Pasquale Colapietro's store, Main St., Windsor Locks, Conn. about 1906.
Pasquale (seated), daughter, Pasqualina, Vito Colapietro,
Grazia (Patsy's wife), Leo Colapietro behind the counter.

In the above photo, Pasquale Colapietro, known as "Patsy Coly" is sitting down on the left. His daughter, Pasqualina, who was known as Esther, is by his side. It was common for Italian immigrants to Americanize their names because non-Italians found the Italian pronunciation to be difficult. Patsy's dog can be seen beside Esther. Patsy was the oldest of four Colapietro brothers. One of his brothers, Vito, who came to the U.S. in 1905, is in the center of the picture, behind the dog. To the right of Vito is Patsy's wife, Grazia, who was called "Grace". On the right, behind the counter is another of the Colapietro brothers, Leo, who later moved to Springfield, Mass, and opened up the "Windsor Locks Grocery Store" on Main St. in Springfield.

The 1913 "Aero view" map of Windsor Locks indicates that Patsy's store was on the Mather Block, which was the block of Main St between Spring St. and Oak St. Information on that map shows that Patsy's store also sold fruit, cigars, tobacco, groceries, confectionary, post cards, and toys, and imported olive oil.

It was the custom of the time for the first Italian sibling who moved to the US to help his other siblings to come to this country, and to help further when they arrived. All three of Patsy's brothers came to the US. Below is a photo of the four Colapietro brothers. Only one, Giovanni, returned to live in Italy.



*The Colapietro Brothers
Vito, Giovanni, Leonardo and Pasquale*

Dominick Alfano's Ice Cream Store

Below is a photograph of a very early ice cream store in Windsor Locks. You can easily read the name of the store in the Window "Dominick Alfano Co." on the front window. Under that are the words "Ice Cream" and "Soda" in large, bold, fancy letters. On each of the left side windows is the word "MOXIE". This store is in the Barrett Building on the corner of Main St. and State St., across Main Street from the bridge to Warehouse Point. If you expand this photo on a computer screen, you will see the word "Grocery" appear on the scalloped awning on the front window.



Dominick Alfano Co. Ice cream shop, in the Barrett Building,
Corner of Main St and State St., just south of Church St.

So when did this store exist? Look at the next photo, which came from the Windsor Locks Historical Society's website. They are both the same corner store of the Barrett Building. The store has the same Moxie signs on the left window, the same slanted corner wall where the door is, and a scalloped front window shade. Underneath that photo on the Windsor Locks Historical Society website (and below), it says "The Windsor Locks Journal, June 8, 1888". Now we know that Alfano's store existed in 1888.



The Windsor Locks Journal
June 8, 1888

Leo Viola's Ice Cream Store

Below is a 1913 photo of Leo Viola's Ice Cream Store.



Main Street, Windsor Locks, Connecticut 1913

By looking at the three previous photos, you will see that this store is in the same location (The Barrett Building) as Dominick Alfano's store. You can't read the lettering on the scalloped awning on the front window in the above photo.. Below is an expanded view the section of this photo which has the front window awning.



Image expanded and enhanced to show the name
"Leo Viola" on the awning of the store

You can clearly see that this is store of Mr. Leo Viola. The 1913 Aero View Map of Windsor Locks lists Leo Viola's store and says that it also sold confectionery, cigars, olive oils, etc. Now we have two pieces of information saying that Leo Viola's store existed in 1913. It is the same store, but under new management.

Leo Viola store also sold plates with a calendar and a decorative painting of fruit. The plate below has a 1929 Calendar on it, so we know that Leo Viola's store, which had been in operation in 1913, was still in business in 1929.



Advertising plate for Leo Viola's store
with fruit painting and 1929 calendar.
Store was in Barrett Bldg., Main St. Windsor Locks, CT

Vito Colapietro's Ice Cream Store

Earlier in this article, you saw a photo of Pasquale Colapietro's Ice Cream Store. Pasquale's younger brother, Vito was in that shop. Vito worked for his brother in 1906 when he first came over from Turi, Italy. Turi is a tiny town, south of Bari, Italy. The patron saint of Turi is St. Oronzo. Everyone from Windsor Locks knows the name "St. Oronzo." Besides working for his brother, Pasquale, Vito also worked on the bridge to Warehouse Point. Around 1917, he purchased the Byrnes Hotel on Main Street, across from the Train Station. It became known as the Windsor Locks Hotel, and later as Coly's Hotel. On the street level of the hotel, there were three stores. Vito rented out two of them, and used the one on the corner of the Hotel next to the driveway, as an Ice Cream Store. Below is a photo of Vito Colapietro in his store in 1917. Notice that while this store was a bit larger, it is not all that different from Pasquale's store. It had a ice cream and soda counter on one side and a counter on the other side for selling tobacco products, magazines, candy, post cards, etc. The sign on the right lists the following drinks: grape juice, orangeade, root beer, milk shakes, malted milk. The bottles on the shelf on the right are the various syrups that he used. The Coca Cola lamp has a cut glass lamp lampshade that would be worth a small fortune today. The counter was marble.



Vito Colapietro's Candy Store 1917

Vito Colapietro had the following photo "Retouched" for purposes of advertising. It was taken in 1927. You can see Vito in front of his store, wearing a white apron. The man standing next to him was Michael J. Fitzpatrick. The boy with them was Vito's son, John. Notice the other two stores on the street level of the hotel. The one next to Vito's store was "The Boston Store". The one to the left of that was the "Windsor Locks New Market". In the photos of the Dominick Alfano and the Leo Viola stores, you saw the same style of awning over the front window.



*1927 photo of Coly's Hotel "retouched" for advertising.
Michael J. Fitzpatrick, Vito and John J. Colapietro standing*

Vito's Ice Cream Store went through a number of transformations between 1917 and the redevelopment of Main St., but it always had that same style awning. I remember getting out the long metal rod that was used to roll the awning up and down and operating it often. Later, those other two stores became a shoe store which was run by Mondo Bianchi, and a Package Store. Back then, liquor stores were known as Package Stores.

The following photo is of Vito's store in 1932. Vito, as always, was wearing a white apron. Next to him are Moses Goldfarb and Vito's son, Leo. Later in life, Leo became a Navy pilot, and was given the nickname "Pete", which stuck with him to the present day.

That nickname came from the fact that his Navy buddies couldn't pronounce his last name "Colapietro". The correct pronunciation is "Co la p yet tro". They had trouble with the "p yet" part, so they simplified it to "Pete". When they pronounced his last name, it was "Cola pete tro". Many still use this Americanized pronunciation. Moses Goldfarb ran a rooming house on the upper floors of the building that you seen on the right of the photo.



*Vito Colapietro, Moses Goldfarb, Leo,
in front of Coly's hotel 1932*

By 1933, the Ice Cream Store was transformed into a "beer tavern", as you can see in the following photo. Notice the sign in the right of the photo which said that Vito was not allowed to sell alcoholic beverages other than beer.



Vito Colapietro's Beer Tavern 1933

Notice the bar. It was made of two inch thick cherry. The bar was removed later, when he turned the store back to an Ice Cream Store. The bar was removed and stored in a barn behind the hotel. When I started to build a Soap Box Derby car, Vito's son, my Uncle John, remembered the two inch thick cherry bar that had been stored in the barn for decades, and brought it down for me to use as the floorboard of the car. That was in the mid 1950s.

Below is a photo of me in that Soap Box Derby car, whose floorboard was once Vito's bar top. My brother, Lenny, is in the truck behind me. My car was sponsored by C.H.Dexter & Sons, Inc, which is where my dad worked. They let my dad use their pickup truck to drive my car to the Soap Box Derby track in East Hartford. I built this car in the basement of my dentist, Dr. Sullivan, on the corner Spring St and Center St. He had an excellent woodworking and metalworking shop in his basement, and he was very generous with his time in helping me build that car.



Mel Montemerlo in Soap Box Derby Car.
His brother Lenny in the truck. About 1955.

Co-Op Pharmacy (and ice cream store)

Below is a photo of the Co-Op Pharmacy, which was on Main St in Windsor Locks in 1930. James P. Carroll, Jr. and Art Logan worked there part time. Art left to join his brothers in the plumbing business. You can see the Ice cream and soda fountain counter and stools on the right.



Co-Op Pharmacy, Main St., Windsor Locks, Conn., 1930
Art Logan (left) and Jim Carroll Jr. (right) worked there part-time.

Carroll's Pharmacy (which housed a great ice cream store)

James P. Carroll Jr. opened Carroll's Pharmacy in 1945. Unlike the Italians we have just been discussing, who came over around 1900, his ancestor, Richard Carroll, arrived in the U.S. in 1861. By the time James P. Carroll Jr. opened his Pharmacy on Suffield St. in 1945, his family had deep roots here. Charles Carroll, son of James P. Carroll Jr. provided the photo of the Co Op pharmacy and and the following photos of Carroll's pharmacy, as well as the information about them.



James P. Carroll in his store. About 1955

Below are a number of photographs of Carroll's Pharmacy around 1955. The captions on the photos provide the names of the people in the photos.



Jim Carroll, in front of Carroll's Pharmacy. Since Jim was also the Fire Chief, he had a store window dedicated to Fire Prevention Week.



Charles Carroll between his grandfather, James P. Carroll Sr. (left) and his father, James P. Carroll, Jr (right), in Carroll's Pharmacy, Circa 1955



James P. Carrol Jr. and James P. Carroll Sr. in Carroll's Pharmacy, about 1955



James P. Carroll Jr and Louise Naie in Carroll's Pharmacy

Dr. Ettore Carneglia, who seemed to be everyone's physician in Windsor Locks, used to give his young patients vouchers that could be redeemed for an ice cream cone at Carroll's. Charles Carroll said that in the days of Carroll's Pharmacy, many prescriptions were compounded by hand, and the capsules were filled by hand. He also said that the Pharmacy was on the ground level, and his family lived above the Pharmacy. They built a Cape Cod style house next to the Pharmacy and moved into it in 1963 when the Pharmacy closed. The photos and stories that Charles provided bring back pleasant memories of Carroll's Pharmacy. Those of us who remember Carroll's Pharmacy can really appreciate what personal service used to be. Every time we now walk into a CVS or a Rite Aid, we are reminded of what we miss.

Marconi's Luncheonette (affectionately known as Wuzzy's)

Marconi's Luncheonette was on the corner of Spring St and Main St. until the reconstruction of Main St. It was a lot of things to a lot of people. Teenagers will remember it as a hangout. There were booths in the back which were great for hanging out. There was a time when Ella Grasso, who later became the Governor of Connecticut, had breakfast at Marconi's often. The singer, Gene Pitney, went to Marconi's a number of times, always without advance warning. The popular radio announcers, Bob Steele and Brad Davis would visit Marconi's and mention it on the air.

Folks from Windsor Locks remember the booths in the back, the pinball machine, the Cherry Cokes, the homemade meatballs and tomato sauce, the burgers and fries, home fries, sausage grinders, and the list goes on. They also made a chopped pickle and bologna sandwich.

The Marconi brothers were Johnny, Louis and Angelo, who was called "Wuzzy". There is a story about how he got his nickname. The story is: Angelo was supposed to serve Mass one Sunday but he didn't show up. Fr. Grady asked his friends "Angelo wasn't sick, **was he**? The "was he" sounded like Wuzzy, and ever since, Angelo was known as Wuzzy. Is the story true? Who knows? Back then people didn't have cell phones which could record video of everything.

Below is a photo of the exterior of Marconi's Luncheonette. Unfortunately I could not find any photos of the lively interior of the store.



Marconi's Luncheonette on corner of Spring St. and Main St., Windsor Locks, Conn., was usually called "Wuzzy's".
A great Ice Cream Store and teenage hangout .

The discussion of Marconi's on the Windsor Locks group on Facebook was vigorous. That conversation was a lot of fun. Some remember that guitar lessons were given in the floor above Marconi's. Some remember their parents telling them that they couldn't go to Marconi's. Some remember playing "church hooky", and going to Marconi's instead of St. Mary's on Sunday morning. One remembered that a Saturday night ritual was to stand in front of Marconi's and watch the cars and girls go by, before heading out to Riverside Park. Some who worked as paper boys remember going to Marconi's the day they got paid, and spending too much money on the pinball machine. One remembered that all of the Marconi brothers had been alter boys at St. Mary's.

Marconi's luncheonette was unforgettable.

Tony's Soda Shoppe

In about 1950, Vito Colapietro's son, Tony, took over the ice cream store, and it became known as Tony's Soda Shoppe. Below is a photo of Tony in his store, on opening day.. The store was completely remodeled. Notice the newer style stools at the counter. Notice the cigar and cigarette counter on the right. I remember cigarettes selling for as low as 15 cents per pack, but that might have been back when Vito Colapietro ran the store.

The store was decorated for its grand opening as Tony's Soda Shoppe. You can see the vase of flowers on the counter on the right. I remember asking why "shop" was spelled "Shoppe". I also remember not understanding the answer. Uncle Tony let me help take care of customers on that opening day.



Tony Colapietro at opening of Tony's Soda Shop, around 1950

The fact that his son, Tony, was managing the store didn't stop Vito from working there every day. Here is Vito in the store in 1950.



Vito Colapietro at opening of Tony's Soda Shop, around 1950

In the above photo, Vito is at the counter which was toward the back of the store. You can see the stool of the Ice Cream counter at the right of the photo, From the 1950 opening of Tony's Soda Shop until it was closed for the redevelopment of Main St, the store didn't change much. Vito continued to run the hotel from the Ice Cream Store. That's where people paid their hotel bills and where all hotel business was conducted.

Dougherty's Drug Store and Friendly's

In the 1960's and 70s, there were two other ice cream stores on Windsor Locks's Main St. They were in Dexter's Plaza. Dougherty's Drug Store had a classic Ice Cream Store counter. It served everything you would expect from an Ice Cream Store, and it also had a simple lunch menu too. I worked there in the summer of 1962. It was a good experience. I already knew how to make the ice cream dishes. The really interesting thing was learning how be a short order cook. It was a great summer job.

Just a few doors down from Dougherty's Drug was the new Friendly's. It was much like all the other Friendly's stores in the US. It was a fun place to go. It signaled a change. It signaled the introduction of large chains of ice cream stores. I couldn't find any photos of Dougherty's Drugs or of Friendly's. Here is a photo of Dexter Plaza, where they were located.



Dexter Plaza, 1965

Dougherty Drug Store was in the corner at the end of the road that you are looking down. It was to the right of Grant's. Friendly's was also to the right of the road, but closer to the cars are parked on the right.

DAIRY CREAM (on Ella Grasso Turnpike near Bradley Field)

The Dairy Cream on Ella Grasso Turnpike near Bradley Field was a big step in the parade of ice cream stores in Windsor Locks. It was founded in 1954. It was the first of the soft-serve ice cream stores in Windsor Locks. It quickly became very popular. There were days and evenings when the parking lot was full and the lines were long. It was, in the tradition of ice cream shops such as “Wuzzy’s” (Marconi’s Luncheonette), a gathering place for family and friends. It was a hangout, but in a different sense. People hung out in their cars and in the beds of their pickup trucks in the parking lot instead of in the booths or on stools at an ice cream counter. It was the first place I remember seeing people in the beds of pickup trucks, enjoying a leisurely ice cream treat. It was a place where folks with antique cars met to show off their cars. It is the longest lasting ice cream shop in Windsor Locks. 1954 to the present day (2016) is a half century. Here are some great photos of this great Windsor Locks ice cream institution.





Bradley Field Dairy Queen at night



Dairy Cream Treats



Antique Cars in parking lot of Windsor Locks Dairy Cream

CONCLUSION

Why would anyone bother to write a history of the ice cream shops of a small town like Windsor Locks, Conn.? Well, if you ask such a question, you are probably not from Windsor Locks. I know from my grandparents that ice cream stores were a big part of Windsor Locks culture in the early to mid 1900s. I lived in Windsor Locks from the early 1940s to 1960, and knew Tony's Soda Shoppe, Carroll's Pharmacy, Marconi's Luncheonette (Wuzzy's), Friendly's and the Dairy Cream very well, and I worked at Dougherty's Drug Store's ice cream counter for a summer. All the kids that I knew loved to go out for ice cream. Going out for ice cream in Windsor Locks is a longstanding tradition. It was and is a popular thing for families, friends and for groups of kids to do. Of course, it is a great place to go on a date.

My grandfather, Vito Colapietro, had the ice cream store on the Main Street level of Coly's hotel, and I visited my grandparents at their apartment in the hotel at least two days a week. I was in the ice cream store every day I visited my grandparents. My grandfather taught me how to play the pinball machine in his store before I was three years old. He would lift me up onto the top of a wooden soda box in front of the pin ball machine. He showed me how to use "body English" on the machine; that is, to hit the machine with my body to make the ball go where I wanted it to, but without pushing it so hard that I would "tilt" the machine. He taught me how to make ice cream cones, ice cream sundaes, milk shakes, and banana splits. He showed me how to get the partially frozen gallon of "Lemon Blend" out of the freezer and use an ice pick to loosen it up, and pour a glass for a customer. He taught me how to roll the awning outside the store up and down, and how to stock the shelves in the candy section. You can see why I have such an interest in the Ice Cream Stores of Windsor Locks.

I went to St Mary's Elementary School. One day, something that my grandfather taught me, got me in trouble in math class. The Sister was teaching us fractions. She gave us a worksheet with drawings of fruit and other foods and told us to draw a line on each which cut it in half. Everybody was expected to get 100% on this simple test. I believe I was the only one to disappoint the nice Sister. When it came to the banana, I drew a line across the banana the long way. I remember distinctly that the Sister reprimanded me in front of the entire class, saying "Why would anyone ever cut a banana the long way? Everyone cuts a banana in half by slicing it across middle (the short way)". I was flabbergasted and astounded. I remember responding, "Well Sister, I guess you have never made a Banana Split." She was very unhappy with my response. I told my mother about this when I got home, and then Mom reprimanded me for being disrespectful to a Nun. All of this was because of ice cream. :-)

I hope you have enjoyed this informal history of the Ice Cream Stores of Windsor Locks. It was fun for me to put together. Many, but not all of the photos came from the photo collection of Vito and Anna Colapietro. The photos of Carroll's Pharmacy came from Charles Carroll. The photos of the Dairy Cream came from another Facebook group that is dedicated to this particular Dairy Cream store. I thank Kat Arbacheski for the suggestion of including the Dairy Cream in this article.

The members of the Facebook group known as "You know you are from Windsor Locks When" discussed many of the photos in this article. I used that information in this article. Without the input from the folks in the Facebook group, this article would have been much shorter, less personal, less "real" and less fun. I want to thank everyone who contributed photographs, stories and comments. Those stories are history that was told by people who lived it, or who are children of people who lived it. The members of this group care deeply about their town and its history.

Finally, I thank the reader for reading this article, and I ask that you pass it on to anyone else you think may be interested. It does bring back some great memories.

Thank you very much.

Mel Montemerlo
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