

Johnny Cappa and “Johnny’s Market”

Mel Montemerlo

April 19, 2016

Kids growing up in downtown Windsor Locks in the 1950s, 60s and early 1970s knew Johnny Cappa and frequented “Johnny’s Market” on Chestnut St., across from St. Mary’s Church. “Johnny’s” was a place where you could get the normal things you would get in a small market, but it was far more than that. Every time you passed Johnny’s, you saw a number of bicycles lying on the sidewalk in front of his shop. It was where kids stopped in for penny candy or for a Coke. He also had a stand with comic books. You could get comic books without covers for a nickel.

In front of his counter, he had a Coca Cola cooler in which the bottles sat in very cold water. The door was on the top, and you had to pull it up. Then you saw the bottles sitting in the water and you also saw a stream of extremely cold water coming out of a pump. Boys would try to hold their hand in the stream of cold water as long as they could. It was a mark of “strength and power”.

Kids stopped at Johnny’s on the way to or from school, on the way to Pesci Park, on the way to Union School for basketball practice, and on the way to St. Mary’s school for catechism class or choir practice. In the eyes of the youth of downtown Windsor Locks in the 1950s and 60s, there were two iconic stores: Marconi’s Luncheonette, which we called “Wuzzy’s”, and Johnny Cappa’s Market, which we called “Johnny’s”.

Adults frequented Johnny’s too, although for different reasons. Let’s look at some of those reasons. Johnny made fresh grinders for you. You could get a salami, cheese, lettuce and tomato grinder for 50 cents. Johnny’s Market was a single small room, but it was a very tall room, and there were shelves all the way up to the ceiling. Those shelves were packed. He had a few each of lots of items, and he would get them down with a long stick with a claw on the end. Johnny operated that device with great skill. Nothing ever fell.

The Italian community in Windsor Locks loved a brand of bread made in Hartford. It was made by the Moon Bakery. They made the classic round loaf of Italian bread with a thick crust. It came in a white bag. The only problem with this delicious bread was that if you didn’t eat it in about a day, it got as very hard. Of course, even then you could toast it, or dip it in various things like milk. My grandfather, Vito Colapietro, loved to dip it in a glass of wine. Moon Bakery also made grinder rolls. These might have been the best grinder rolls ever made. You could buy them at Aldo’s, Maria’s, the A&P, and Johnny’s. However, Aldo’s, Maria’s and the A&P ran out early. Somehow, Johnny’s always seemed to have them. You could get them there in the evening. Those Moon Bakery grinder rolls cost 5 cents apiece.

There was one more thing which made Johnny's really special, and way ahead of his time. Johnny's was one of the first grocery stores anywhere to make deliveries. His brother, Eddie, had a pickup truck and he made deliveries all day. That gave Johnny's an advantage over the other markets. Back then, not everyone owned a car. The deliveries were something many people depended on.

Johnny Cappa was born in 1912 and died in 1983. He ran his Market for 28 years, from 1947 to 1975, when he retired. However, none of us really knew Johnny. We just went there for penny candy, a loaf of bread, a Coca Cola or a comic book. We went there as part of a group on bicycles.

Just how popular Johnny Cappa was back then became clear to me this evening when I put up a single, grainy photo of Johnny's Market on the Facebook website known as "You know you are from Windsor Locks when:", and it got 45 "likes" and 15 responses in the first three hours it was up. On the spur of the moment, I decided to try to learn what I could about Johnny Cappa by doing a search on the Internet. A search of the Springfield Union newspapers yielded seven newspaper articles. They shed a bit of light on the life of Johnny Cappa -- not much light -- but it was very satisfying. I learned more by reading those seven news clippings than I did from visiting his store an uncountable number of times. All seven of those articles are included below.

The first things that came to light were the dates of his birth and death, the year he started his market and the year he retired. All this was stated above. Two articles show that he was a member of the Parent Teacher Association. Another described a break-in at his home, and yet another described how a car smashed into his house. When the car smashed into his house, those who were hurt were attended by Dr. Ettore F. Carneglia. Finally there was the announcement of Johnny Cappa's death.

I had been trying for months to find a photo of Johnny's Market and finally got one from Mickey Danyluk this week, which you will find below. I have a photo which includes Johnny's brother, Eddie. There was a resemblance between the two brothers, so that photo is included below as well.

As I look back at my years growing up in Windsor Locks, I can say that Johnny Cappa and Johnny's Market made a good life even better. He was a boon to the community. He left a good feeling in the minds of the kids and adults who knew him and frequented his market.

From all of us who remember you, "Thank you, Johnny."



Johnny Cappa's Market, Chestnut St, Windsor Locks, CT



Umberto Pesci, Fidelio Giannuzzi, Eddie Cappa, Leo Montemerlo 1927

MRS. TERSILIA CAPPA

Windsor Locks, Conn., Aug. 28—Mrs. Tersilia Cappa of 18 Church St., widow of Frank Cappa, died at her home yesterday, following a brief illness. She was born in Italy, and had resided in this town the past 50 years.

She leaves two daughters, Mrs. Virginia Hancock of this town and Mrs. Frank Sabonis of Broad Brook; three sons, Anthony, John and Edward Cappa, all of this town; also one grandson.

The funeral will be held tomorrow morning at 8:30 at the Johnson funeral home on Oak St., followed by requiem high mass in St. Mary's Church at 9. Burial will be in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Springfield Union
August 29, 1955

Groups of PTA Are Announced

WINDSOR LOCKS, Conn.—Mrs. William Levine, president of **Windsor Locks** PTA, has announced chairmen of the committees for the year. The PTA includes the high school, Union School and North Street School.

Chairman of the ways and means committee is the first vice-president, Mrs. Lawrence Costello of Circle Dr.; program, the second vice-president, Chester Babiarz of Elm St.; publicity, Mrs. James Hanley of Circle Dr., and Mrs. Chester Babiarz of Elm St.; representative to scholarship committee, Mrs. Norman Green, South Main St.; refreshments, Mrs. David Bazyk of Circle Dr. and cochairman, Mrs. John **Cappa** of Suffolk St.; hospitality, Mrs. Lawrence Savoie of Sunset St. and cochairman, Mrs. Edward Olin-sky, Sunset St.; bulletins and publications, Mrs. Edward Jansen, Middle Dr.; printing of Chatter, Mrs. William Fitzgerald of Wedemeyer St.; editor of

Springfield Union
July 28, 1959

ANTHONY J. CAPPAS

WINDSOR LOCKS Conn.-

Anthony J. Cappa of 18 Church St., died Wednesday in Hartford Hospital. Born in Argentina, son of the late Frank and Theresa (Portoluppi) Cappa, he spent most of his life in this town. He leaves two brothers, John A. Cappa and Edward J. Cappa, both of this town; two sisters, Mrs. Sherman Hancock of this town and Mrs. Frank Sabonis of Broad Brook. The funeral will be held Saturday morning at 8.30 at Johnson funeral home on Oak St., with a requiem high mass in St. Mary's Church at 9. Burial will be in St. Mary's Cemetery. Friends may call at the funeral home from 2 to 4 and 7 to 9.

Springfield Union
Feb. 5, 1960

WINDSOR LOCKS BRIEFS

WINDSOR LOCKS, Conn. — A special meeting of Windsor Locks PTA will be held in Union School on Church St. next Wednesday evening, Feb. 10, at 8 p. m. "Brotherhood" will be the theme for the meeting. Guest speakers will be Raymond A. Roncari, presently national director of the Catholic Men's Retreat Movement; Rabbi Louis Kaplan of the Beth Hillel Synagog in Bloomfield; and Rev. Henry A. Peck, pastor of Windsor Locks Congregational Church. The Junior Choir of St. Mary's Church, under direction of Frank Borchetta, and the Junior Choir of the Congregational Church, under direction of Miss Ethyl Bacon, will sing for the program. Room mothers of the fourth grades of the local public schools and Mrs. Landers' morning kindergarten class will assist Mrs. David Bazyk and Mrs. John Cappa, refreshments chairmen.

Springfield Union
Feb. 6, 1960

WINDSOR LOCKS, Conn.—A car owned and operated by Mrs. Ann Marie Bennett of East St., Suffield, got out of control Friday night near Suffield St. and Ahern Ave. and went onto the front lawn of John **Cappa** of 57 Suffield St. It crashed into the front of the **Cappa** home and halted with the front of the car in the living room.

Hurt Seriously

Mrs. Bennett and a passenger, Michael Sullivan, also of East St., were seriously injured and were rushed to Springfield Hospital in the Lions Club ambulance. They were attended at the scene by Dr. E. F. Carniglia. Much damage was done to the car and the front of the home. Patrolmen Theodore Fisher is in charge of the police investigation.

Cappa, who operates the Chestnut St. grocery store, had just arrived home. He and his wife were in the rear of the house about ready to eat supper when the crash occurred.

Springfield Union

Dec. 9, 1961

Windsor Locks Briefs

WINDSOR LOCKS, Conn. —

The Ladies Auxiliary of Smalley Brothers Post, VFW, will meet Sept. 8 at 8 at the post home. Mrs. Charles Hirth, department president, will make her official visit.

Police are investigating a reported break at the home of John **Cappa** of 57 Suffield St. According to police, the break occurred between 7.40 and 9.40 p. m. Wednesday. Entrance to the home allegedly was made by breaking a window in a kitchen door and opening the door from the inside. The kitchen and a bedroom appeared to be ransacked but nothing was reported taken.

Springfield Union

Aug. 21, 1965

John Cappa dies at 71; once ran grocery store

WINDSOR LOCKS, Conn. — John A. Cappa, 71, of 57 Suffield St., retired 28-year proprietor of a Chestnut Street grocery store, died Friday at home.

A lifelong resident of Windsor Locks, he retired in 1975.

He was a communicant of St. Mary's Church.

He leaves his wife, the former Almena Maine; and a brother, Edward A. of Windsor Locks.

The funeral will be Monday morning at Kania Funeral Home and in the church with burial in Grove Cemetery. Donations may be made to American Heart Association, or Windsor Locks Lions Club Ambulance Fund.

Springfield Union
Sept. 18, 1983