

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS LODGE #692

OSSINING, NY

A BRIEF HISTORY

Christopher Columbus lodge #692, Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA), was founded in Ossining, New York just after the 1900's. It was at a time when stone masons were working on building the Croton Dam, a reservoir that supplies water to lower Westchester and New York City. Newly arrived immigrants and their families got together in 1909 to form what was to be a Mutual Aid Society, and named it the Christopher Columbus Protective Association. The first elected President was Lorenzo Montagna (in later years the name became Montague).

Eight years later, the Mutual Aid Society decided to become part of the rapidly growing Order Sons of Italy in America, which began in New York City in 1905. The Society was initiated into the order in 1917 and became known as Cristoforo Colombo Lodge #692 (Christopher Columbus Lodge #692), still maintaining its role as a protective association. Meetings and correspondence were all in Italian, gradually switching to English over the years.

We are (95 years) Young and still going strong.

In the early 1920's lodge members donated their time, labor and talents to construct a building. The lodge was built in a part of Ossining that was known as "The Hollow" a term used for this part of town where Route 9 dips to a "Hollow" through which the Killbrook runs. Most Italian upon arriving in Ossining clustered in this part of town. Along the street the Italians had their own community, a shoe maker, produce store, small grocery and candy stores, selling lemon ice. Chicken and meat markets were also found here along with a TV repair shop. A bakery was established which made the best pizza ever. Most proprietors of these establishments became members of our lodge. Over the years the Italians branched out to other areas of the town and the face of the stores in this area changed. The one remaining constant is our building where we still we hold our regular monthly meetings and many functions.

During the 1930's, Pietro Floriano (Peter Florian who had dropped the "o" on his last name as many of the Italians did during that era and who was also one of our members, became the first Italian policeman on what was then an all Irish police force. This man is also the father of the author of this article (Barbara Florian DiRito who is currently a member and officer of the lodge).

During World War II mothers and wives of members instituted an auxiliary club known as the Victory Club in honor of our members who were serving our country in the armed services.

One of the lodge's greatest achievements in bringing the Italian Heritage to Ossining was in having its annual Columbus Day Celebration. This feast was held on the street right in front of our building in "The Hollow". The street was closed off, vendors, music, fire works and delicious food filled this area during the celebration. In 1948 a child prodigy from Italy – age 9 – Ferruccio Burco conducted the NY Concert Band at the festival.

In 1958 increasing traffic on North Highland Avenue caused the New York State of Transportation to put a stop to this event and since traffic could not be detoured, the Lodge ceased to hold this yearly celebration outdoors.

In the 1950's one of our members, Judge Ulbaldo N. Marino became the NY State Grand Venerable, and according to the book, The Purple Aster (which is about the founding of the Grand Lodge) Venerable Marino took over the grand lodge while it was struggling and helped to turn the tide on its finances.

We've had the honor of receiving and hosting many of our NYS Grand lodge presidents and dignitaries. In 1962 we hosted then Governor John A Volpe of the State of Massachusetts and his wife. Planning sessions have also been held at our lodge.

In 1976 the lodge became co-ed and today we have eight women holding office. At one time our membership was as high as 250, today we are holding at 165.

In 1985 we hosted a group of Italian sailors from Italy who sailed a replica of an old Venetian sailing ship, powered by 27 Italian oarsman, down the Hudson River. This group was known as "U Dragn".

Our lodge can also boast of having two of its members hold the office of Mayor of Ossining. John Donzella and Thomas Cambarieri.

Picnics, clambakes, golf tournaments, dinners, carnivals, Christmas parties for young and old are just some of the activities of the lodge. A scholarship is awarded each year to the student who excels in the Italian Language course offered at the Ossining High School.

Today, Christopher Columbus Lodge #692 is once again back in its traditional role as sponsors of the Columbus Day Celebration in October, as part of our "Italian Heritage Month" and we look forward to having communities take part in the festival, as they have in the past.

The Officers and Members
Christopher Columbus Lodge #692

January 2012