

Campesi (Campisi) Family Story
From Poggioreale to White Castle

Hello, my name is Patrick Ross Campesi. I am a 5th generation Sicilian-American and Poggiorealese descendant. I am honored to tell you the story of the Campesi's, going all the way back to the mid-1800's in Poggioreale. I hope you enjoy reading the history of my family, a history much like your own. The following is not just the experience of my family, but an experience all of our Sicilian ancestors experienced in one way or another. *Buona lettura...*

The Campisi Family story starts in Poggioreale in 1862 with the birth of Vincenzo Campisi. Vincenzo's future wife, Gaetana Messina, was born the following year in 1863. They were married in Poggioreale in 1889. Rosario Capo, friend of Vincenzo, left for New Orleans in 1889 and was soon followed in 1890 by Vincenzo (28 y/o), his wife Gaetana (27 y/o), Vincenzo's sister Elisabetta (7 y/o) and Gaetana's sister Margherita (15 y/o)¹.

Since the tickets the Campisi family used to come to America were provided by the sugar industry to recruit farm laborers after the Civil War, once they arrived in New Orleans, they went directly to Godchaux plantation in St. Rose to work as laborers on the sugarcane farm. In 1893, my great-grandfather Joseph Campisi was born to Vincenzo and Gaetana². The family continued to work there until the early 1900s, where they then migrated to Iberville parish, farming on property in the back of the town of Bayou Goula.

In 1925, my grandfather Ross Campisi was born to Joseph Campisi and his wife Margherita (Maggie). As a result of the Great Flood of 1927, the Campisi's were displaced from their residence in the back of Bayou Goula and were thus forced to move close to the Mississippi River, where the land was higher. The family stayed there for a few years, where the Campisi men worked on the farm in addition to traveling by horse and buggy to Thibodaux, LA, to trap fur. During this time, they also worked with the Army Corp of Engineers to help build the levee in their area.

Following the Great Depression, which started in 1929, the Campisi's were able to get into a gentleman's agreement (which was honored for 70 years, bonded only by the verbal agreement between the LeBlanc family and the Campisi's.) to move to White Castle to farm. As part of this deal, the Campisi's went from farm laborers to tenant farmers, living on Laurel Ridge

plantation³. The family went on to live on this property until the 1970s, when an architect from Baton Rouge bought the plantation and dismantled it piece by piece with the intention to rebuild it in Baton Rouge. Unfortunately, the architect ran out of money and was never able to rebuild Laurel Ridge plantation and all that remains is the land under the giant oak trees where the home once stood. ***NOTE:** Around 1940, the Campisi name was anglicized and changed to Campesi (it is easy for a cursive “i” to turn into an “e”, which is what the 1940s Census showed had happened to my last name^{4,5}).

By the time my grandfather, Ross, had turned 24, he had negotiated a deal with a river pilot who lived in White Castle to purchase sugarcane farmland known as Canonburg, without any money down. The deal revolved around the proceeds the family would receive from the harvest that year, which would help them pay off the property and own it outright. This was the Campesi’s first time owning land in America.

My grandfather continued to work as a sugarcane farmer through the years, but being a child who was raised during the Great Depression, he was always looking for ways to provide for the family. In 1956, my father Pat was born to Ross and his wife Marion. In 1957, with a loan from his cousin Peter Cappo (son of Rosario and Margherita Capo), Ross bought the destitute plantation Belle Grove in White Castle, which he then developed a neighborhood for the family (and friends) on the land of the former plantation home.

Not long after this deal, in the 1960s, Ross started a chemical plant maintenance company, Maintenance Enterprise Inc. (MEI). This company (one among almost 90 companies he started in his lifetime) would take him around the world, across all of continental U.S. to Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and South America. It even brought him back to Sicily.

On one trip, my grandfather brought back a check owed to the Cannizzaro family in Poggioreale, which came from one of their family members who lived in Plaquemine, LA. The check was worth a considerable amount of money, especially to a family living in Poggioreale at the time. When he arrived in Poggioreale and delivered the check to the family, he was met with a celebration similar to those we see in the movies in old Sicilian towns. On another trip (following the earthquake of 1968), my grandfather met a man named Leonardo Cannizzaro. He was the descendant of Francesca Campisi, sister to my great-great grandfather Vincenzo Campisi. On my trip in 2023 with Poggioreale in America, I was able to meet my cousin

Leonardo and talk with him about the time he met my grandfather. It was an experience that I will cherish forever⁶.

In addition to MEI, Ross was hired by Dr. Arthur Keller of LSU to be a consultant for under-developed countries looking to increase and upgrade their harvesting of sugarcane. Through Ross' work, sugarcane was brought to the Rio Grande Valley, along with many other places in South America.

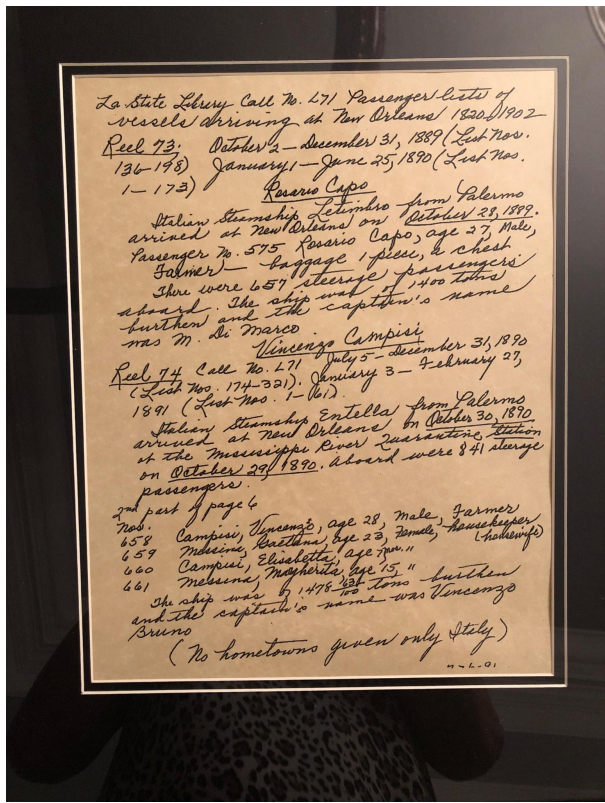
Ross continued to create companies in any field that he saw an opportunity, from chemical plant maintenance and development, to workers comp insurance, sugarcane farming, raising cattle, real estate development and more. Over his lifetime, Ross was able to provide not only for his 8 children and wife, but also for his siblings, cousins, grandchildren and now great-grandchildren. I was blessed to have spent 18 years with my grandfather Ross before he passed in 2016.

It truly is amazing to see how a poor Sicilian-American boy in a small town in Louisiana could, through the values and ethics passed down to him from his Sicilian parents and grandparents, create the legacy that he did for my family and the Campesi name in South Louisiana. His life truly is a testament to why our ancestors left rural Sicily in the search for a shot at the American Dream.

Thank you for taking the time to read about my family's story. I am beyond grateful for the sacrifices that my family made all the way back in 1890. Through the prejudice and oppression they faced being Sicilians in the South, they persevered (like all of our Sicilian ancestors did) and created legacies that our families continue to enjoy to this day. Let us never forget what they gave up for us, but rather use our shared history to revitalize the Sicilian values that our ancestors lived by. I pray that we can continue to grow in success and that we can work together to ensure that these stories, our culture, our heritage, and our experiences continue to be passed down to the next generations.

Sinceramente,

Patrick Ross Campesi



1. Ship record for Rosario Capo, Vincenzo Campisi, Elisabetta Campisi, and Gaetana & Margherita Messina.



2. Vincenzo and Gaetana. Joseph Campesi is the young boy standing between them.



3.

Laurel ridge plantation

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE-BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
FIFTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1900
POPULATION SCHEDULE

State Louisiana Incorporated place _____ Ward of city _____ Block No. _____
 Township of St. Charles Division of county St. Charles Unincorporated place _____
 Enumeration District No. 249 Supervisor's District No. 9 Sheet No. 15A
 Enumerated by me on April 2, 1900 Wm. S. Harbo 1900

PLACE OF BIRTH	NAME	RELATION	BIRTH DATA	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION	EDUCATION	PLACE OF BIRTH		MOTHER TONGUE OR PAIR OF MOTHER TONGUES		CITIZENSHIP, ETC.	OCCUPATION AND INDUSTRY		MARRIAGE	MILITARY SERVICE
						State	Foreign	English	Other		Occupation	Industry		
1	483 815	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
2	483 816	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
3	483 817	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
4	483 818	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
5	483 819	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
6	483 820	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
7	483 821	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
8	483 822	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
9	483 823	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
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12	483 826	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
13	483 827	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
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25	483 839	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
26	483 840	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
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35	483 849	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
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44	483 858	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
45	483 859	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
46	483 860	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
47	483 861	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
48	483 862	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
49	483 863	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None
50	483 864	John	1852 12 15	W	None	Louisiana	Louisiana	English	English	None	None	None	None	None

4.

Last name spelled "Campisi"



1. Joseph and Margherita Campisi on the sugarcane farm.



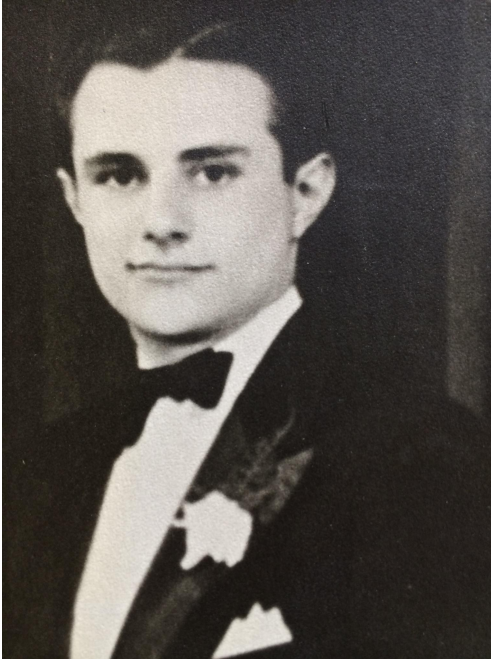
2. My grandfather Ross as a young boy on the tractor farming sugarcane.



3. My grandfather and my Great Uncle Dominic at my baptism. I was one of the last people to be baptized at this church. This was the same church in Bayou Goula that the Campisi's had gone to since the 1920s.



4. Joseph and Margherita at the 50th wedding anniversary. My dad, Pat, is the little boy standing in between them.



5. Ross J. Campesi, Sr. as a young man.



6. A photo of me. I have been told by everyone who knew my grandfather that I am a spitting image of him, both in physical features and personality.