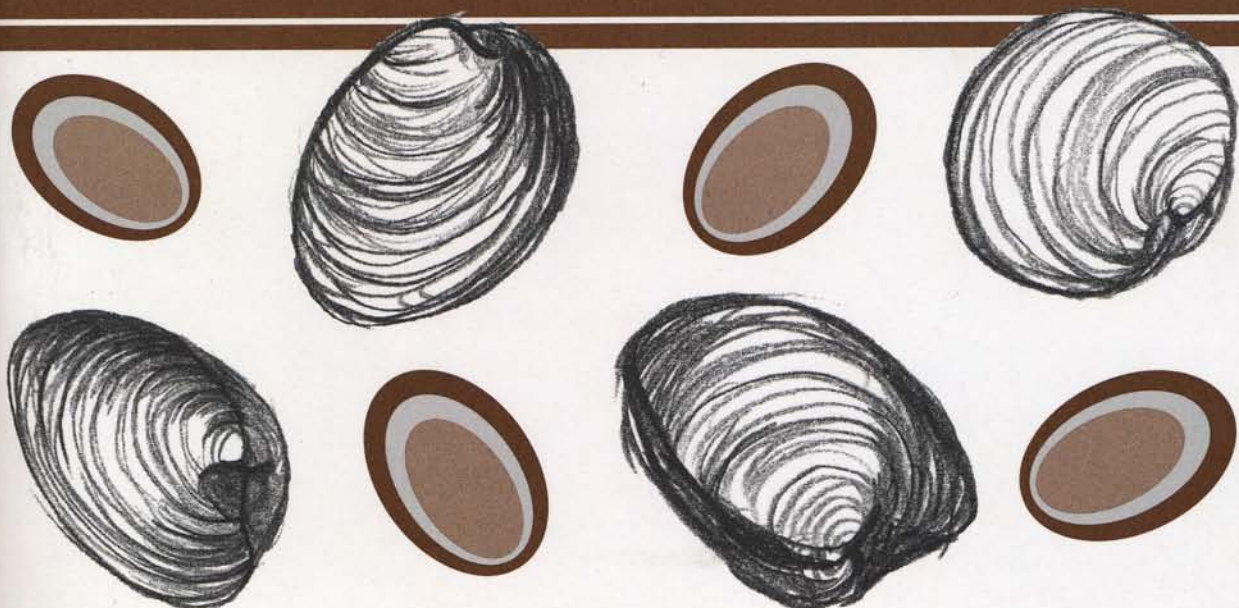


**I'd Rather
Lose a Clam
than a
Customer**

RECOLLECTIONS OF
Michael "Brother" Yaccarino



I'd Rather Lose a Clam than a Customer



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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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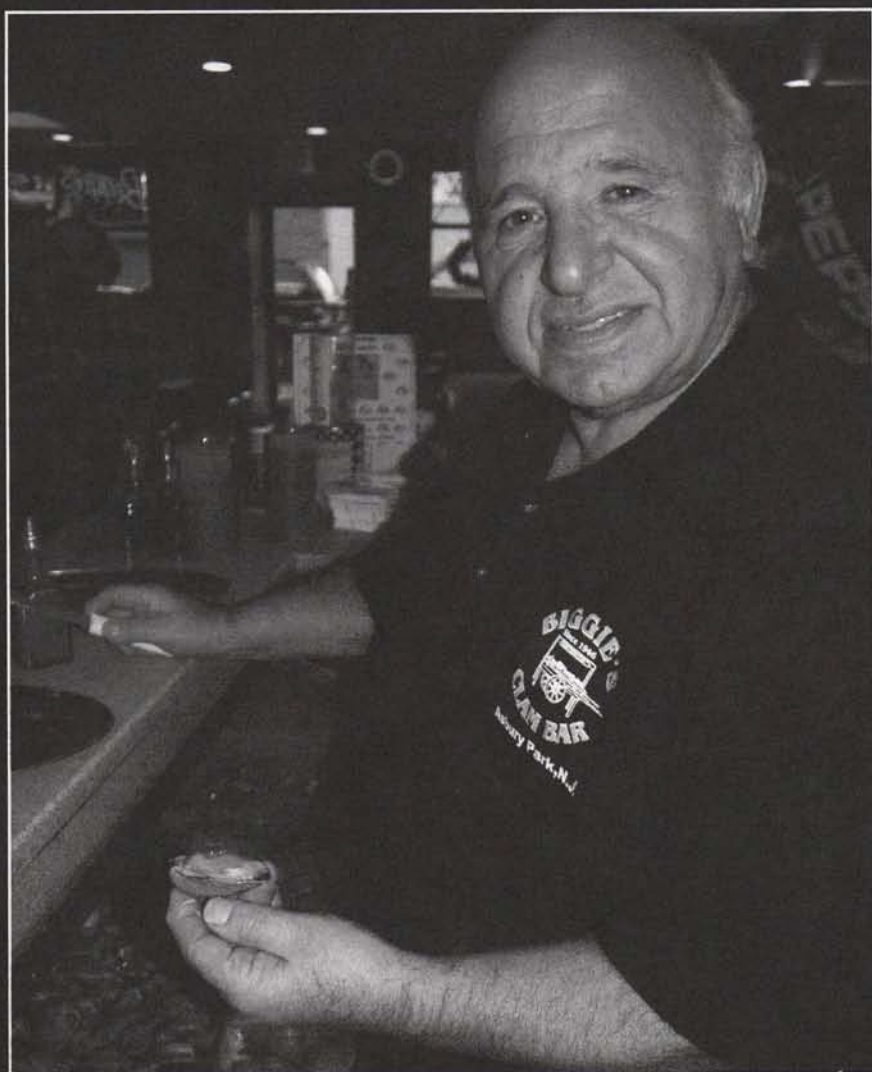
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Hoboken Oral History Project:
Holly Metz (chapbooks editor), Melanie Best, Ruth Charnes
Designer: Ann Marie Manca
Illustrator: Joy Sikorski
Proofreader: Paul Neshamkin

Contemporary photo of Michael "Brother" Yaccarino, 2009
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It's a great way to start off a meal. You can have them baked, steamed, you can have them with pasta. There are so many ways you can enjoy clams. It's a good food, a healthy food, and if you deal with Biggie's, buy from him, he'll cut them as an expert. Because if you have a bad clam, you're going to stay away for quite a while. I'd rather lose a clam than a customer. That's my motto.

—Michael "Brother" Yaccarino, June 25, 2007

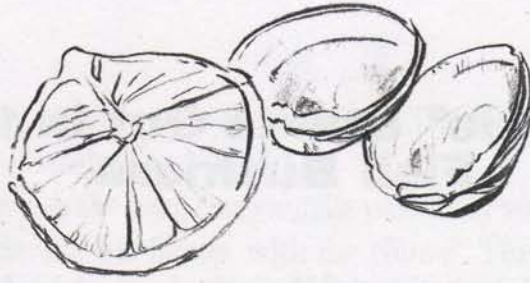




ABOVE: Photo of Biggie's street sign

BELOW: Biggie's Clam Bar logo





INTRODUCTION

Biggie's Clam Bar has been drawing clam-lovers to 318 Madison Street in Hoboken, New Jersey, for 63 years—ever since “Joe Biggie” Yaccarino traded his pushcart and clam pails for a family restaurant. After about twenty years, one of Biggie's sons, Michael (known as “Brother”), became the Clam Bar's “frontline ambassador.” And now, with Michael's retirement, his son-in-law, Steven Ranuro, is the third generation owner-operator of this ever-popular eatery. By Michael's reckoning, several million clams have been shucked and served on the half-shell over the years, along with an uncounted multitude of hot dogs, sausages, and sandwiches.

During conversations with Robert Foster at the Hoboken Historical Museum on June 6 and 25, 2007, Michael Yaccarino talked about the history of Biggie's Clam Bar, and explained the origin of his restaurant's name. “Joe Biggie” had been his father's stage name during the 1930s, Michael said, when his father performed as a comic in amateur minstrel shows. Sponsored by Hoboken church groups and civic organizations such as the Third Ward Democratic Club and the Madison Athletic Club, the shows had included variety acts, musical performances, dancing, comic skits, and singing (including, on at least one occasion, serenading by a young Frank Sinatra).

Michael “Brother” Yaccarino recalled that Biggie “was a great storyteller” who could make people forget their troubles, a skill he believes his father developed as a comic and which he used successfully in his business to make every customer feel welcome and special. He instilled in Brother—and Brother instilled in Steven—that “every customer is a king and queen. I think that's the key to winning. When you have that going for you, I think, the food speaks for itself.”

“Biggie” Starts Out in the Fish Business

[My father, Joseph “Biggie” Yaccarino] came here from Naples, Italy at age one—the oldest of eleven children. Before the clam business, he worked in the produce business. He [was] selling fruit and produce, up at Cliffside Park, and he [traveled by] horse and buggy.

Sometimes you don’t know how they got home [to Hoboken after a long day of work, followed by a visit to a local tavern.] These old-timers, they’d go into the tavern, and sometimes you wondered how they got home! You wonder sometimes. But God was good to them.

Dad did that for many years, then he switched over to the fish business. I started working with him at ten years old. In the early ’40s, he had a pushcart on Fifth and Jefferson Streets. Clams were sold two for a nickel—thirty cents a dozen.

There were months when we shut down, October through March. It was a seasonal business, [and] we shut down for the winter. ([Dad had another job, though.] He worked for the City. He was a maintenance man. He put in twenty-two years at Hoboken City Hall.)

My brother Pat and I worked during the summer months. We had an old Chevrolet, and we took the rumble seat out, put in the pails of clams and all sorts of other pails, and we went and made about six stops to various taverns. Their patrons would wait for us.

I was the pail boy. You’ve heard of batboys, ball boys; I was a pail boy. In one hand I carried the clams, in the other hand I carried the ketchup, the horseradish, and everything else. The price of clams was two for a nickel. At that time, some of the taverns gave away finger sandwiches—a free lunch. And this happened almost every night, weather permitting.

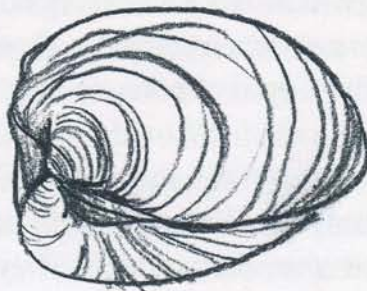
[Where were my tavern stops?] Sixth and Adams, Sixth and Monroe, Fifth and Monroe, Third and Monroe, and then First and Harrison, and Second and Jefferson. Six bars, primarily bars,

patrons there. At that time there was no TV, and the men would talk sports—baseball and whatever.

[I'd go into the bar,] carrying the pail. They would say, "Here comes Biggie and his family, with the clams!" They would order them, and we would shuck them right there. [We didn't have to pay the bar anything.] Once in a while [my dad would] buy them a drink. That's what I experienced.



ABOVE : Fragment of handbill for Biggie's "Little Coney Island," ca. 1946.



From Biggie's Clam House to Little Coney Island to Biggie's Clam Bar

Daddy was a self-made man. After a few years, Dad got a brainstorm. He opened up Biggie's Clam House at 506 Jefferson Street—Grandma's property. We did that for about a year and a half. It was a yes-and-no deal—busy at times. Maybe the timing wasn't right for a restaurant.

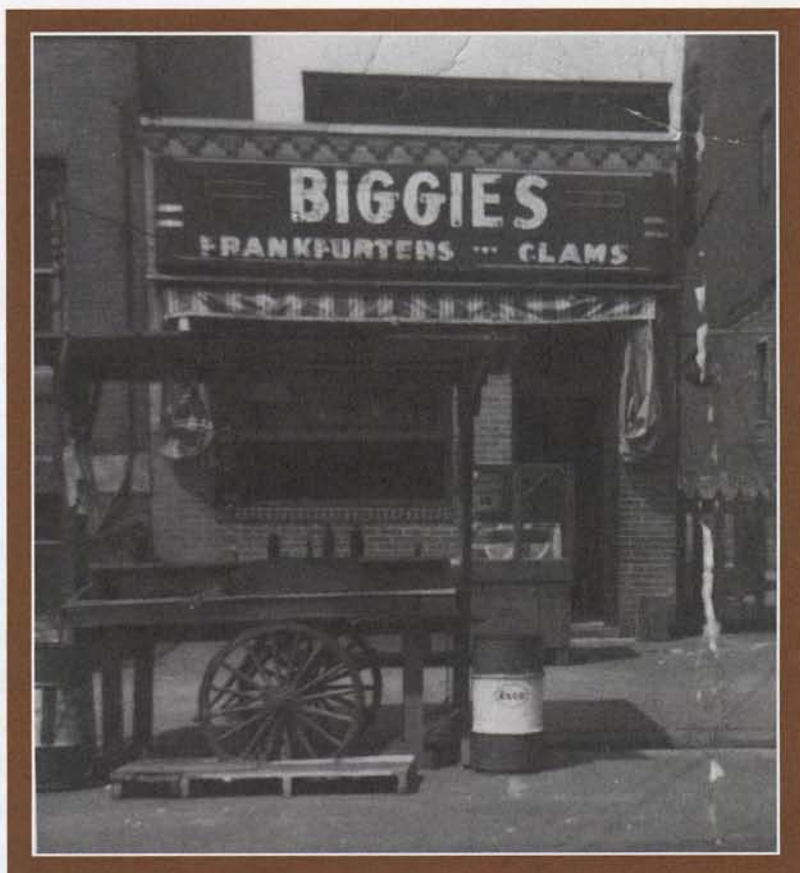
So we switched over to 318 Madison Street, our present location, in the spring of 1946. We called ourselves "Little Coney Island," before we took on the name "Biggie's Clam Bar." Our specialties [were] clams on the half-shell, cheese steak, hotdogs. Clams on the half-shell went for 40 cents at that time! [Now they're] ten dollars a dozen.

We had a pushcart on the street and a watermelon case on the sidewalk. The food concession was on the inside. There we sold sausage sandwiches, steak sandwiches, corn-on-the-cob, French fries, hotdogs, and cold drinks. I'm sure we had the coldest soda in town.

As the weather got warmer, our business increased. People stayed out late at night and there was no air-conditioning in those apartments. There were big families downtown, and watermelon [which we had on display outside] was a good summer food. Clams were cheap, but, there again, a summer fruit and very nourishing. (It's not [really] a fruit; it's a fish. But [when] you eat a nice, fresh, cold clam, it's like a fruit. You're satisfied.)

[We had clams in a cart outside.] The cart had big giant wheels, and it had handlebars. Our cart stood stationary and it was lined with tin. This way, when you put in clams with ice, that would hold the ice. We lined up the clams, rows of clams with lemon. It was very attractive.

We set the clams out in the middle of the night. We never locked up our [clam] bar. When the night was over, we'd just ice them up, and put a cover on the clams. They'd say, "Biggie, aren't you going to lock up your clams?" "No, I'll leave them, so I'll come down and I'll cut them for you." [Since we lived next door to the clam bar.]



ABOVE *Biggie's in the early years, ca. 1946.*

The Second Generation Learns the Business

Dad and Mom] had seven children, and each one of us helped and served. I was right in the middle—three over me, three under me. There were four girls and three boys. We didn't have much. Well, nobody did. Families were large. There wasn't much work [for] people, and if you made a decent living, you were happy.

We worked long hours, and the store was open to 1:00 in the morning. When I went to [the Fulton Street] market with Dad, I used to fall asleep [on the ride to Manhattan.] I was going to bed late at night, and the next day I was going to school. It was no easy task, but he wanted me to go to market with him.

And you know what? He was teaching me every step of the way. And I think, today, some of that teaching that Daddy passed on toughened us up: the business approach, walking around the market, looking at the clams on the rack. Clams came from all



over. Clams from Long Island, Carolina clams, Virginia clams, Connecticut. So you've got to know what you're buying. You want to get the freshest.

We would sell quite a few. There were two other [clam] bars [during those early years, too] – another one on Jefferson Street, and one on First and Willow. These guys did equally well, but we pursued it more.

It's amazing that you're able to take a product at random—my father went from the produce business to the fish business—take this product and work at it. I give a clam away because I want them to taste it. They have to acquire the taste. Of course, I give them a clam, but I'm drumming up tomorrow's business. People say to me, "If I'm going to have clams, I'm coming to Biggie's." They know they're cut fresh, they know they're cut nice, and they're going to be treated nice.

[And people remember.] One night — it was a long night. We were closed, and Dad and I were sitting on the watermelon case. Five carloads of cars came in with fellows from Palisades Park. One guy, "Hey, Biggie! You're closed? I've got five cars here." My dad looked at me and he says, "Ready, Son? Give us ten minutes." We'd go in there, get [food ready.] That's the goodwill of the business. That's what made you. It wasn't that you'd come in and take in the money. You had to work at what you were doing. They'd pass a lot of places to get to you, from Palisades Park. They're not even from your turf, and you've got to put your best foot forward.

The Candy Man Doesn't Eat Candy

When I first started, my dad was cutting the clams. I couldn't cut them then. I was eating more than I was serving! Someone mentioned to my dad, "Hey, Biggie, this guy's eating all the profits." He says, "Oh, he'll get tired of it." Sure enough, I stayed away from the clams for years. It's like the candy man; he doesn't eat candy. [But I loved them from the start.] And when that patron wanted to pay my father, he said, "Who shall I pay, you or your son?" He—Biggie—says, "Pay my son. Tonight I'll turn him upside-down." I looked at him and said, "Hey, Dad, give us a break!" But no, he was a funny man, and that was one of his ways of being funny.

[How do I like my clams?] I love them baked with my pasta. And I like them with the vinegar and the cocktail sauce. Sauce is a great asset to the clam. Some like the vinegar with the hot peppers, some like Tabasco. With lemon, you taste the ocean. Some like a nice spicy cocktail, made with horseradish. That's another popular item. There again, it depends on your taste buds. Today, for my holiday table, I take home over ten dozen clams, baked and raw and some with the pasta. Clams are a must in my home. We all love them.

And keep in mind: Clams have few calories. It's a good, nourishing food, and if you want a diet of fish, clams are what you want. Any fish lover will tell you, if you want a good complexion, eat a lot of fish. That's why the Europeans, throughout Europe, they eat the catch-of-the-day, and they look great.



OPPOSITE TOP:

Joe Biggie outside the clam bar with the watermelon display, ca. 1960.

Eating Clams—"An Event"

Eating clams by us was an event. You say, "What do you mean, an event? A clam's a clam." No. A clam shucked by Biggie and his boys is something special. The art of shucking clams is holding the clam firm, keeping the juice in there, and getting all that veil out, cut around and double-cut it, so you're free from the muscle. The clam looks plump. It's cut nice. It's attractive, and the presentation is there.

When you get a clam from me, within seconds you see something of beauty. If you go into a fancy restaurant, there is a prep man, a salad man, but there's no clam man. So what happens? They shuck the clams, they ring the bell, the waiter is in the Blue Room, the Green Room, the Yellow Room. . . .By the time it gets to you. . . .That clam slides down in the shell, the juice runs out, and it's not as appetizing as when you get it from a clam bar, at Biggie's.

It's a good appetizer. You can have a couple dozen. People want to go into a restaurant with a friend or whatever, they'll have half a dozen or a dozen as an appetizer, depending on the entrée. It's a great way to start off a meal. You can have them baked, steamed, you can have them with pasta. There are so many ways you can enjoy clams. It's a good food, a healthy food, and if you deal with Biggie's, buy from him, he'll cut them as an expert. Because if you have a bad clam, you're going to stay away for quite a while. I'd rather lose a clam than a customer. That's my motto.

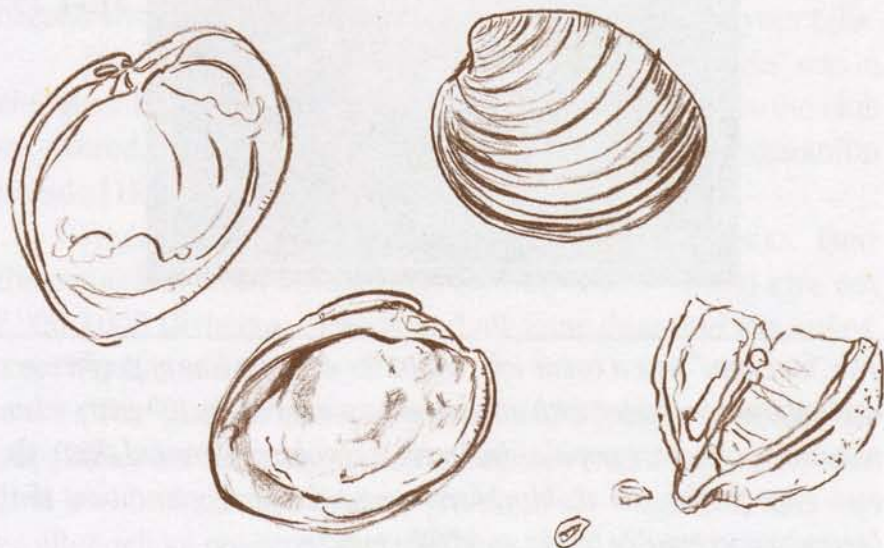
I don't fool with it. If [a clam] doesn't live up to my expectations, it will be twelve or thirteened. They say, "Well, Brother, how do you know?" By the sound of the knife, going through the clam. You hear the hollowness. If it's hollow inside, you open it up, and the shell will be dry. That's a no-no. That's got to go out. You say, "Well, why did they put it in the bag?" In that bag, you're going to find a mussel or [a dry clam.]. As they reel up from the ocean, they're going to take everything. So you're going to get it.

[In the past, we would pick up our clams at] the Fulton Market, in New York. [Now] I get sidewalk delivery. The guy knows what I like and what I don't like. He's told what to get. Each bag is tagged. You don't buy from somebody who went clamming—



ABOVE: *Joe Biggie shucking clams, ca. 1960.*

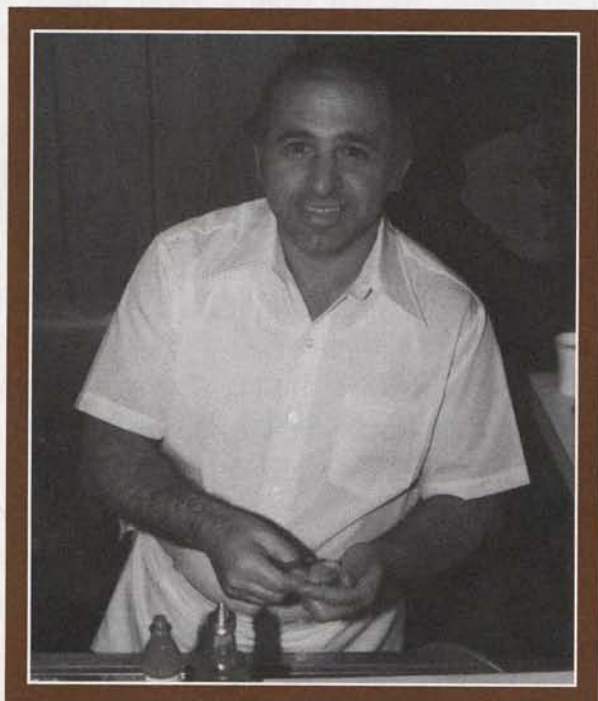
thanks, but no thanks. We buy from a quality house, and they're tagged—when they're picked and where they're picked. It has that marked on the tag. Years ago, they sold them by the bushel; today you get a bag, and it's a 400-count. Clams are graded in four sizes—little neck, top neck, cherry stone, and chowder. So we look for the little necks for people. Some people like the bigger ones—the top neck. Those are a nice clam, a mouthful. Chowders I don't deal with too much. [A really big clam is only] good for chowder.



How I Got the Nickname “Brother”

“Brother” is a nickname that Daddy gave me. He was a minstrel man, a prominent comedian in the early ‘30s. He went under the trade name of “Joe Biggie.”

He was an “end man”[in minstrel shows.]* The end men came in and told jokes. When [these] two men entered the center stage, they basically had a [regular] joke [that began]: “Hello, Brother...” So when I was born, they called me “Brother.” It was nice at that time, but then as you get older—my name is Michael, and you want to be introduced as Michael. But there again, a name’s a name, and it stuck. [And now, a lot of people] call me “Brother Biggie.”



LEFT:
“Brother Biggie”
(Mike) preparing
clams at Biggie’s
Clam Bar,
March 1977.

*The “end man” was a comic who sat at the end of a line of performers and engaged in banter with another showman. For the 100 years when minstrel shows were popular in America (beginning around 1830), the end man performed in blackface—a performance tradition that became unacceptable by the mid-20th century.

Joe "Biggie," Entertainer

Joe "Biggie" he had his own group. [They went by different names. In the twenties, he performed with another minstrel showman at the Lyric Theatre in Hoboken. In the thirties Biggie was an entertainer at fundraisers and events organized by the Third Ward Democratic Club. He performed with] the Madison Minstrel Club, a group of guys that put on a minstrel show every year, at the Oxford Hall, [a social club] on 5th and Adams, upstairs.

This was before the war. [And when the U.S. entered the Second World War] a lot of those men, from the Oxford, were in service. When I went to visit the club, I saw all the servicemen's pictures on the wall, every one of them, in a nice row. The servicemen were well represented—the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard. Every one was represented, members of the Oxford club.

[Of course my dad was a member, too.] All of downtown became members. Rent was cheap. And it was a place where they talked shop. Politics, naturally, was always on the table. [Mayor Bernard] McFeeley was our leader at that time, [during the 1930s and 40s.]

My dad once told me that he worked with all of them, [the Hoboken mayors]—McFeeley, John Grogan, Louis DePascale, [Steve] Cappiello.... If you had a city job, you became an organization worker. You worked for the guy who paid your bills.

[So at] the Third Ward Democratic Club, "Joe Biggie" was in charge of the entertainment [for fundraisers and events the club sponsored, including the annual May Walk and the ragamuffin parade.] He was the emcee.

Daddy was very instrumental in the May Walks. Four thousand kids used to march in the May Walk. They'd give out 2,000-3,000 Dixie cups, candy and all. Four thousand cup cakes, too. Four thousand!

[The girls at the recreation center] used to make the Maypoles. Mrs. Kennedy and her associates would teach the young girls how to make nice things—[streamers]—to go with it. It was an after-school program, making them. [And] when May 1st came,

there was the Maypole. The women and the kids dressed up, and they paraded. That was a highlight.

[For the ragamuffin parade, everyone dressed up in fancy costumes and hats.] Today we do that on Halloween. But years ago, we'd celebrate on Thanksgiving Day. On Thursday morning, the band picked up Joe Biggie at his home on Madison Street, and the fun began. Biggie dressed up in costume, and walked with the band, and gave out candy. A lot of people knew him.

Ladies Night Package Party

Sponsored by

Third Ward Dem. Club

To be held at

New Oxford Hall
500 ADAMS STREET, HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY

Saturday Eve., November 12, 1938

REFRESHMENTS FREE

GENTS 75 cents LADIES WITH PACKAGE FREE



A Frontline Ambassador

My dad was a great storyteller. Maybe he got that from his vaudeville days, being an actor; he knew what to tell them. Make them happy. You'll forget your troubles and be happy. So these comedians, don't sell them short! Each one has a story. They make you forget your troubles, they entertain you, and you get your money's worth.

People from his old neighborhood would come to visit him. One guy stood out in my life. My dad was talking about his family. This gentleman was sitting on the edge of his seat, facing my dad, looking him square in the face, as my dad expressed the good times, and told stories about their parents. The guy was on the edge of his seat, listening. The guy had tears in his eyes.

[Biggie] liked to touch base and find out where you were coming from. So I became a frontline ambassador, [too.] Your personality is up front. In fact, anybody in any business today, whether you go into any store throughout the country, the person behind the counter is a frontline ambassador. You say, "What do you mean?" That means they're going to greet you, take an order, they're going to send the order in to the next step, they're going to fill the order, and then it's delivered. Time is important, and every customer is a king and queen.

I think that's the key to winning. When you have that going for you, I think, the food speaks for itself, the clams speak for themselves, and that's how I was able to last a lot of years. I developed a lot of pleasure from working, and dealing with people.

I think this business was tailor-made for me. I went as far as high school, [then] I went into the service. My brothers and sisters minded the store while I served my time in Korea. I came back, I took over, and it was like I never left. The business was there, greeting me.

OPPOSITE TOP: *Handbill for New Oxford Hall, 1938.*

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *Photo of the Maywalk in Hoboken, ca. 1930.*

“Brother Biggie” Takes the Reins

In 1965, Daddy gave me the reins to carry on the tradition of Biggie’s Clam Bar. Even though Joe Biggie had a big pair of shoes to fill, I think I handled myself admirably. In business, it’s no easy task. The food line is very hard, and you’ve got to be dedicated to the business.

Behind a successful man is a woman—my wife, Marie. I’ve [been] married to Marie for forty-nine years as of 2007. She worked with me. She done whatever I asked her to do in the business. Many times she called me—“Your food is ready”—and I’d say, “I’m not ready. Put it on the stove.” I was a firm believer that my customers—You’ve got to eat early. You don’t eat early, then you’re caught in the supertime. Then you can’t eat! So you’ve got to serve the food early, then freshen up and hit part two, which is the night business.

We took over where Daddy left off. A new broom sweeps clean. I had new, fresh ideas [and] increased the menu. I served all of Hudson and Bergen counties, a lot of sports figures, writers, working people, lawyers. Everybody liked my sandwiches. The big families, teachers, ball players, they all patronized me. I was happy, because they would talk sports and about current events. We made a decent, honest living.

Marie and I had two girls, Rosemarie and Judy. As we raised our children, I bought a home on Garden Street, and the girls attended local schools. And both girls worked at the restaurant. They did their homework on the back table.

Every year, instead of closing up around September 10th, I [stayed open] until December 1st. When I did close, I took the two or three months off, from December, January, and February. I took my family on vacation, and I enjoyed my home life with my children.

This went on for a number of years. Then my daughters grew up, and my oldest daughter—her husband came into the picture, a nice, aggressive young fellow by the name of Steven [Ranuro.] He assisted me. He took over the cooking duties, and he left no stone unturned. He worked hard, and I saw a lot of dedication in Steven.

Time went on—about twenty years. I called him in one day and said, “Stevie, starting at the first of the year, I’ll make you my partner.” He was happy, and I was happy that I was able to do it without being pressed to do it.

Today [Stevie and] my daughter are running a real first-class business. In fact, in the year 2002, we entered a contest that was started by the *NJ Monthly*. It wasn’t for taste, it wasn’t for sales. It was for longevity, and we had four generations: myself, my father, my daughter and her husband, and her two boys. Believe it or not, we were in competition with the big companies. But the bottom line was, we won it all! We were the champions in 2002 of the Family Business of the year [in] the state of New Jersey. I was happy. I found that, like my dad, I was very happy with my little place, in the middle of the block on Madison, between Third and Fourth.



ABOVE: Longtime Biggie's employees with Michael “Brother” Yaccarino.
From left to right: Frank Palmisano (34 years), Brother,
Gary Branda (14 years).

Family Headquarters

As a family business, everybody jumped in. My sister was behind the counter, my mom, Rose, cooked. . . . And now my nephews [have come] into the picture. They all help. Everybody got a little shot at Biggie's, they earned a little money, and—This is important: Biggie's was headquarters then, and still today, in my sixty-third year, it's still headquarters. The family meets there, we greet there, we entertain, we break bread, we have our coffee and eat some goodies. The place is family headquarters and that's the way it should be. Those are the values we were taught.

[If anyone] wanted to see you, they just came to your business. We had a table set aside. If friends of mine came in there, Mom made coffee, we had a soda and ate sandwiches. That was a place where you'd meet, and sat down. It was a nice upbringing.

It wasn't the fanciest, but people were coming for the food, for the clams. When the people see a husband and wife team, they know that that's straight up. They're going to come, and I'm going to tell them what they want to hear. I'm going to sell my fresh stuff, my tasty sandwiches. The presentation is there, and the goodwill that goes with every business.

These Mom-and-Pop stores, throughout the country—I think I stand to be corrected—were the foundation of our country. They were dedicated people who put in long hours, raising their family, sending them to college, and making a better life for their children. My hat's off to all Mom-and-Pop stores, throughout the country.

[There were lots of Mom-and-Pop stores in Hoboken when I was growing up.] On my block there were about fourteen businesses. Two butcher shops, a furniture store, two delis, a children's store, a candy store, a Chinese laundry, an icehouse, and we were there. On the west side of the street came another deli, another deli. . . . There was a guy who sold fish *and* ice cream. How that went together I don't know, but both things were good! Then, further down the block was a nice coat shop. The Pescatore family. He made a nice coat. It was a busy street, Fourth and Madison.

I'm happy the way my life unfolded. If I were to do it all over again, I would do it the same way. My wife came from Monroe

Street, around the corner. I didn't have to go looking far for her, and when we got married we lived on the next block from my store.

My two girls are doing well. I have four grandchildren. I didn't have a chance to take my girls to the Dairy Queen for ice cream because I was always working, but when they got married, my wife and I gave them everything any parent could give their children. We had big weddings, and that was our day all summed up, of all the hard work we did raising our children.

I love Hoboken and Hoboken loves me. The neighboring towns—a lot of people patronize me. Now they're coming from all over. If your name is out there, your food is out there, your business is going good, and you have a nice product, they're going to get to you. So we've got a winner. We own the property where we're at. So we stay there, and we're happy, with our feet planted firmly on the ground.



ABOVE: *Mike and Marie Yaccarino at the 60th anniversary celebration of Biggie's Clam Bar, Hoboken, September 17, 2006.*

THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

“Vanishing Hoboken,” an oral history project, was initiated in 2000 by members of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Museum in response to dramatic physical, social, and economic changes in the city of Hoboken over the preceding twenty years, and to the 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; and 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, where 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 Hoboken Oral History Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of

“Vanishing Hoboken” chapbooks. Since 2002, eighteen chapbooks have been published in the series, 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, more recently, John Wiley & Sons.

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 chapmen, 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.



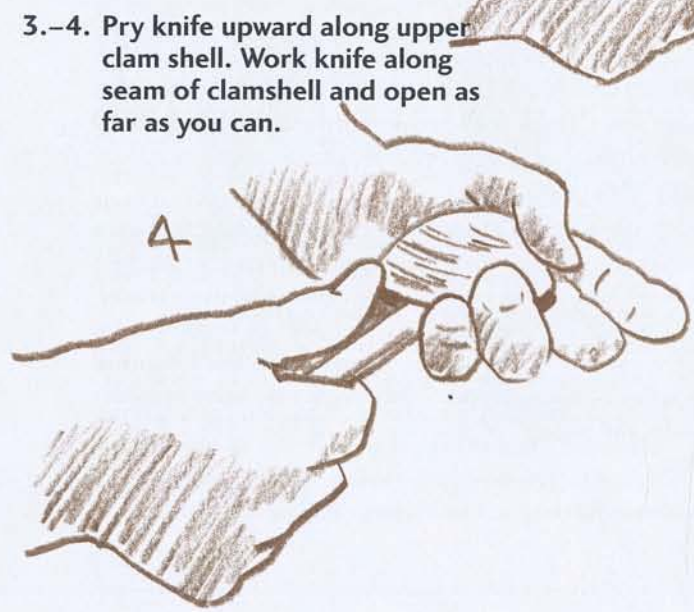
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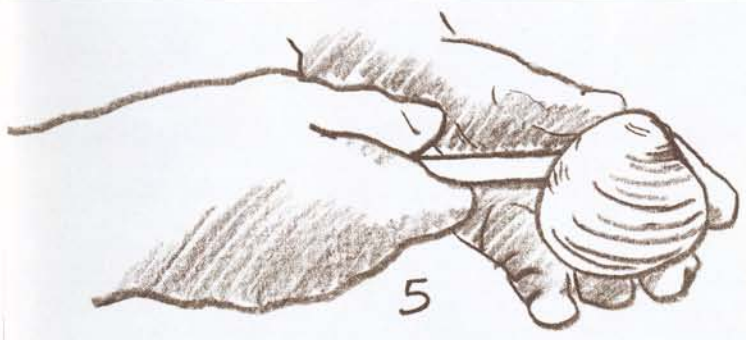


4

1. Pick out a nice Long Island clam and hold it firmly in your left hand, with clam knife in your right hand.

2. Pry knife in between clam shells and with your forefinger, press knife into clam.

3.-4. Pry knife upward along upper clam shell. Work knife along seam of clamshell and open as far as you can.



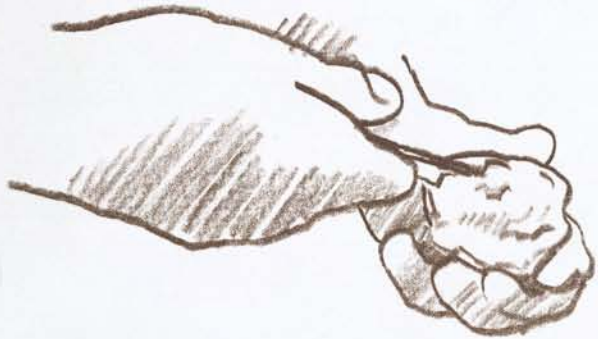
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6



7



8

5. Cut as far as you can around clam.

6. Using your right hand, tear off upper shell. Veil of clam will stay put and fall into place.

7. Cut back muscle and free clam from shell.

8. Place clam on tray for presentation and serve immediately to customer.



Ice Cold
clams on a
Half Shell!



A project of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library
and the Hoboken Historical Museum