

HOBOKEN HISTORY

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An American Legend

by
Nancy Sinatra

STRANGER IN THE NIGHT

The Story of
Sinatra
and Hoboken and
What Went Wrong

by
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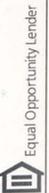
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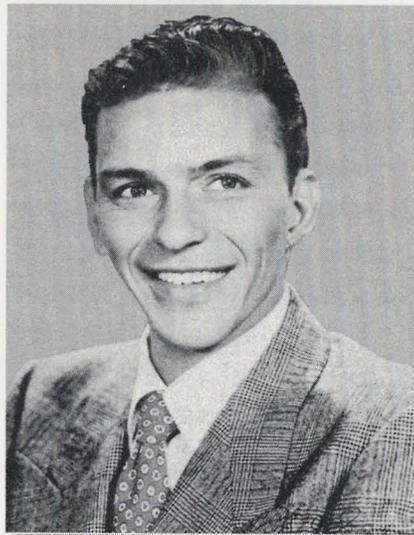


FRANK SINATRA

An American Legend

All or Nothing At All:

Born and brought up in Agrigento, Sicily, my great-grandparents John and Rosa Sinatra were married young. Soon after the birth of their son Anthony Martin, they took a long look at their prospects among the hardscrabble grape growers of rural Catania and decided to take their chances in America. Joining waves of landless immigrants who were leaving the homelands in Italy, Ireland and Germany around the turn of the century, they sailed to New York and settled among the other urban poor in a working-class neighborhood of Hoboken, New Jersey — the American Liverpool — a grimy one-square mile industrial port across the Hudson River from the spires of lower Manhattan. John got a job as a boilermaker and then worked at the American Pencil Company for eleven dollars a week. He inhaled the dust there for 17 years until his lungs gave out, but he was never able to do any better because there was nobody to



teach him English. Rosa opened a little grocery store, and young “Marty” — who could neither read nor write — found work as an apprentice in a cobbler’s shop to help pay the bills.

Eventually, he took up prizefighting. He fought under the name “Marty O’Brien” because, in a town of ethnic tensions controlled by the Irish politicians, it was better to have an Irish name than an Italian one. He also did some extra work in the very early movies and labored as a boilermaker in a shipyard. As a kid, Marty had met and fallen for Natalie Catherine “Dolly” Garaventi, the daughter of a well-educated lithogra-

by Nancy

pher who had emigrated with his family from Genoa. Because of class differences, her parents opposed the romance, but my grandmother was a determined, strong-minded girl who did what she wanted to do. One night, she disguised herself as a boy — women were barred from prizefights in those days — and sneaked out of the house with her brother Dominic (Champ), who was to fight her boyfriend Marty in the ring. There was no limit to the rounds back then — you fought until somebody dropped. In that particular match-up, Marty and Champ seemed to fight forever. Nobody fell down. And until the day my grandfather died, they argued over who had won that night.

When Dolly announced her intention to marry Marty, her family refused to host a wedding, so the couple eloped. They were married at City Hall in Jersey City on Valentine’s Day, 1913. Only later, when their families acquiesced, did they have a second



Martin Anthony Sinatra weds Natalie (née Garaventi) February 14, 1914.

ceremony. They set up housekeeping in a four-story, eight-family tenement at 415 Monroe Street in the heart of Hoboken and began their life together. Even though they were complete opposites — Marty was quiet and gentle, Dolly was aggressive and outgoing — it was to be a long and happy marriage. And nearly three years later, in their bedroom at home, their first and only child was born.

December 12, 1915:

My father almost died the day he was born. The doctor had trouble getting the huge 13°-pound baby out of his tiny mother, a woman less than five feet tall. Using forceps, the doctor tugged away, ripping and scarring the baby's ear, cheek and neck, and puncturing his eardrum. But the baby wasn't breathing, so his grandmother Rose, an experienced midwife, grabbed him from

the doctor and held him under cold running water until he gasped his first breath and cried out. Francis Albert Sinatra entered the world fighting for his life — and he won.

April 2, 1916:

Three and a half months later, after his birth wounds had healed, little Frank was finally baptized at Hoboken's St. Francis Church. The baby was named for his godfather, Frank Garrick, a politically well-connected Irish newspaperman who was one of Marty's closest friends and his teammate on an amateur baseball club.

Frank Garrick, the son of Sinatra's godfather, describes the relationship: **"We weren't family, but my dad was his godfather, because he and Marty were friends. The truth is Frank wasn't supposed to be named after my father. His name was supposed to be Martin, like his father, but, when they went to the church, the priest asked my dad for a name. My father thought he meant his own name and told him Francis. Of course, the priest meant the baby's name, so he filled out the baptismal certificate with the name Francis. Frank stayed in touch with my father until his death. Dad always had seats at Frank's table at every one of his appearances in Atlantic City, and, after Dad died, I always got the same invitation."**

1917-21:

My grandfather was too old to join the American forces setting sail for France to fight in World War I, so he scratched out a living between prizefights as a dock laborer and running a bar. But most of his working years were with the Hoboken Fire Department, where he was always first to arrive at a fire. He also did the cooking at the firehouse. As quiet and reserved as he was, he was also known for his wicked sense of humor. The owner of a saloon owed Grandpa money for a long time. Finally, instead of giving him the money, the man tried to pay him off with a horse. A horse not in the best of health. He delivered the horse to Grandpa and took off, leaving the animal to die. Later, in the dark, Marty walked the horse to the guy's saloon and shot it. By the time the saloonkeeper arrived to open up, rigor mortis had set in. Business was off for a while, with a stiff horse blocking the doorway.

When Frankie was three, Dolly had a dream job. She worked as a chocolate dipper, covering the candies with chocolate and decorating them with identifying letters: V for vanilla cream and M for maple. "I remember my first visit to the candy store. She had a bucket of ice water and a vat of hot, fudge chocolate," he recalled. She dunked her hand in the icy water and then the hot chocolate, which stuck to her fingers. She then wrote the correct letter on the drippings from her fin-

gertips. She gave me three pieces of chocolate. It was wonderful.”

1921-26:

From when Frankie was six to twelve, his parents were so consumed with work that their only child spent much of his time either by himself or in the care of his grandmother Rose, his aunt Mary or Dolly’s sister Rosalie. Dolly worked at various jobs including midwifery. Later she became a committeewoman for the Democratic party and, as she developed political clout, her personality grew even more domineering. She once even planned to run for mayor of Hoboken, prompting Grandpa to pull Dad aside and say, “Listen, you’ve got to do something. Stop her. She’s impossible to live with now.” But her influence helped Grandpa become a captain in the Fire Department, and her additional income allowed them to move from the tenement house to an apartment on Hoboken’s Park Avenue in the better part of town. Still, Dad grew up a loner, often finding nothing to eat when he came home from school, not because they didn’t have money, but because his mother was always doing something else. “Aunt Dolly was always busy and I think Frankie was always underfoot a bit,” recalled cousin John Tredy. “We used to go around the firehouse to see Frankie’s father, and he’d throw us a nickel or dime. They didn’t have too much time for

Frankie. He was always alone. He was warm, he wanted friendship. And that’s why he always came around to our different homes. Frankie was a really soft kind of boy. You know, like his father, Marty. Marty was a pussycat, a real nice guy. He used to talk loud and rough, but he had a heart of gold. Frank’s got a lot of character like his mother. And he’s got the other side like his father. When he was little, Frankie was the quietest boy of everybody. He and I used to sit in the corner and listen to the grown-ups. We never interfered.” Not long after my first child was born — my daughter A.J. — Dad told me, “I hope you’ll consider having another baby. It was very lonely for me. Very lonely.”

1926:

Little Frankie got small scars on his face that came as a result of his walking home through the “wrong” neighborhood: A kid went into an ethnically different neighborhood at risk of being beaten up. Just as it is today, street gangs guarded their turf. At one point, the neighborhood kids were calling him “Scarface” because of the scars from his birth injury. “Mom kept physically fit chasing me and whacking me around now and then. But my mother wasn’t tough; the neighborhood

was tough,” he recalled. “She wanted me to be safe, to be a gentleman. She would have had me wear velvet pants, I think, except that, when we lived on Monroe Street, I would have gotten killed. The funny thing about that Park Avenue neighborhood was that the guys there were worse than the guys downtown. They were brighter, more insidious; well mannered, with good clothes — and deadly.”

1928:

At David E. Rue Junior High School, Frank, the budding performer, annoyed his teachers by doing imitations of popular movie stars and radio comics. Not much of a student, he was popular with the other kids.

1930:

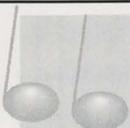
As a student at A.J. Demarest High School, he tried out his voice and people responded. He liked the feeling and the applause.

BIRTH REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE			
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR OF VITAL STATISTICS No. Page 71			
City of Hoboken		County of Hudson	
NAME	SEX	PLACE OF BIRTH	DATE OF BIRTH
Francis Albert Sinatra	Male	HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY 415 Monroe St.	December 12, 1915
This is a true certification of name and birth facts as recorded in this office.			
January 7, 1916 Registration Date		February 17, 1976 Date Issued	
			
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A copy of Sinatra’s Birth Certificate courtesy of the Hoboken Public Library.

1931:

His high school years were not very productive. "To my crowd," he recalled, "school was very uninteresting, and homework was something we never bothered with. The few times we attended class, we were rowdy. So it isn't surprising that a bunch of us were expelled." Cousin John Tredy remembered: "He played hooky for a whole year before Aunt Dolly ever knew that he was out of school." Fed up with school anyway, he left Demarest in his senior year, and his formal education ended with a semester at the Drake Business School to satisfy the state minimum educational requirements for children under 16. My grandmother was crushed. She had had her heart set on seeing her son become the family's first college graduate — and she threw up her hands when he said he'd like to try his luck as a singer. But, finally she resigned herself: "If he wants to go into music, that's where he should go." "At one point," he remembers, "I said I wanted to be an engineer, to go to Stevens Institute in Hoboken, number two after MIT when I was a boy — a great school — because I love the idea of bridges, tunnels, and highways. It was my great desire until I got mixed up in vocalizing." Marty, who never said much in the best of times, finally spoke up: "Do you want to get a regular job? Or do you want to be a bum?" It was OK to leave school, Marty said, but Frank had to get a real job — no music business.



At an appearance at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas in 1966, Sinatra told a more humorous version of this story: **"I got to be 16 or so and my father was called into the school by the principal for about the 700th time. We walked out to sit on the steps of the high school. I must first mention the fact that my father is a Rutgers graduate and he majored in English. And he said to me, 'Whaduh hell izza matta wichu? You doan wanna learn nuthin?' He knew I wanted to get in show business, and he gave me the alternative. 'You wanna be a bum in show business or you wanna get a real job.' So I figured 'What the heck,' he's my father and I love him and I'll go along with his ideas."**

1932:

It was time for the Sinatras to move up in the world again, and they left their Park Avenue apartment for a house they couldn't really afford at 841 Garden Street, a roomy place with three stories, four bedrooms, and a real dining room. Frank even had his own room on the top floor. It was Dolly's showplace, with a gold birdbath outside the front door, a baby grand piano in the living room and a gold-and-white French telephone on a pedestal in her bedroom. As my mother later recalled, "It was lovely, beautifully furnished, beautifully kept. Always."

Early 1932:

One of Dad's uncles got him a job in the Teijent and Lang Shipyards. For three days, he caught white-hot rivets hanging over a four-story shaft until he swayed a little too far out and a rivet came down, barely missing his shoulder. It crashed to the bottom of the shaft. "It scared me so much I couldn't handle it. I had acrophobia and didn't know it. And I was hanging on to that rope and that burning hot rivet went by me like a bullet, singeing my shoulder. I got a different job."



Sinatra at the Sands: **"So he got me a job. Do you know what a thrill it is to get a hernia for \$62.50 a week, lifting crates of 600 pounds with another little guy with a hand truck? Well, he got me another job, in the shipyards, Todd Shipyards. I was a rivet catcher, in the hold of a ship. But the guy throwing them was a real cockeye. He couldn't hit a bull in the fanny with a bag of rice. It hurried my career into show business. I gave in my union button with the pea cap and the leather jacket."**



He began unloading crates of books for Lyons and Carnahan on 16th Street in New York City. The repetitiveness of that job got the better of Frank and one day he said to his co-worker, "You know, this job is stupid." He insisted there were better jobs. And he got one back on

the ships, working for the United Fruit Lines. He had to crawl inside and unscrew tubes in the condenser units so they could be pulled out and cleaned. Then he'd screw them back in again. It was winter and there was ice on the water, and the snowflakes were as big as quarters. Some of the work was done on the night shift. "We were so cold that we would sneak around to the big coffeepot for some hot coffee to get warm. We got caught once by the guy above us. He had a Southern accent and he said to the snapper, or foreman, 'Ah don't lak what's going' on around heah with you an' those dagos.' And, whack, the foreman knocked him right in the river. Somebody dragged the guy out and defrosted him." When he quit the docks again, my exasperated grandfather finally threw him out of the house, and he was forced to take a room in New York. "I remember the moment. We were having breakfast. I was supposed to get up that morning and look for a job because I had decided that I didn't want to go to college. And he wanted me to go to college in the worst way. He was a man who could never read or write his name and his big point was education. He got a little fed up with me because I just wasn't going out looking for work. And on this particular morning he said to me, "Why don't you just get out of the house and go out on your own?" My mother was nearly in tears, but we agreed that it may be a good thing. And then I packed up a small case and I came to New York." Discouraged by his inability to find steady work, he soon returned home.

Late 1932:

It was the Great Depression, and millions of Americans were out of work. Through family connections, my father had jobs available to him, but he just didn't seem to be cut out for manual labor. Gradually the idea came to Frank that he might want to sing for a living. He made money wherever he could, at whatever jobs he could get, but singing remained his central passion, even if it had to be relegated to the periphery of his day. "At night I was working with little combinations, singing with the bands," he recalled. "I was making nothing, but it was a great experi-

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ence. I was using a megaphone like Rudy Vallee, and guys would throw pennies and try to get them into my mouth. But I used to move a great deal so they couldn't hit it. It was great fun." He borrowed \$65 from his parents and purchased a portable sound system in a rhinestone-studded case along with sheet music arrangements. This gave him a distinct edge over other vocalists competing for one-nighters with local bands. He sang at nightclubs, road-houses, Democratic Party meetings and gatherings of the Hoboken Sicilian Cultural League, usually on weekends or evenings after his workday was over. Frank worked hard for bookings, and he was developing a style.

Summer 1934:

At 19, while spending the summer at his Aunt Josie's house in Long Branch on the Jersey Shore, my father met my mother, Nancy Rose Barbato, 17, who was vacationing across the road in a big house with her father, Mike (a plastering contractor), his brother Ralph, his sister Kate and their families. Nancy was giving herself a manicure on the front porch when Frank came over with his ukulele and began to serenade her. One thing led to another, and they started going with each other.

Early 1935:

Still trying to earn a living, Frank and Nancy's brother, Bart, plastered walls for "The Chief," as they called Grandpa Mike, but their work always had to be redone. According to my mother, though, my father did eventually improve, and her father didn't have to undo it all. And Frank was always falling asleep on the job after staying up late the night before on singing gigs. My grandfather wouldn't fire him, and Dad desperately wanted to quit, but Grandpa Mike said, "No job, no Nancy." It became increasingly obvious that Frank wasn't cut out to be a working stiff — but his music career didn't seem to be going anywhere either. Once he finally quit his job working for Nancy's father, he and Nancy continued to see each other on the sly, and he spent all his spare time singing anywhere he could find an audience — even competing in

amateur contests. "I sang at social clubs and at roadhouses," Dad recalled, "sometimes for nothing or for a sandwich or cigarettes — all night for three packs. But I worked on one basic theory: Stay alive, and get as much practice as you can."

Summer 1935:

On a fateful evening together, Frank took Nancy to see his idol Bing Crosby in a performance at Loew's Journal Square, an old vaudeville theater in Jersey City. It was a night that changed his life



When Major Edward Bowes (center) suggested the Three Flashes team up with soloist Frankie Sinatra (far right), the group not only became the Hoboken Four but were voted the most popular act on the Bowes' national radio show.

forever. "I was a big fan of Bing's," he recalled. "He was the first real troubadour that any of us had heard. After seeing him that night, I knew I had to be a singer. But I never wanted to sing like him, because every kid on the block was boo-boo-booing like Crosby. My voice was up higher, and I said, 'That's not for me. I want to be a different kind of singer.'"

September 8, 1935:

Frank Sinatra's first big break came when he and a local trio who called themselves the Three Flashes auditioned separately for an appearance on Major Bowes and His Original Amateur Hour, a popular radio show broadcast nationwide on NBC from the stage of the Capitol Theater in New York. "They won and I won," said my father, "and when I was accepted the old man said, 'They're going to be on the show a week from Sunday. Why

don't we put you on together and we'll call it the Hoboken Four.' " The brash 19-year-old declared on the air, "I'm Frank, Major. We're looking for jobs. How about it? Everyone that's ever heard us, liked us. We think we're pretty good."

They sang the

Mills Brothers song, "Shine" — and racked up the biggest vote in the history of the show, with 40,000 people calling in. Bowes was so impressed that he brought them back several weeks in a row.

There are as many versions of how the Hoboken Four came into being as

there are people left to tell the tale: Sinatra got to be part of the group because he was the only one in the neighborhood who had a car; Sinatra attached himself to what had been a trio called the Three Flashes and filled in for an original member who wasn't around one day; Mike Milo, who owned campus records at the time, sent both Frank, as a soloist, and the Three Flashes to Major Bowes separately, but Bowes suggested that, since they all knew each other, they should team up rather than compete against each other; Dolly, who had obviously decided at last to let her son sing for a living, used her influence to get him incorporated into the group. We will never know the whole truth. Nor does it matter. What matters is that the Hoboken Four ended up on the Major Bowes show on September 8, 1935. At the Sands, Sinatra said: **"Bowes used to come on the air and say, 'The Wheel of Fortune spins, 'round and 'round she goes and where she stops nobody knows.' That was the dullest opening I ever heard on any radio show."** Actually, there is a surviving recording of that first appearance, which preserves Sinatra's first public proclamation. After Fred Tambarro, the leader of the group, introduced Patty Principe and Jimmy Petrozelli and told where they worked, he says **"And this fellow over here never worked at all."** That's when Sinatra—cocky but genial even then—made his pitch.



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October 1935:

Frank appeared with the rest of the Hoboken Four in two movie shorts for Major Bowes: *The Night Club* and *The Big Minstrel Act*, shot at Biograph Studios in the Bronx and later shown briefly at Radio City Music Hall. In the first he played a waiter; in the second a member of a black-face singing troupe.

Late 1935:

The Hoboken Four toured the country with one of several Major Bowes amateur companies — performing in front of a full band at local theaters for radio audiences out on the town — at a salary of \$50 apiece per week plus meals. Wherever they stayed overnight, a white banner announcing their presence was hung from the hotel: *Major Bowes' Amateurs Stopping Here*. But of course they were no longer amateurs. They began their tour in the West, playing San Francisco and Los Angeles and a succession of smallish, out-of-the-way cities. Frank remembered, "The radio program was such a hit that people wanted to see what we looked like, like animals in a cage. But one of the niceties was that people came backstage with cakes and homemade food, and women would say, 'You must miss your mother's cooking' and all that kind of jazz, and they'd give us food like we were starving. It was sweet."

Summer-Winter 1936:

More determined than ever to make it on his own, Dad went back to the single circuit with his portable sound system, singing with backup from a couple of friends on drums and horn at every Italian wedding and Irish political rally in town. He also appeared at Elks Club meetings and at Hoboken social clubs like the *Cat's Meow*. On December 12, his 21st birthday, he fond himself on stage — wearing blackface again — in the male chorus of a minstrel show at a New Jersey fire station. He finally got a regular gig for several months as a vocalist, earning a princely \$40 a week at Union Club dances.

Late 1936:

Desperate to break out of the small-time grind, Frank began performing — for car fare or for free — on local radio stations, including WAAT in Jersey City. Recalled one station manager: “I’d come out of my office and he’d be standing there to see me or anybody else who would listen to him. He was pushy but polite.” Riding the four-cent ferry across the Hudson into Manhattan, he persuaded the management of WNEW to try him out as a singer, and worked his way up to as many as 18 spots a week. Though he was paid less than four dollars a month, it was great exposure. Pounding the pavement along 28th Street — Tin Pan Alley — he hustled arrangements from music publishers, and he haunted the nightclubs on 52nd Street, trying to pick up pointers on polishing his style from the big-time vocalists who performed there. He also scraped together enough money to hire a New York voice coach, John Quinlan, for \$1-a-session diction and voice lessons that helped him to lose his Jersey accent. Quinlan discovered that Frank’s voice had enormous range and encouraged him to use it.

1937:

Cousin Ray Sinatra, who played in the NBC house orchestra, got Frank an audition for a 15-minute daily radio show broadcast from New York City. He got the gig — for

70 cents a week — along with another promising young singer named Dinah Shore.

May 12, 1937:

As the vocalist and ukulele player for Frank Sinatra and the Sharps, he performed on Town Hall Tonight, and amateur show that was hosted by comedian Fred Allen.

1938:

Still living at home with his parents, Frank heard about an opening with the Rustic Cabin, a roadhouse on Route 9W near Alpine, New Jersey, where they needed a singing waiter who could act as master of ceremonies. “Saxophonist Harry Schuchman said, ‘I hear they’re going to have auditions at the Rustic cabin where I’m working.’” Dad recalled. “I asked him to intercede, and I went up and sang a few songs and got the job. The piano player and I performed from table to table between sets. I would push his little half piano around. He’d play and I’d sing. We had a little dish on the piano, and people would drop in coins. I earned about 15 clams a week. I did a little bit of everything. I never stopped. I showed people to tables, I sang with the band, I sang in between sets. But I didn’t mind. Because I was learning. And we were on the air every night. The WNEW Dance Parade. That’s what I wanted; I wanted to be heard. By people. No salary — they

just picked up the orchestra. And people at home apparently danced to it. There were about 15 clubs all around the area, each hooked up. It was great.”

February 4, 1939:

Frank Sinatra married Nancy Barbato at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Jersey City, with both families attending. As a wedding present, he gave her the record of a song dedicated to her — that he had recorded privately the day before: “Our Love.” After a reception at the Barbato home, they honeymooned in their three-room, third-floor walkup on Garfield Avenue — for \$42 a month — and Dad resumed his gig at the Rustic Cabin, where he had just received a raise to \$25 a week. And he landed a nightly gig in Manhattan on The WNEW Dance Parade and partnered with guitarist Tony



Frank Sinatra attending the 1945 Academy Awards with his wife Nancy. Nine years later Frank would show up to receive an Oscar for his role in *From Here To Eternity*.

Mottola on a 15-minute, five-day-weekly radio show, Blue Moon. Nancy, meanwhile, went to work as a secretary for \$25 a week at American Type Founders in Elizabeth, New Jersey. During Dad's rare moments at home, she said, "He was handy around the house, putting up towel racks and hanging curtains for me. We really had fun in our first home." And Dad recalls, "In Nancy I found beauty, warmth, and understanding; being with her was my only escape from what seemed to be a grim world."

February 1939:

A 24-year-old unknown, Frank had been planning to sign on with a band run by Bob Chester — bandleader of one of the groups that played at the Rustic cabin. Frank said, "In those days, working with a big band was the end of the rainbow for any singer who wanted to make it." My mother got a 15-dollar advance on her salary so Dad could have publicity pictures taken to give to trumpeter Harry James, who had just left Benny Goodman, the "King of Swing," to start a band of his own. Harry Schuchman said: "I remember that day. He had the pictures taken but he couldn't get to Harry James. So he got someone to put them on Harry's desk." Soon afterward James happened to hear Dad on the radio. Already knowing what Frank looked like from the pictures, James then went to see

him live at the Rustic Cabin. When James showed up, Frank sang "Begin the Beguine." James said later that he "liked Frank's way of talking a lyric" and signed him up as a male vocalist with his newly formed band — a two-year contract at \$75 a week.

June 30, 1939:

Appearing with the band on their first tour stop at the Hippodrome Theatre in Baltimore, he sang "Wishing" and "My Love for You." They spent most of the summer touring the East and playing at the Roseland Ballroom in midtown Manhattan, where a one-line review in *Metronome* by George Simon complimented "the very pleasing vocals of Frank Sinatra, whose easy phrasing is especially commendable."

July 13, 1939:

Frank Sinatra cut his first record with James, "From the Bottom of My Heart" (backed with "Melancholy Mood") on the Brunswick label. Recorded at 78 rpm, neither song hit the charts.

August 31, 1939:

For Columbia, Frank recorded a song that was destined to become one of his first big hits: "All or Nothing At All."

Fall 1939:

Still a newlywed, my mother went along on tour with the band. It was

a rough life, and money ran short, but she recalled those days as the happiest of her married life.

Late Fall 1939:

Harry James recalled when the band played to a nearly empty room at Victor Hugo's in Beverly Hills. "They didn't care for us and refused to pay us." As the band scrambled to find some paying work, money ran short. One day, according to Harry, "The whole band chipped in to buy spaghetti and the makings for your mother to cook for us. Spaghetti never tasted so good." "In looking back at that period of panic," Dad recalled, "I can truthfully say it was full of happiness — in spite of the trouble and hardships we had. It's one of the things I can't forget — and besides, I wouldn't want to anyway."

We are indebted to General Publishing Group, Santa Monica, California, for permission to reprint the above from Nancy Sinatra's book *Frank Sinatra: An American Legend*.

Editor's note: Things got better for Sinatra, of course. By the end of 1939, Sinatra had moved to the Tommy Dorsey band and the beginnings of stardom. In 1944, he moved his family — Nancy, Nancy, Jr., and Frank Jr. — to California. For the next few decades, trips back to New Jer-



sey were frequent not only for New York performances but also to visit his parents, who moved to Weehawken after Marty's retirement from the Fire Department. There Dolly often entertained Frank and his friends with lavish Italian dinners. Marty died in January 1969, and, seven years later, in May 1976, Dolly moved to California to be closer to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Eight months later, on January 6, 1977, Dolly died when the plane she was taking to Las Vegas to see Frank perform crashed into Mt. San Gorgonio just outside the Palm Springs airport.



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STRANGER IN THE

THE STORY OF SINATRA AND HOBOKEN AND WHAT WENT WRONG

I grew up in Hoboken

when people still pronounced Hoboken with a heavy accent on the first two syllables. It wasn't an attractive, closely knit urban community then. It was a city, a dirty city, crowded with old tenements, where the asphalt got so hot in the summer that you could push in bottle caps with your foot. None of us considered Hoboken a great place, nor did we think it a particularly bad place. It was just Hoboken. Nothing special.

There were only a few exceptions to the grinding routine of living, working, and dying in Hoboken. My father, who was born there, used to tell us stories about two extraordinary events, which proved he had captured a bit of history for himself and for all of us.

One was the making of *On the Waterfront*. (Ed. Note: See Hoboken History, Issue 18.)

The other story involved Frank Sinatra, and how he used to come by "Cockeyed Henny's," the local poolroom my father hung around as a kid. He'd tell us how Sinatra, just a skinny teenager then, pestered the older guys so much with his singing and ukulele playing that they would throw him out.

Every other family in Hoboken had similar tales. Local barbers became unofficial historians, swapping stories and taping faded black and white photographs to the mirror walls of their shops. The pictures were always the same: a studio mug shot of Sinatra, signed "Sincerely, F.S."

The Sinatra stories were difficult to substantiate, especially back then, because Sinatra went around telling people he was from Hasbrouck Heights, where he had bought a house after leaving Hoboken. The only proof of Sinatra's real home came from the barber shops and the old-timers, but all they said was that "Sinatra



is a bum," or that he still owed them twenty-five dollars. The city showed no public recognition that Sinatra had once lived there. When his father retired from the fire department in 1956 and moved to Weehawken, he became the last Sinatra to leave the city. The city council didn't get around to naming a street after "The Voice" until 1979, although earlier attempts to rename Monroe Street, where Sinatra had been born, had proceeded until one councilman asked if it really was an honor for anyone to have such a rundown thoroughfare named after him. Dolly Sinatra, Frank's mother, had been a star in her own right, a political powerhouse with pandemic connections and a vocabulary that became local legend because it really did make longshoremen blush. But the city didn't see fit to honor her until after she died in a tragic plane crash on January 6, 1977, and even then the affair became as much a publicity stunt for Hoboken as an homage to Mrs. Sinatra.

Thanks to the efforts of an industrious press agent, Hoboken received worldwide attention for dedicating an oil painting of Frank and Dolly and officially establish-

N I G H T :

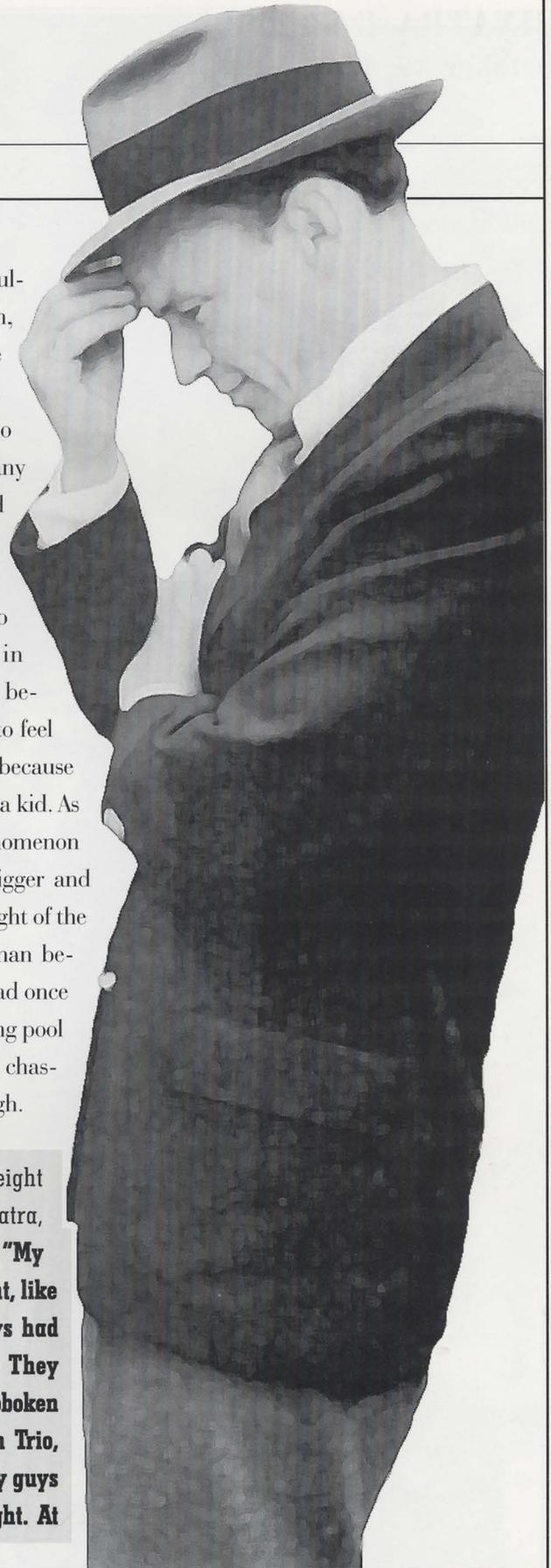
By Anthony De Palma, Jr.

ing a Sinatra collection in the public library six months after the accident. But in all the newspaper accounts, no one mentioned that the painting had actually been done by a commercial artist in Pennsylvania copying from a family photograph that Sinatra liked but hadn't wanted released outside the family. The \$750 painting had been commissioned by the promoters of the Ladies Professional Golf Association to entice Sinatra into presenting awards at the tournament. Sinatra refused both the invitation and the painting, so, with no one wanting it, the promoters donated the rejected portrait to Hoboken. Sinatra was filming in Paramus the day the painting was dedicated, but he turned a cold shoulder to Hoboken. Event organizers had sent an invitation only three days before.

If Sinatra had come, it would have been the first time in thirty years that he had made a public appearance in his old hometown. Once Sinatra made it big, receiving hysterical adulation from legions of bobbysoxers, moviegoers, and everyone who spent time in front of the radio listening to "Your Hit Parade," he never came home again. For whatever reason, he shut

Hoboken out of his tumultuous life, and Hoboken, in turn, seemed to have done the same to him. "I'm sorry, but I've got no use for him," is what many Hoboken residents said about Sinatra during those years. These weren't just people who happened to live in Hoboken. These people believed they had a right to feel that way about Sinatra because they had known him as a kid. As they watched the phenomenon that was Sinatra get bigger and bigger, they never lost sight of the fact that there was a man behind it, and that man had once been one of them, playing pool at the Cat's Meow Club, chasing girls, and being tough.

Jack Theresa, who is eight years younger than Sinatra, remembers him as a kid. **"My father Marty, that's right, like Sinatra's father, always had little harmony groups. They called themselves the Hoboken Quartet or the Hoboken Trio, depending on how many guys were with him that night. At**



SINATRA DAY October 30, 1947

Under the glare of popping flashbulbs, while hundreds of rain-soaked friends and fans struggle to get a glimpse of this stranger in the night, Frank Sinatra receives a much needed police escort in front of Hoboken's City Hall. A determined Fire Captain, Sinatra's own father Martin, (lower center) aids in clearing a way.

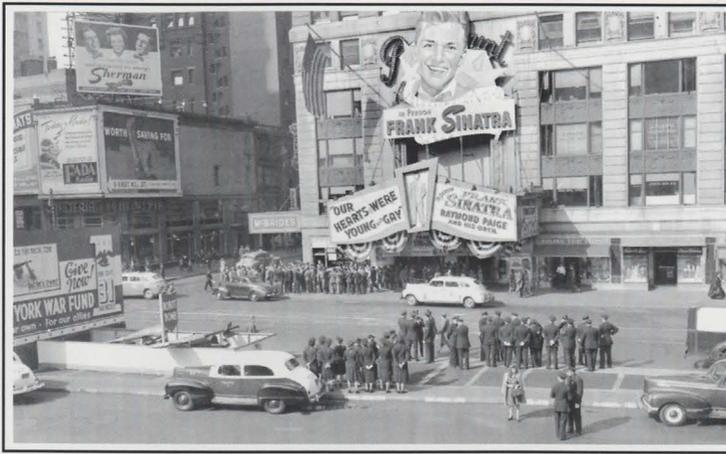


Courtesy of the Jack Theresa family



the time, we lived on 7th and Clinton, upstairs from Parky Radigan's bar, and Frank and his friends would sit around outside the place and sing. When the weather was cold, they'd come up into our house and sing. My father always told Frank to forget singing harmony. He had such a good voice he should go out on his own. We'll be here. And, well, let's put it this way: He made it and the rest of them didn't. Some of them felt that he should've brought them along with him. But the truth is he doesn't owe them anything. He had the talent. He does a lot of good, you know. He's donated money to hospitals and local churches and to people who had fires in their homes. Well, some people feel that, if he does for one, he should do for all. But that's ridiculous. Maybe he did for people he knew as a kid or who were friends of Dolly and Marty. Who knows? But I do know he doesn't owe anybody anything."

Sinatra ran as far away from Hoboken as he could get. He moved to the desert and seemed to love it there. He built a baronial compound: houses, pools, garages, a helipad, all his own. The openness of the desert, the vast stretches of



By 1944 Sinatra was receiving top billing at the New York Paramount Theatre. Despite the police presence, 30,000 fans stormed the sold-out engagement in the now-legendary Columbus Day riot of 1944.

nothingness, were the antithesis of Hoboken, where every inch of land had been paved over and occupied by so many entire families per square foot. In the desert he had as much land as he wanted, more than he could use. He had more of everything than he could use.

Some say that when Sinatra left Hoboken for the last time, he vowed never to return. He came close once, back in 1963, when he threw a fiftieth wedding anniversary for his parent in the Casino in the Park in Jersey City. The affair was strictly invitation only. Sinatra wasn't expected to perform, he was just going back there, but relatives say he was so nervous about coming back to Hudson County that his stomach started turning flips and he had to take tranquilizers. When he finally showed up that night, he stood at the entrance to the room, staring straight ahead. He marched in, his entourage of bodyguards and

hangers-on pulled along in the wake. Neither stopping nor greeting anyone, Sinatra went directly to the head table, greeted his parents, and then took a seat nearby with a few priests and a quiet aunt, all of whom were not expected to say much. Sinatra sat uneasily through the activities and left as soon as they were over,

never having spoken to or acknowledged the old friends who had waited twenty years to pass along a word or two. Later that night he went to the fights in New York.

The House on Monroe Street:

Sinatra and Hoboken weren't always distant. During the first phase of his remarkable multiphase career, the part where he made contemporary American history by crooning and swaying so that teen-aged girls, packed into the Paramount Theater in New York, screamed, fainted, and wet their panties, Sinatra and his publicity machine milked Hoboken for every drop of pathos the American public would buy. They presented him as a poor kid from the slums of Hoboken, a kid who was just like everybody else in those post-Depression, early war years. His was the American success story all those young people, whose own future



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had been swiped by another stinking war, dreamed about for themselves. Sinatra had been a scrapper and a brawler as a kid in the ethnic bowels of grimy Hoboken. At school he sang with the glee club, played mean basketball, and managed the football team. He quit high school to go to business school, and then landed a job as a sportswriter for a local newspaper. Sinatra's press agent, manager, and substitute father, George Evans, pumped out soapy stories, and the fan magazines devoured them. Evans even brought Sinatra back to Hoboken once to take a whole new set of publicity shots, showing him in boxing trunks, behind the desk at the paper, and in the high school gym showing off his style. America had its original working-class hero.

Of course, the people in Hoboken knew this was all a lot of bunk Down on Monroe Street, where Sinatra had been born on a snowy December Sunday in 1915, neighbors read about how the poor immigrant family lived in a crowded tenement hard by the docks and the Erie-Lackawanna tracks, and they wondered. From 415 Monroe Street, you can't even hear the wailing horns of the big steamers, and the railroad tracks are a half-city away. The four-story, eight-family building was only ten years old when Sinatra was born. It was typical of the wooden housing that would eventually become today's slums, but back then it was new

and clean. The water was cold and the bathroom was in the hallway, but many of Hoboken's buildings were like that, and in the eyes of the newcomers from the old country, it wasn't bad at all.

Frankie was the only son of an immigrant boilermaker and a practical nurse who had been born in Genoa. Anthony Martin Sinatra, Frank's father, sought his own glory in the ring, fighting as Marty O'Brien at a time when an Italian name like Sinatra shut doors even in a gymnasium. A club bantamweight, Sinatra took as many punches as he gave from guys like Champ Seigner, another disguised Italian whose real name was Dominick Garaventi. Garaventi and his brother Lawrence, who was also a fighter, had a younger sister named Natalie who was extraordinarily independent for an immigrant woman at the turn of the century. She and Marty Sinatra eloped, against the wishes of her parents, and when the Garaventis finally accepted Sinatra, they helped him buy a bar at the corner of Fourth and Jefferson streets. But just as he had done in the ring, Marty Sinatra lost whenever he was up against a Garaventi. Dolly, as Natalie came to be known by everyone in Hoboken, ruled her family as she ruled her neighborhood. Dominant, outgoing, with a mastery of all the Italian dialects, and a burning drive to provide for herself and her family, Dolly squeezed herself into the

machine politics of Hoboken.

Despite the strict ethnic boundaries that severed Hoboken into isolated fiefdoms, Dolly was clever enough to realize that the city's major industry was politics, and that, in order to get ahead, she had to become part of it. She had the ability to make friends and to use them. She attended all political functions, courteously greeting all guests, then turning to a trusted acquaintance to ask, "Who the hell was that son of a bitch?" When Frank was born, the Sinatras chose Frank Garrick, a young Irishman, to be the boy's godfather. Garrick's uncle, Thomas Garrick, was a Hoboken police captain at the time. The Sinatra baby was mistakenly named after his godfather because the absent-minded priest repeated Francis, instead of Martin, during the ceremony.

The Sinatras and Garaventis did well in Hoboken, much better than they had any right to expect. After Prohibition cut into Marty Sinatra's bar business, Dolly used her influence to get him on the Hoboken Fire Department, where he rose to the rank of captain. The family moved out of the cold water flat and took a succession of apartments, each move a block or two eastward, toward the river and the sections of town reserved for those with money and power. The two families shared a cottage in Long Branch, where the children spent most of the summer and where Frank met Nancy

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Barbato of Jersey City, the girl who would become his first wife and mother of his three children.

Young Frankie never really knew hard times. Other boys in the neighborhood wore hand-me-down clothes and fought for their share of food at the family table with six, seven, or eight brothers and sisters. Frankie always had new clothes. And he had a bicycle when no one else did. Later on, his parents opened an account for him at Geismar's, a local clothing store. Frankie graduated from David E. Rue Junior High School in 1931, and then, like many sons of immigrants, spent half a year at Demarest High before leaving school. He tried one more academic endeavor, enrolling in the Casey Jones School of Aeronautics on Broad Street in Newark to become an aviation technician, a dream he had harbored since winning a model airline competition. In a short time, he left school forever.

A young boy in Hoboken didn't learn how to become a longshoreman, a truck driver, or a racketeer in school. So most kids quit as soon as the law allowed. Frankie, who never liked the big Italian meals his mother or father prepared and instead preferred to grab a sandwich, was too thin and frail for that kind of work, although he was tough enough and wouldn't let anyone push him around. When two copyboys for the Hudson Observer in Hoboken died in a car accident over one weekend, Frankie showed up at the newspaper offices on the following Monday morning asking for their job. His godfather, Frank Garrick, was the paper's circulation manager, but he did not pull any strings; by the time Garrick walked in that morning, Frank was already filling glue pots in the city room. Garrick remembers that Frank thought about going into the sportswriting field, but never really tried. He lasted at the paper only a few weeks. Then he left the job to his cousin Buddy.

Frank was living to sing, although by all accounts he didn't sing with the glee club during the short time he was at Demarest. He sang in the shower. He sang at dances run by the social clubs he belonged to —

the Azovs and the Cat's Meow. He sang at Cockeyed Henny's. He sang at weddings. He sang as he walked along Washington Street. He sang. And people listened.

They listened to him as they listened to Dolly. She had become a ward leader, delivering votes to the Democratic machine in return for favors. She doled out her own favors using the exchange system she had observed in her mother's grocery store. People paid Rosa Garaventi and she gave them food. Dolly gave people a bag of coal, or a basket of fruit, advice for taking care of a sick child, and they gave her their vote. People in Hoboken paid attention to her, and she was too busy to pay attention to Frank. But when he sang, people listened.

The rest of the Sinatra legend is familiar — and sticks a little closer to the facts than the hyped stories of Frank's impoverished youth. He won a local talent contest and then got a shot on the popular Major Bowes Amateur Hour radio show with the Hoboken Four, a group of guys from the neighborhood. Then there was a coast-to-coast tour, a return home, a job as a singing waiter and emcee at the Rustic cabin in Englewood Cliffs, opening first with Harry James and then Tommy Dorsey, the Paramount in New York, and then — he was a star. It all happened in less than five years. When "The Kid from Hoboken" played the Paramount, he was only 27. He had made it to the top, and, except, for a few short-

lived dips, he has been there since.

Everybody Booed and Threw Fruit:

Hoboken doesn't resent Sinatra's success, but people are bothered, and a bit ashamed, that he never came back. There had to be a reason, and when Sinatra himself never publicly admitted anything, they came up with their own. Fred Tamburro, and some other Hoboken characters who have tried to hit Sinatra for favors, often get the blame. Choosing Tamby as the scapegoat somehow makes the rebuke easier to accept. "Those guys think they owned Sinatra, and they always wanted something from him," the others say. "No wonder he never came back."

Other tales, loosely based on the truth, are told, but over the years they have been shaded with more legend than fact. "Oh, it was the parade they gave Sinatra," goes one of them. "Everybody booed and threw fruit. He swore he'd never come back after that."

That explanation for Sinatra's thirty-year estrangement from Hoboken is so commonly offered that even some of those who attended the parade now doubt what they saw back in 1947, just a few months after Fred M. DeSapio, a Hoboken businessman, had succeeded in bucking the Hudson County political machine by upsetting Bernard McFeely in the mayoral election. DeSapio won with the help of Dolly Sinatra, who

by then was as well known in Hoboken as her son. By late September, part of DeSapio's reform team had started to splinter off, forming its own coalition, and the new mayor, looking at a postwar Hoboken and the beginnings of a thirty-year ride on the skids that would ravage the city, needed a big boost. He rallied the local chamber of commerce to show off Hoboken in a March of Progress celebration that would last the entire month of October. DeSapio saved his trump card for last, squeezing every bit of advantage from the scheduled appearance on October 30 of Frank Sinatra. His faithful ward leader had not let him down.

What actually transpired that day, the only official Sinatra Day Hoboken ever had, differs substantially from the legend. The day before Halloween in 1947 was wet and gloomy. Despite a heavy downpour, the crowds began gathering at City Hall in the early afternoon,



Sinatra stops to sign autographs on the steps of City Hall while Mayor Desapio looks on.

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and by 7 P.M. some 20,000 people lined Washington Street, waiting for the parade they were not even sure was still scheduled. Sinatra, in a trenchcoat, finally arrived at City Hall, determined to take that ride down the main drag of his hometown in a fire engine driven by his dad. Hoboken organizers were stunned by the crush of photographers and reporters who crowded into City Hall, but they somehow managed to complete a photo session and to present Sinatra with a roughly cut wooden key to the city from “the hearts of the citizens of Hoboken, New Jersey.”

Standing on the steps of City Hall, just around the corner from the Hudson Observer offices where he had worked as a copy boy, Sinatra blushed and told the crowd in the best, hero-returns-home fashion, “Gosh, little did I think when I worked for the Obby that I’d be greeted like this. He reached out to the crowds jumping and screaming in front of him, his fans from all over the metropolitan area mixed with his old babysitters, his stickball second baseman, his old gang. “You know,” he told them, “I’ve met people in cities all over the country but folks here in Hoboken, well, they’re just wonderful — that’s all.”

Sinatra weaved through the crowd and jumped on the fire engine with his father. Overloaded with photographers who clung to the side of the engine, Sinatra and

company made their way slowly down Washington Street. Cheers went up as they approached. Occasionally, Sinatra shouted to a recognized old buddy. “Hi, Gus. How ya doing?”

By the time the parade reached Eleventh

Street, the rain had become too much, and Sinatra hopped off the engine and into Mayor DeSapio’s car for a retreat to City Hall. Most of the program — an awards presentation at Veterans’ Field, an address at Joseph F. Brandt school — had to be canceled. It was ten o’clock, and Sinatra had to be in Madison Square Garden for a Bellevue Hospital benefit by eleven. He made his apologies and left, and the crowds still waiting at the field and school had to be told he wasn’t coming. They grouched a bit, but understood.

Both local newspapers carried stories on the parade and reported that the crowds were exhilarated at their brief glimpse of Frankie. Even the gossipy fan magazines were there, and although they probably would have loved to report that the crowds booed and threw fruit, they mentioned only screams and excite-

ment coming from the rainsoaked mob. The booing story that has made the rounds so frequently in

Hoboken that it is now considered truth was phony. And, in fact, Sinatra returned to play Hoboken one more time.

In so doing

he provided the city with the basis for yet another legend about the last time he came home.

Sinatra’s last semipublic appearance in town was at the Union Club, Hoboken’s premier gathering place, but it is impossible to pin down exactly when it took place because no records of the affair exist. It almost seems the city has tried to erase everything that conflicts with the myth that Sinatra was booed off the Union Club stage that night and vowed never to return.

As far as can be determined from talking to those who ran the affair, Sinatra sang his last song in Hoboken in 1951 or 1952, while his father was a Hoboken fire captain and cochairman of the local International Firefighters’ first annual fund-raiser. To make the bash something to remember, Captain Sinatra brought his son in to perform. Frank drove to Hoboken that



Courtesy of Patricia Pollia

Once dry and inside City Hall, Sinatra pauses for a photo op. L. to r.: Martin and Dolly Sinatra, Councilman Michael Barulli, Mayor DeSapio, an unidentified woman, Frank Sinatra, Miss Hoboken 1947, and Councilman George Fitzpatrick.

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night, probably reluctant but unable to turn down his father's request.

Tickets for fund-raisers like this are usually pushed down the throats of local politicians and businessmen who, after putting up the money, turn the tickets over to friends, relatives, or anyone else who wants to attend. Because the affair was a dance, many teenagers arrived at the Union Club's Grand Ballroom that night. Years before, when he first broke in with Tommy Dorsey, Sinatra infuriated the egotistical band leader because the crowds that used to swing with Dorsey's big band stopped dancing and listened to the skinny new singer. By the early fifties, teenagers had gotten over Sinatra. They didn't want to hear him; they wanted to dance. Sinatra expected more respect. There was no cat-calling and no pennies thrown, although local legend claims both occurred that night, but Sinatra turned a bit cool and finished up without fanfare. Adults in the crowd never noticed any difference. Policemen whisked Sinatra out of the room and down a back exit, and he was gone.

"I Don't Know Anybody Here."

If Sinatra and Hoboken had not been so closely associated in the early years of his career, his refusal to return probably wouldn't have raised an eyebrow anywhere. How about Bing Crosby? Where did he come from? It doesn't really matter. But in Sinatra's case it does.

Over the years, Hoboken residents have played an unending game of rhetorical hot potato every time Sinatra's name has been mentioned. "What has Sinatra ever done for Hoboken?" poses the ornerier of the two sides. The rebuttal, always swift and absolute, is "What has Hoboken ever done for Sinatra?" In truth, they both have done for the other. Stories of Sinatra's donations around the world are matched by special incidences of giving to Hoboken: a \$5,000 scholarship to Hoboken High School, a \$2,000 donation to the local hospital, a new station wagon for a nun who helped his mother while she was ill, \$500 for the family of a Hoboken fire-

man whose home was damaged by fire.

What did Hoboken do for Sinatra? Frank Sinatra Drive and the Hoboken Library Collection are merely part of the penance done by a city that turned its back for thirty years. What Hoboken has actually given Frank Sinatra is his soul. Hoboken is inside Sinatra. Without it, without Hoboken and the image it conveys, Sinatra could never have become the original working-class hero. While Sinatra had the girls swooning at the Paramount, other 27-year-olds were getting their guts ripped out in Europe. With his 4-F classification, awarded on account of a punctured eardrum, Sinatra would have found the public less understanding had he come from a place like Princeton. But because he was born in Hoboken, and had already paid his dues, it was somehow okay for him to stay home and keep the girls occupied.

Without Hoboken and the political machine which runs it, Dolly Sinatra might have ended up working in her mother's grocery store and had six children of her own. She wouldn't have had favors to barter, and when Frankie needed breaks early in his career, she wouldn't have been able to deliver.

Without Hoboken, Sinatra might have been a skinny kid with a sensational voice, who would later become a fat old man whom people might pay to listen to. And not much more.

Sinatra's first cousin, Frank Manaco, tells a different tale: **"Frank's mother Dolly was the sister of my mother, Josephine Garaventi Monaco. I'm 13 years younger than Frank, so I don't have a lot of memories of him before he made it big. But I know he came back — to visit family. I'll tell you one story. It was on Father's Day in 1977. He was shooting *Contract on Cherry Street* here in New Jersey and stopped in to see my mother and talk to her about the family. I remember it well because he brought Jilly Rizzo with him. Frank claimed he was thinking about writing an autobiography and wanted to talk to my mother, his aunt, about family history. Whenever he appeared in Atlantic City, he would send tickets, and my family would go down to see him. We'd talk about the old days in Hoboken. He remembered Mr. Stover, the principal at Demarest, who must have given him a hard time because Frank also liked to tell about all the times he would sneak out of school to go to the old Hudson Burlesque."**

Sinatra's real reasons for staying away are not that simple. Whatever it was, or is, it haunts the man. Hoboken lures the man but he cannot face up to it. Old girlfriends talk about Sinatra, in his limousine, roaming the streets of the city, especially the old neighborhood, at four or five o'clock in

Courtesy of Frank Manaco



Frank Manaco's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Monaco in front of their home in Long Branch, NJ with Dolly and Martin Sinatra. July 1944.

the morning. But no one has ever seen him. He passes the place where he was born — the tenement on Monroe Street had indeed turned into a slum, ravaged by fire in 1967, abandoned and taken over by the city, and demolished in 1968. (Today 415 Monroe Street is a dirt lot used for parking, marked only by a plain arched gateway made of salvaged brick, scrap hinges, and wooden planks.) He passes by the places the family lived. On Garden Street, where his family's house was recently put up for auction, only to find no takers. On Hudson Street. The former girlfriends remember him driving by Gustoso's bakery, where he used to buy bread, Fiore's, where he bought Italian cheese and cold cuts. He shows them where he went to school. But he never gets out of the car.

REAGAN WOWS HOBOKEN



Sinatra
a bonus
for the
crowd

THE JERSEY JOURNAL, FRIDAY, JULY 27, 1984



Sinatra arrived with President Ronald Reagan during his re-election campaign visit in Hoboken at the city's 74th St. Ann's Festival. The hometown singer flew in by helicopter with Reagan from Newark Airport and landed at the Stevens Institute playing field on Castle Point. They arrived at St. Ann's Church rectory in the President's limousine. For Sinatra, it was his first public appearance in the city since 1947.



Courtesy of Patricia Politis

Sinatra has dropped the Hasbrouck Heights story and once again admits he was born in Hoboken. As he has mellowed, he has become more willing to accept the real Hoboken he lived in, not the Hoboken he created and surrounded himself with. Two years ago, during a televised celebration of his fortieth anniversary in show business, Sinatra accepted an honorary degree from Hoboken High School, admitting to millions of viewers that he never finished school, and setting up a scholarship fund for the city.

Maybe Sinatra has changed. Maybe he has resolved whatever personal conflict kept him from coming back home. Perhaps he feels he is ready to confront Hoboken again. He might be waiting for Hoboken to ask him back. It's a different place now, filled with young professionals from New York who have pushed out many of the old-timers who remember. The city has turned itself around, without Sinatra's help. The newcomers wouldn't feel any of the old pain. They'd be thrilled to have Sinatra and would probably organize a tasteful celebration to honor the man — a man so well into the autumn of his life. He's been thinking a lot about the past, and the future, lately, working on and off on his autobiography. His recent album *Trilogy* contains three records, one disc each dedicated to the past, the present, and the future. The

last album ends with a haunting suite of reflections. The old man is musing here about those final undone deeds.

*Before the music ends,
Before it fades away;
there are sev'ral very necessary things I must do.
Friends I must see again.
Certain places I must be again.*

That place is Hoboken. With a heavy accent on the first two syllables.

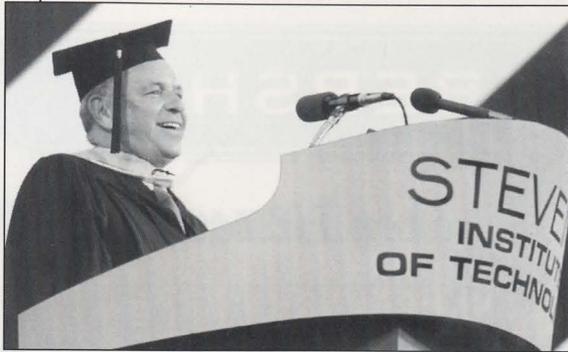
*Before the music ends,
I must go to Hoboken, one more time.
I want to run down the streets where
that thin Italian kid ran,
And slow down at the school
Where those nice old ladies tried to teach me,
Unaware that I knew much more than they did,
And stop at the poolroom for a beer,
And sadly say to myself, "I don't know anybody here."*

Sinatra. Back in Hoboken. One more time. But then the chorus jumps in and interrupts the dream.

*"Francis . . . Don't go home again." **

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This article first appeared in the February 1982 issue of *New Jersey Monthly*. It is reprinted here, almost in its entirety, with the generous permission of the author.



Courtesy of the Stevens Institute of Technology

Frank Sinatra at the podium receiving his honorary doctorate in Engineering from the Stevens Institute of Technology. In his closing remarks to the graduating class he says, "I hope you all live to be 400 years old and the last voice you hear is mine."

Editor's note: But, of course, Sinatra did come back — twice. The first time was in July 1984, when he joined President Ronald Reagan for a visit to the St. Ann's feast. Mark Giordano, a 30-year-old sales manager with AT&T was there. "My father was the Hoboken Director of Public Safety at the time, and he was in charge of local security for the President's visit. There were rumors flying around that Sinatra would be with Reagan, but only the security people knew for sure and they weren't telling. Well, the limo drove up, the President and New Jersey Governor Thomas Keane got out, and the President stepped back almost as if he were saying, 'And now presenting . . .' Then, Sinatra got out of the car, and the crowd went bonkers. People were hugging him and kissing him and crying."

Sinatra didn't stay long, however. When the President went into the school auditorium for a speech, Frank walked back by himself to where the limo was parked, on Sixth and Madison, and left. Former City Councilman Sal Cemelli met him along the way and asked where he was going. As Cemelli recalls it, "I asked him where he was going, and he told me that it wasn't his day, it was the President's, and that he was leaving."

The second — and last — time Sinatra returned to the city of his birth was a few months later, on May 23, 1985, when he was awarded an honorary doctorate in Engineering from Stevens Institute of Technology, the school his mother had once harbored ambitions for him to attend. While he was in town, the campus carillon played "My Way." That night, Sinatra went to Washington, where he received the Medal of Freedom from President Reagan at the White House. In a way, that day may have closed the circle for Sinatra and Hoboken. And, even if it didn't, Dolly would have been happy.



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Chairman: Leonard Luizzi

Committee:

John DePalma, George Kirchgessner,
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Hoboken Historical Museum

P.O. Box 707

Hoboken, NJ 07030

<http://www.tradersofbabylon.com/museum.htm>

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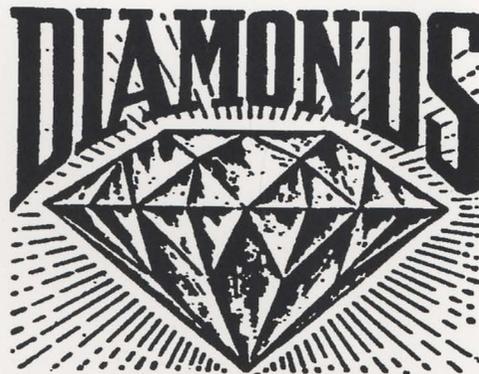
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