

THE FAMILY HISTORY OF VICTORIO TRAVERSO

as told to John and Alyce Traverso
by Jack Traverso in 1980

Victorio Traverso was born March 8, 1866 in Italy in a province of Genoa called Pentama. Pentama is located near the Swiss border with the sea coast on one side and mountains on the other.

Victorio immigrated by himself from Italy to the United States. He settled in Seattle, Washington with some friends, then later migrated south to San Francisco.

Louisa immigrated by herself from Italy to live with a sister on Greenwich St. in San Francisco. Victorio met Louisa and one year later they were married. Victorio was 6'3" tall and Louisa was 5' tall. A year later they had Bill. Victorio at the time was working in a hotel on the corner of Greenwich and Grand Ave. that was owned by some German. Louisa was a seamstress.

Victorio found he could make better money as a miner in Lake County (\$1 a day) so he moved his family there. Their second son Victor was born there. Besides working in the mine, they grew vegetables and sold them to the resorts up there. They saved their money and around the turn of the century (1900) they returned to S.F. and bought the "Telegraph Hill Hotel" at the corner of Dupont and Grand Ave. They charged \$30/month for room and board and had one of the first telephones in S.F. at that time.

Louisa wanted a little girl so about this time they had Jack, their third son.

1906 was the year of the earthquake. The hotel was completely destroyed. So Victorio took his wife and three boys and moved them to a ranch in Pleasanton, which he had just leased to grow grapes to make wine for the hotel.

After the family was settled, he returned to S.F. to rebuild his hotel. He financed the reconstruction by borrowing money from friends, without signed notes, and paid every single one back! When the hotel was rebuilt, he moved his family back into two rooms of the hotel. Victorio was the bartender, goodwill and PR man; Louisa was cook for 22 boarders and sometimes fed as many as 250 at one seating. The three boys worked as waiters, busboys and bartenders.

Jack recalled polishing all the mirrors, brass cuspidors and brass foot rest every Saturday for 50 cents!

Prohibition in 1918 forced Victorio out of the hotel business. He retired and lived next door at 1654 Grand Ave.

The saloon on the corner was converted into a grocery store
page 2

by Victor. He was assisted by his younger brother Jack who helped on week-ends and after school.

Victorio became ill with pleurisy in 1925. He smoked 20-30 cigars a day. He died in 1933.

In early 1933 the hotel was remodeled into apartments and the was owned by the Traverso's until it was sold in 1977.

Bill graduated from Lowell High School in S.F. and then went to St. Ignatius College. He worked for Randolph V. Whiting Reports law firm and attended Hastings Law School at night. He passed the bar exam on the first try. He was Chief Yeoman in the Navy in 1915 and then went into the reserves. He became a judge advocate for the Navy in Vallejo. When he got out of the service he opened his own office at 21 Columbus Ave, S.F. He was very successful. He later moved his office to 550 Montgomery St.

In 1943 he was appointed by Governor Warren to the municipal court of San Francisco. He was the first Italian appointed to the municipal court. In 1945 he was elevated to superior court and he retired in 1965.

Victor went into the retail grocery business. Jack helped out with the bookkeeping while he was still in high school. Jack encouraged Victor to go into the wholesale grocery business. Jack gave up college to help out. In Dec. 1922 they were doing \$3,000/month at 506 Washington St. They were there for 2 years then moved to 443 Washington St. Later, they moved again to bigger quarters and were there for 10 years. In 1944 they were forced out of their warehouse due to the war and under Victor's encouragement the three brothers bought the building at 1050 Battery St.

After Victor's death Jack took over complete operation in 1958. In 1964, based on advise from his doctor, Jack retired from the wholesale grocery business. At that time the business was doing \$5 million a year. The business was liquidated. The building was converted into office space at \$1.8 million; 36,000 square feet. The building is still owned by a firm known as "The Traverso Brothers".

Started in the '30's, the three brothers would meet for weekly conferences to discuss family affairs. When Victorio died in 1933 Bill managed the property for a time then assigned the mangering to Jack about 1950. They established a pact among themselves that if anything should happen to any of the brothers, the others would make sure the remaining widows did not suffer.