



### **History of 804 Walnut (Forte's Store)**

Further research has yielded new information about the history of 804 Walnut.

This building is primarily remembered for having been the Forte grocery store, one of two neighborhood grocery stores on the 800 block of La Farge, and also a residence for the family. The property was owned by the Massaro/Forte family, one of several Italian families living in this block of La Farge, for 47 years. Later, it was the location of the Pillar of Fire Church, one of three churches located on this block.

Charles Welch, the developer of Jefferson Place, sold Lot 25 to Bard Vetch (whose name is also given as Bartle Veicht in the County property records) in 1883. In 1890, it was sold to Eufрасina DiGiacomo Massaro. Her husband was Giuseppe Massaro. He appears in the 1892 directory for Louisville (Louisville's first known residential directory), where he is listed as a coal miner. In the 1896 directory, the Massaros are listed as operating a boarding house at what was likely this location. Not only did they not own any other property at the time, according to County property records, but the 1900 census shows them as having two boarders living with them, as noted below in more detail.

The County, which has been frequently shown to be mistaken with respect to the date of construction with respect to Louisville buildings, gives 1912 as the year in which the building was constructed. This is clearly in error, as the footprint of the building on the 1908 Sanborn map strongly resembles the footprint of the current building. (The building also appears on the 1909 Drumm's Wall Map.) Sanborn maps for 1893 and 1900 show a building with a slightly different footprint on this site that would have been the residence and boardinghouse of the Massaro family. Based on this evidence, the 2000 survey report written for 804 Walnut concluded that the house was constructed between 1900 and 1908. It could be speculated that the older house/boardinghouse structure that appears on the 1893 and 1900 Sanborn maps was incorporated into the main building that appears on the 1908 Sanborn map.

Eufрасina and Giuseppe Massaro were born in Italy, Eufрасina in 1845 and Giuseppe in 1833. Eufрасina, as a DiGiacomo, may have been related to the DiGiacomo family who settled in the Louisville/Lafayette area. Giuseppe had two brothers who also settled in Colorado. Census records indicate that they came to the U.S. by 1880 or in around 1880. Their daughter, Orazia (Ora) was born in Colorado in 1884.

The 1900 federal census shows the following people living together in what appears to be this location (given the presence of La Farge neighbors listed on the same page): Joseph Massaro; his wife, "E.U." Massaro; their daughter, Ora; and two boarders, who were Mick "Washots" and Nick Tomeo, both of whom had been born in Italy.

Michael Forte was born in Pastena, Province of Frosinone, Italy in 1872. He came to the U.S. in 1892 and to Louisville in 1902. According to a written Forte family history, Michael Forte boarded with the Massaro family and fell in love with Orazia Massaro. Ora Massaro and Michael Forte married in 1903, and he continued to live with the family.

The 1904 directory is the first Louisville residential directory that gives location information of residences. It lists Joseph and Mary "Mazaro" as well as Mike and Ora Forte, as living at "Lafarge & Walnut," which is a correct description of the location of 804 Walnut. Both men were stated to be miners.

In 1905, Eufrasina Massaro conveyed this property to her son-in-law, Michael Forte. The earliest record of Michael Forte having a grocery store appears in a 1908 Louisville business directory, and the store is described as selling groceries, shoes, dry goods, and cigars. Forte's store continues to appear in business directories for Louisville continuously until the early 1930s. The Forte family also lived in the house at 804 Walnut until around 1915 (the year in which Giuseppe Massaro died), which is when Michael and Orazia Forte purchased the house across the street to the north, 801 Walnut, and the family moved there.

Two photos taken in the early 1900s show the Forte grocery store in the background. These were taken from the Wolfer family house that stood at 901 Main Street, looking west on Walnut. Some writing can be seen on the north side of the building, perhaps advertising for the store that could be seen from Main Street:





The 1910 federal census again shows the Massaro/Forte family living at La Farge, but this time, it is Michael Forte who is listed as the head of household. Besides Michael and Ora Forte, there were their children, Leonard, Lorina, Virginia, and Olivia, and Ora's parents, Joe and Eufrasina Massaro. They also had a boarder, Dominic Anancini, age 29. In 1910, Michael was listed as being a merchant at a general store and Ora was a "saleslady," while their boarder was a deliveryman for the store. The 1916 directory lists Joseph Potestio as working as a clerk at the Forte store.

In 1920, the Forte family was living at 801 Walnut and not at this location, but the Forte Store continued at 804 Walnut. Michael Forte's occupation in the 1920 census was stated to be retail merchant for a general store, and Ora was the proprietess of a general store. Similar occupations are stated for them in the 1930 census.

Michael and Ora had seven children. In addition to Leonard, Lorina, Virginia, and Olivia, there were also Alice, Joseph, and Patricia. According to a Forte family history written later by some of the Forte adult children:

In the early 1930's, during the Depression, Michael Forte was the first person to raise head lettuce in the Granby area. He did this during the summer months while Ora managed the store. Later on he also was the first to raise head lettuce on rented acreage between Blackhawk and Central City and later in Nederland, Colorado. He served on the Boulder County Welfare Board between WWI and his retirement.

Michael Forte also served as a member of the Louisville City Council from 1915 to 1917.

As for their mother, the Forte family wrote:

[Ora Forte] had to quit school after the sixth grade to help her mother in the boarding house. She was self-educated to a very high degree. . . . She played the organ, conducted the choir and soloed in St. Louis Catholic church. She produced plays for the townspeople of Louisville as well as Denver neighborhood theaters. . . . Ora ran the store completely, from accounting, purchasing, sales and all other interior work while Michael contacted and delivered to families in the nearby towns of Superior and Marshall by dray wagon and later on by motor truck.

The St. Louis Catholic Church, in which Ora Forte was so involved, was located directly across the street at 833 La Farge during all of the years that the Massaro and Forte family owned 804 Walnut.

In the late 1940s, Forte's store was included on an advertising movie curtain that was made for the Rex Theatre at 817 Main, just a short distance away. The Rex's owner, Santino Biella, lived across the street from Forte's Store at 825 La Farge, just south of the St. Louis Catholic Church. Santino Biella included a number of nearby businesses in the advertising on his movie curtain, including "M. Forte & Son," as shown here:



This sign advertised the store's groceries, meats, imported Italian products, notions, shoes, and gave "infants apparel" as the store's specialty.

The 2000 survey record written about this house stated that this building "was initially owned by Lawton and Nellie McCorkle who ran a general store here" from about 1906 to 1908. Evidence of this was not located in the course of research conducted for this report. Information at the Louisville Historical Museum indicates that Lewton McCorkle operated other stores in Louisville, but not at this location. Also, no evidence was found that Lewton and Nellie McCorkle were ever owners of this property, based on a search of the County property documents and based on the Massaro family owning this property prior to Michael Forte owning it. According to archival records located at the Louisville Historical Museum, Lewton McCorkle did start a grocery store just to the east of this property, at Main and Walnut, in 1906. This was the City Meat and Packing Co., which evolved into the City Market and Grocery. Perhaps it was the initial location of McCorkle's store in a different location on Walnut that

initially led to the conclusion in the 2000 survey report that McCorkle owned 804 Walnut and located his store there.

Giuseppe Massaro passed away in 1915, while Eufrasina DiGiacomo Massaro died in 1926. Michael Forte's wife, Ora Massaro Forte, died in 1937. Also in 1937, Michael Forte sold 804 Walnut and moved to Denver. He died in 1968.

The new owners, who were Minnie Tate and Mary Lippis and who were connected to the Lippis family of Louisville, continued to operate a grocery store at this location. It is believed that it was early during this period of ownership that Marie Merciez and her daughter and son-in-law, Alice and Nestor Soupley, operated this store. Marie Merciez's daughter, Edith Chiolino, lived with her family at 729 La Farge in Jefferson Place. Marie's granddaughter, Lois Chiolino Tesone, has recalled that her aunt and uncle, Alice and Nestor Soupley, lived in the cottage behind the store. In the early 1940s, Benjamin and Mary Lippis and their son, Frank, who served in World War II, are listed as living at 802 Walnut, which is believed to be this building despite the variation in the address, in light of the fact that Mary Lippis was one of the owners of the building.

In 1943, 804 Walnut was purchased by the Pillar of Fire Church. The Pillar of Fire Church first appears in the 1945 directory as being located here, and it was presumably open for services at that time. The Church's pastor in the 1950s, David Ruby, passed away in 2008. The following photo is from the County Assessor and shows the building in 1948:



The following photo of 804 Walnut is believed to have been taken in the 1960s-1970s:



In 1972, after nearly 30 years of ownership by the Pillar of Fire Church, 804 Walnut was purchased by the current owner, Jeremiah Whitney. Property records indicate that in the early 2000s, there was an adjustment that resulted in a change to the legal description of 804 Walnut so that it now includes part of Lot 24 to the south.

This building has been known by several different addresses over the years: 355 La Farge (before Louisville's new address system was adopted in the late 1930s), 802 Walnut, 830 La Farge, 834 La Farge, and 840 La Farge. In the 1950s, 804 Walnut became the standard address for this property.

### **Sources of information**

Boulder County "Real Estate Appraisal Card – Urban Master," on file at the Carnegie Branch Library for Local History in Boulder, Colorado.

Boulder County Clerk & Recorder's Office and Assessor's Office public records, accessed through <http://recorder.bouldercounty.org>.

Directories of Louisville residents and businesses on file at the Louisville Historical Museum.

Census records and other records accessed through [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).

Drumm's Wall Map of Louisville, Colorado, 1909.

Sanborn Insurance Maps for Louisville, Colorado, 1893, 1900, and 1908.

Sacred Heart of Mary (Boulder County, Colorado) cemetery records, accessed at <http://www.findagrave.com> .

Archival materials on file at the Louisville Historical Museum, including written family history material about the Forte family in 1988 and donated to the Louisville Historical Museum.

Interview of Lois Chiolino Tesone conducted by Museum Coordinator Bridget Bacon, April 23, 2009.