

# UP FRONT



## ACROSS MY DESK

By Brian Butko, Editor

### San Rocco Procession Aliquippa, Pennsylvania

Every year on an August weekend since 1925, the people of Aliquippa gather to celebrate a tradition that dates back to Europe in the Middle Ages. The San Rocco Festa is named for Saint Rocco, a 14th-century saint venerated in the Roman Catholic Church as the protector against the plague and all contagious diseases, and for distributing his wealth among the poor in Italy. A number of local communities once held San Rocco Festas but most have faded away, leaving Aliquippa's event as one of the oldest continuously held ethnic festivals in the United States.

Saint Rocco's death is commemorated on August 16 with a festa on the closest weekend. A highlight of the celebration is a parade with participants carrying a statue of Saint Rocco on their shoulders. The statue is unique in that it depicts Rocco with his left hand pointing to an open sore on his leg; few images of saints expose any such afflictions or handicaps. San Rocco has long been honored as the patron Saint of Patrica, Italy, but it was the immigrants of nearly a century ago who brought him to America, especially Western Pennsylvania. Aliquippa's San Rocco Culture Committee recalls that their festa originated in the then-new neighborhood of Plan 11, led by the 200 members of the Italian Political Citizens Club of Woodlawn and featuring a high mass at St. Titus Roman Catholic Church:

**The History Center's statue  
can be seen on the 4th floor  
in Special Collections.**

HC Museum collection, gift of Cathy Costa Fusca's,  
in memory of Joseph Costa. Photo by Brian Butko.



“From the very beginning, the liturgy in church and the procession of the saint through the streets were the heart of the celebration. As with all Italian celebrations, the festa was blessed with beautiful music, delicious food, rich laughter, and family traditions.... Fireworks and band concerts completed the two-day program.”

In 1935, dancing, parades, and bands were added and children dressed in white to join the procession. By 1945, the festivities were attracting 5,000 people. In recent years the San Rocco Cultural Committee has added charitable works to its efforts.

The San Rocco statue, imported from Italy in 1958, is housed within a cupola. A similar statue on display at the History Center was brought from Calabria in 1931 by Joseph Costa and used in East Liberty’s festa through the 1940s. 🌟

For more about the Aliquippa festa, visit [www.sanrocco.org/](http://www.sanrocco.org/). To learn more about the Italian American Collection at the History Center, visit [www.italianamericancollection.org](http://www.italianamericancollection.org).



**Left: Men carry the San Rocco statue along the San Rocco procession route in Aliquippa.**

Photo by Kevin Lorenzi, <http://kevinlorenzi.photoshelter.com>.

**Below: Marco Dunlap, 5, left, and his brother Roman, 7, wait in their electric toy car alongside their mother Mara Biancucci-Dunlap, far right, as the procession pauses.**

Photo by Kevin Lorenzi.

