

Obituaries

Rocco D. Pallotti; City Politician Battled His Way to Prominence

Rocco D. Pallotti, a veteran of the raucous days of ward politics in Hartford's old East Side, died Wednesday. He was 84.
Born in Hartford, he began his colorful, often contentious political career at 17, ringing doorbells for the Democratic party in what was then the Second Ward, a largely Italian district that was razed in the 1960s for Constitution Plaza.

From that base, Pallotti went on to become a major power in local politics. Although often at odds with his party's leaders, he held a number of political and elective posts, including ward chairman, city alderman, state senator, Democratic State Central Committee member and deputy commissioner of the state Department of Motor Vehicles.

As a young man, Pallotti fought several semi-pro boxing matches under the name Battling McGann. The scrappiness never left him: At the age of 63, he chased and collared a 17-year-old involved in a purse-snatching at the parking lot Pallotti operated.

His feisty nature got Pallotti in trouble more than once, however. In the 1920s and 30s, when newspaper accounts of municipal elections reported polling-place scuffles as routinely as vote tallies, his name was often on the list of combatants.

"Alderman Pallotti, Rankin agitator, engaged in a hand-to-hand tussle with Nicholas Capobianco, Gaffey precinct captain, the pair being separated by Sergeant Kroopneck only after rolling on the sidewalk," read a Courant story on a 1929 Election Day brawl. Pallotti even served nine months in jail for fighting during the 1933 election, when his feud with the Democratic organization was at its height.

But Pallotti was even better known for fighting on behalf of the people of his district — working for employment, social services and better living conditions in the East Side. Two of his contributions — the Windsor Street railroad overpass, which eliminated a dangerous crossing, and the swimming pool in Riverside Park, which kept youngsters out of the Connecticut River — still bear his name.

Typical of Pallotti's concern for children is the story of his 1931 election to a paying position in his local school district. Right after winning the election, he pushed through a pay increase for the job from \$600 to \$900 a year. Then, he declared that every cent of his salary would go to a Fourth of July picnic for East Side children.

"That victory belongs to the kiddies," he said.

After serving as alderman from 1927 to 1933 and state senator from 1946 to 1949, Pallotti was named to the Department of Motor Vehicles job, which was to involve him in a major controversy. In 1956, the department came under fire for restoring the license of a man with a record of two drunken driving arrests and one conviction; and Pallotti was forced to resign under pressure.

Pallotti steadfastly maintained he had done no wrong, however, and his ouster led to what Jack Zaitman, now-retired Courant political writ-

er, once called "a fascinating inside political story that nobody will talk about."

A few months after he left the department, Pallotti went on the payroll of the Democratic party. According to legend, his salary was just about what a deputy motor vehicles commissioner made — then about \$8,000. And, from then on, everytime the deputy commissioner's pay went up, Pallotti's party pay went up.

The arrangement lasted for 16 years — until 1971, when Republi-

cans took control of the administration.

Pallotti leaves his wife, Marguerite Pallotti of Glastonbury; two daughters, Marianne Pallotti of Redwood City, Calif., and Teresa Reilly of Glastonbury; a stepdaughter, Marguerite Chamberlain Klobe of Minnesota; a sister, Marie Alexander of Saybrook; and three grandchildren.

The funeral will be Saturday, with a mass of Christian burial at 10 a.m. in St. Luke's Church, Hartford. Burial will be in Rose Hill Memorial Park, Rocky Hill.

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