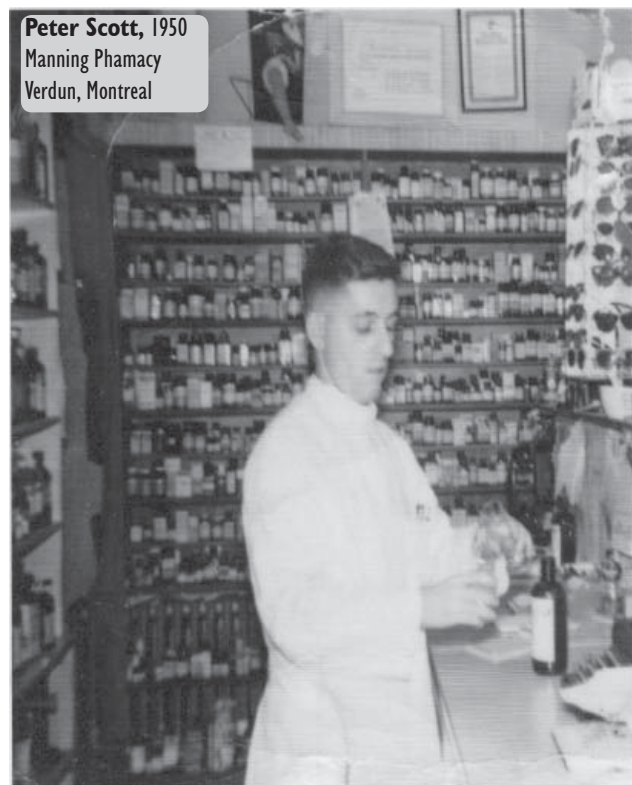


# Peter Scott “Il sacrestano” of St. Anthony’s Church 1933-2012

by Zeljka Gaspar

If there is a place that is the heart and soul of the Italian-Canadian community of Ottawa, then it is the Church of St. Anthony. And if there is a man who can tell about its importance, life and people, then it would be Peter Scott. His position in the church is that of a social worker, but Peter Scott is also known among the people from the community as ‘sacrestano’, ‘janitor’, ‘dottore’, ‘professore’, ‘padre’ and even ‘poliziotto scientifico’. Each morning, for almost 40 years, this man has awoken at four o’clock in the morning to prepare the Church of St. Anthony for a new day. Born in 1933 in England, Mr. Scott was the only child of Peter Victor Scott, an Englishman, and a German-Jewish woman named Schroder. “I was born in a private primary school that was run by my godmother”, says Peter. “My mother was working there as well”.

Several years after the death of his father, Peter’s mother married a French-Canadian. They came to Canada in 1946. “We landed in Halifax. Then, we went to Trois Pistols, a small place on the southern shore of Quebec.” Peter stayed there for a year, then moved to Ottawa. In Ottawa, he met Father Jerome Ferraro whose



Peter Scott, 1950  
Manning Pharmacy  
Verdun, Montreal

smiling face was eternalized in the bust in front of St. Anthony’s Church. “I was 13 when I met the Father and I was intentionally looking to study for priesthood”, says Peter. Life, however, led him in different directions. “I stayed around St. Anthony’s Church while going to school until 1956. In that year I went to Montreal where I worked in accounting and in a pharmacy for the next 4 years. After that I came back to Ottawa.” Upon Peter’s return to the city, Father Jerome asked him if he was interested in working and helping the people from the Italian community. Peter accepted. From that time on the two have been inseparable. Even

though he is not Italian by heritage, Mr. Scott often refers to the Italian-Canadian community using the personal pronoun “we”. “When I started helping the Italians I did not know a word of Italian. But, I was spending so much time with the people that I picked up the language quickly; I was able to understand different dialects. In those years there were not enough people who could work as interpreters. As a result, I soon started going to the courts and hospitals. I worked at the Civic Hospital and the Ottawa Sanatorium. I was also involved with the social services, City of Ottawa and school boards”.

Mr. Scott was a big help to the new Italian immigrants. He dedicated much of his time and energy offering legal aid and counseling to them on different things. He had to play so many different roles that people were unsure of his profession. “One Italian lady thought that I was a doctor. When I went to the hospital to visit her and her child I said that my name was Pietro. Next day she came to the same hospital and insisted that she talks to Dr. Pietro”, explains Peter. When I sat down with Peter



Peter Scott, 1963.

for our conversation, this is what he told me:

**Q:** Could you tell me about St. Anthony’s Church and the adjacent Monastery of the Servite Fathers?

**A:** Before the church was established in 1908 the Italians attended services in a little chapel on Murray St., which was rented for them. Both the church and the monastery were built at the same time, in 1913. In 1917 a fire destroyed a part of the church. In 1925 there was a second fire. As for the monastery, we used to have students studying for the priesthood there. Some of them were sent to Rome for special studies, the history of the Blessed Virgin, for instance. Father Dominic and Father Marcel were ordained in Rome. The church was the most important place that the Italians had. There they received almost all the help they

needed. After the urban renewal took place, many Italians moved from this area. However, many of them continued coming back to the Church of St. Anthony even though they lived at a great distance from it. The “village” has always been involved in sports. Father Jerome was very active in hockey, baseball, and soccer.

In terms of the Procession of St. Anthony, it started the same year the church was built, but it stopped during the war years. It’s gotten bigger and bigger every year. Now it draws about 10,000 people.

**Q:** How important is the Church of St. Anthony today?

**A:** Oh, it is still very important. One of the reasons is the family spirit that still lives on in Italian families. Children of the Italian descent respect their ‘nonni’. They are becoming more and more Canadian, but they are still trying to keep their Italian roots and the church plays an important role in that.

**Q:** You were in the church when Guido Nincheri, painter and architect, who drew the architectural plan of St. Anthony’s Church, was working there. What was he like?

**A:** He was a fragile little man who would work at night. He spent one year working on the frescoes for the apse and stained-glass windows. There was wooden scaffolding constructed for him. He did not have any assistants; he did almost everything by himself. Father Jerome and the Licari brothers helped him in preparation of the walls for the frescoes.

I also remember that he worked from live models for some of his work.

**Q:** Can you recall any interesting stories while working as an interpreter at the courts?

**A:** I remember well my first case. A woman was accused of shoplifting. She had several items in her bag. Some of them had the labels, others did not. The judge wanted to charge her for all of them, but I said that we could not prove if the woman stole every single item, because some of the articles did not have labels. After a long discussion the judge started giving up. He said to me: ‘Could you ask her why she took all those things without paying for them?’. When I asked the woman the same question she answered that she thought that she had to pay at the bank. ‘O.K.’, said the judge. ‘I will suspend the sentence, but tell her that the next time she has to pay at the store’. There were also some sad stories. An undercover policeman went to the home of a 80 year old lady and sold her a bottle of homemade alcohol. A few days later she was charged with possession of alcohol. I tried to explain that in Europe it was a normal thing to buy alcohol like that and keep it in home for guests and that she did not buy it to resell it. It did not help. At the end she had to pay \$100.

**Q:** Do you remember any popular places or people who helped the new immigrants in early years?

**A:** Many Italians found work at Galla Bakery, O’Leary Asphalt Construction and Caravata Tailoring. Those who were good at plaster work were employed by Licari brothers and the Zito family, while Durie Mosaic gave jobs to marble workers.

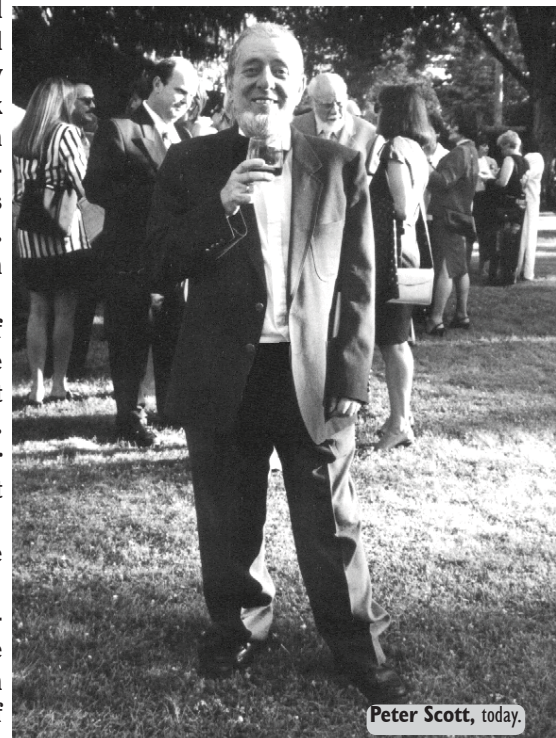
I also remember Chappy’s restaurant, Capri’, and the one run by the Imbro brothers on Rideau St. Those were the best spaghetti places in town.

There was the Prescott Hotel, which Antonio Disipio bought in 1930 and which is now owned by his grandson, and Guzzo and Adamo Specialty Shop. I also remember the post office run by Mrs. Tiezzi. She and her husband helped a lot of the new immigrants.

In terms of prominent people, there was Dr. Sabetta, a skin specialist. Also, Lina Cuccaro and Jennie Prosperine. Lina worked at the embassy at the time. Both she and Jennie Prosperine were presidents of the Ladies’ Aid. Then, Mary Ierullo, Giuseppe Constantini, the Honourable George McLraith, and many others.

**Q:** If you had the power to change something in today’s Italian-Canadian community, what would you change?

**A:** I would like to see people working more together as it was the case in the early years. They should also work more on the preservation of the Italian language and culture and give more support to the places that are the pride of the community, such as the Villa Marconi Long Term Care Centre. I would also like to thank the Servite Fathers and St. Anthony’s Church for giving me the opportunity to achieve many goals, not only community wise, but also spiritual.



Peter Scott, today.



SCOTT, Peter Victor

Peacefully on Saturday, September 1st, 2012, at the age of 79, surrounded by the Angelo Filoso family. Survived by his aunt Jeanne D’Arc Ouellet. Predeceased by his parents, Victor and Laura Scott. He will be dearly missed by all of the Servite Fathers of St. Anthony’s Church and the St. Anthony Parish community. Visitation will be held at St. Anthony’s Church, (Booth at Gladstone) on Thursday, September 6th from 2-4 p.m. and 7-9 p.m. Funeral Mass will be celebrated on Friday, September 7th 2012 at 11:30 a.m. in St. Anthony’s Church. In memoriam donations may be made to St. Anthony’s Church/Peter Scott Memorial Fund which will be used to reconstruct the exterior granite wall of the Church. [www.kellyfh.ca](http://www.kellyfh.ca)

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