

Louis DaMassa

Class of 2019



Louis DaMassa graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1921 in one of the first classes to attend the school at its Bridge Street site. As a young boy growing up in Oroville, he played the clarinet in the Oroville Boys Band and attended vaudeville shows near the site of the present-day Municipal Auditorium. At OHS, he worked on the school newspaper, participated in drama and music, and played in the orchestra. He also served as Lieutenant in the school cadets. He showed an early interest in business and finance as assistant business manager for the school yearbook and tennis team.

Louis's dream was to attend college and earn his degree as no one in his family had ever achieved that. His parents were Italian immigrants and came to Oroville in the late 1800's, and he was the first member of his family to attend college. He was accepted at Saint Mary's College in Oakland and after four years there, earned his BA degree in Foreign Commerce in 1925. While a student at Saint Mary's he was vice president of his senior class, manager of the school basketball team and active in drama, where he had a lead role in a production with a cast of over 100 students. He was also a member of the school yearbook staff.

After earning his college degree, Louis went to work for the Bank of Italy in San Francisco, transferring to the Oroville Branch in 1929 where he remained for 40 years. While in Oroville he saw the bank through its transition to the Bank of America in 1930 and moved from his first position as Bookkeeper to Vice President and Manager, a position he held and cherished until his retirement in 1968. As manager he actively supported area agriculture and local businesses.

While not at the bank, Louis donated countless hours to his beloved Oroville community. He served as president of the Oroville Chamber of Commerce and was one of the visionaries for the early construction of the National Guard Armory in town. He also served as Exalted Ruler of the Oroville Elks Lodge, president and treasurer of the Fellows Club of Oroville, and chairman of the Oroville Park Board. While serving on the Park Board, he worked to restore and preserve the Lott Home, Sank Park, the Chinese Temple and open them to the public. He served on the Board of Directors of the Oroville Olives Semi-pro baseball team, the YMCA and the Oroville Cemetery District.

He was also a member of Rotary International, the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, the Feather River Project Association and the Oroville Industrial Commission. He was instrumental in the early development for the building of the Oroville Dam. He led United Way campaigns, was involved in activities for Regatta Days and enjoyed representing Butte County at the California State Fair in Sacramento.

During World War II, Louis served as an Air Raid Warden, keeping watch for unknown aircraft activity in the Oroville Area.

Nephew Robert Powers wrote in his letter of support for his uncle, *"As to his character, there was no one I looked up to and respected more than Louis DaMassa. His reputation as a banker from the little that I know, was of fairness and equity. My Uncle Louis spoke more by his actions than his words and earned one's respect and admiration by the manner in which he treated others. He was a man of his word and expected as much in return. While accomplishing much, he remained humble and understated and always looked for the next opportunity of service to his community."*

In a letter to Mrs. DaMassa dated May 2, 1977, from then Oroville City Director of Parks, Jim Carpenter wrote, *“In memory of Mr. DaMassa’s dedication to the preservation of the Chinese Temple, the Park Commission has directed that a Bronze Plaque be placed upon the bench in the Court Yard. This is but a small memento toward the Sincere Thanks that the Park Commission and the City of Oroville citizens wish to bestow on him. It is because of him, and people like him, that the Temple Complex is what it is today.*

In an article from the Oroville M-R, Looking Back in Oroville 1962... Bill, Aiston wrote, *“ Louis DaMassa as a member of the off-street parking commission learned that the young lady who operates the police vehicle and tags overtime cars has been taken off the job. Louis, as acting chairman, wrote a letter of protest to the city council. Louis wrote such an effective letter that the next day the meter maid was back on the job and the first car she tagged was owned by Louis DaMassa.”*

Louis DaMassa passed away on Friday, November 14, 1975.