

## Guadagni Family History

The Guadagni are an historic Florentine Family. The first known ancestor, Guittone Guadagni, was a landowner in the proximity of Fiesole, circa 1080. The family resided at Croce alla Spina, translated "Cross with Thorns" which came to describe their family crest, a golden "cross with thorns" against a red background. In the 12th century as Ildebrandino and Guadagno Guadagni and their descendants, moved into Florence they quickly became important merchants and bankers. They actively participated in the political and military life of the city. At that time Florence was an independent Republic. The Guadagni were twelve times "Gonfalonieri" (Presidents of the Republic) of Florence. Some of them, like Migliorozzo, Vieri and Francesco, were generals of the Florentine army and greatly contributed to the extension of the territory controlled by the Florentine Republic.

When the Medici Family grew in power and wealth during the 15th century, the Guadagni saw the dangers it posed for the continuation of a democratic republican regime. So, allied with other old powerful Florentine families, Bernardo Guadagni, at that time gonfaloniere" of Florence, had Cosimo de' Medici arrested and sent into exile in Venice. However when Cosimo returned to Florence sooner than expected, he wasted no time in avenging himself of his enemies. His hatred for the Guadagni knew no limits. Antonio Guadagni, for example, was beheaded on September 4, 1436 under the accusation of plotting against the Republic of Florence. On November 13, 1458, he was sentenced to death again for the same reason. The Medici had forgotten they had already killed him twenty-two years earlier and were obliged to take the humiliating measure of revoking the decree.

Like many other Florentine families the Guadagni escaped abroad, first to Geneva, Switzerland and then to Lyon, France. There Tommaso Guadagni and his nephews became bankers and quickly, through hard work and intelligent investments, they accumulated a large fortune. Even today, in Lyon, when you want to say that somebody is very rich, you say: "He is as rich as a Guadagni!" The Guadagni became the richest family in France and for several years the richest family in all of Europe. Charles-Felix Guadagni and his descendants became the rulers of a little independent country, located in South Eastern France, called "The Duchy of Gadagne" (Gadagne being the French translation of Guadagni). As the Guadagni were related to the Medici, when two Medici princesses married two French Kings, Henri II and Henry IV, the Guadagni became related to the Kings of France.

When the German Emperor, Charles V, captured King of France, Francis I, in the battle of Pavia, he demanded of the French Government a large ransom. No one in France could gather that money. Ultimately, Tommaso Guadagni went to the palace of the French Government and gave them with a smile the money they needed.

For several generations the Guadagni lent large sums of money to the Kings of France to finance their wars. Eventually the Kings of France could not gather enough money to repay their loans so they began giving the Guadagni land instead of money. The Guadagni became large land owners with many castles all over France. They were part of the French nobility: they were Barons of Beauregard, Counts of Verdun, Dukes of Chateaufort, etc. The Guadagni were also known for their charity towards the poor and the sick. During an epidemic of plague in Lyon, for over a month Helene Guadagni and her husband fed at their own expense 4,000 poor and sick people every day. Tommaso II Guadagni built the largest hospital in Lyon and donated it to the city.

During the 16th century, a branch of the Guadagni reconciled with the Medici and returned to Florence. . Several of them, like Donato Maria, Alessandro, Giovambatista and Pietro Maria, held

important charges in the administration of Florence and were rewarded with the titles of Marquis of San Leolino and Marquis of Montepescali by the Medici Grand-Dukes. The Guadagni quickly became one of the four wealthiest families in Florence. They owned one third of all the large palaces of Florence. Carlo Francesco Guadagni assembled the largest and most beautiful private art collection of Florence, with masterpieces of Michelangelo, Perugino, Ghirlandaio, Correggio, Tintoretto, Titian, Palma il Vecchio, Verrocchio, Caravaggio, etc. Pierantonio Guadagni had the largest private collection of ancient books of Florence. The family's large parcels of land included a hill behind Florence named for themselves Guadagni Hill. They also owned a major part of the center. One could walk from Guadagni Hill to the Duomo, in the center of Florence without ever leaving Guadagni property.

In the early 1920's, worried about the Civil War between Fascists and Communists in Italy, one of the Florentine Guadagni, Luigi, his wife Antonietta Revedin and their seven children immigrated to Quebec, Canada. All the children married and had families. Some remained in Canada, others moved to the U.S.A.

In 1933, Guido Mapelli an Italian immigrant started a small wholesale beer company in Denver Colorado and named it Western Distributing Company. Antonio Guadagni, son of Luigi Guadagni, was visiting Colorado in 1945 and met Guido's daughter Dolores. They were soon after married and Antonio went to work for his new father-in-law. Today Western Distributing Company is in its fourth generation in the importing and wholesaling of alcoholic beverages.