

Bonfiglio Perini

The Good Son

He was an immigrant who came to the New World with an old world skill; but a skill that proved valuable in a country that was creating new technologies, new industries, and a new way of life. His name “Bonfiglio” is Italian for “good son,” and the values of hard work and family loyalty were passed on from one good son to another as the small contracting firm he founded in 1894 changed and grew along with his adopted country.

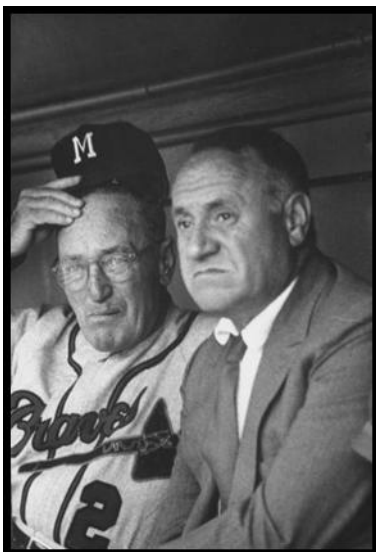


Bonfiglio Perini was determined to relocate to America from his northern Italian town of Gottolengo, and worked in France for almost two years to earn his passage. He arrived in New York in 1885. Although only 22 when he arrived, Perini was already a stone mason, having learned the skill while working on the grounds of the Rothschild estate in Switzerland. He soon found work as a laborer on the Wachusett Reservoir system in Massachusetts. Cities and towns in eastern Massachusetts had an insatiable thirst, and Perini’s masonry skills were in great demand as large reservoirs and dams were built to water to Boston and other communities. After working on projects in upstate New York, Perini eventually settled in Ashland, Massachusetts with his wife Clementina and his growing family. There he founded the Perini Contracting Company, and soon the company was handling many water resource projects in the area, among them the construction of the Fayville Dam in Southborough and the Cochituate Reservoir

in Framingham. Every one of Perini's five sons worked in the family business, some beginning at the tender age of 6 hauling water at construction sites.

Bonfiglio Perini died after a long illness in 1924 at a critical moment in the company's business life. The contractor had just been awarded a large contract by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and his death jeopardized the project. Although only in their early twenties, sons Louis, Charles and Joseph convinced both state officials and financial backers that they could run their father's company. Louis became president and Joseph treasurer, while brother Charles served as vice-president in the renamed B. Perini and Sons, Inc. Under President Lou Perini's guidance, the company expanded into other types of construction, including highways and large civic projects. Perini did contract work on the construction of the Winsor Dam and Quabbin Reservoir in central Massachusetts. In 1933 they took on their largest project to date; the modernization of the Worcester Turnpike (Route 9). It was around this time that the company moved its headquarters from Ashland to Framingham.

Much of the company's success is due to Lou Perini's business instinct and progressive thinking. Although just 21 years old with only an eighth-grade education when he took over the company, Lou had many years of experience working on job sites



with his father. It was Lou who procured large scale projects for the company, including the first private contract ever awarded by the US Army Corps of Engineers, for the widening of the Cape Cod Canal. Lou may not have had much of an education, but he had an engineer's eye and instinct, which assured that any work

done by Perini was always of the highest quality. He also had a warm, engaging personality which allowed him to socialize with workers as well as politicians and celebrities.

In 1943 this immigrant's son turned millionaire realized the great American dream of many a young boy by buying his own baseball team. Along with two other contractors, Lou purchased the Boston Braves and within a short time used his business sense to make them as successful an enterprise as his construction company. The Braves were one of the first baseball teams to play under lights at night. In 1948 they made it to the World Series, only to lose to the Cleveland Indians.

It was during Lou's ownership of the Braves that another Boston institution was established. In 1947, Lou became interested in the pioneering cancer research of Dr. Sidney Farber. After hearing about a 12 year-old Braves fan named "Jimmy" who was being treated by Dr. Farber, Lou arranged for several of the team's stars to visit the ailing boy at Children's Hospital. The visit was broadcast on national radio and hosted by popular radio personality Ralph Edwards. As a result of the broadcast, hundreds of contributions from across New England poured into the hospital. Children set up lemonade stands to raise money for cancer research, and promotional films were shown in movie theaters across the region- the Jimmy Fund was born. When the Braves moved to Milwaukee, the Red Sox took over sponsorship of the organization.

According to author Adolph, the growth and success of the Perini Corporation was due in large part to Lou being "exposed to his father's way of doing things- to the Italian tradition of hard work, and to Bonfiglio's congeniality, basic native intelligence, and intuitiveness." (Caso 155).

These qualities became important when Lou found his baseball team to be unprofitable in the early 1950's. Like many pioneers before him, he looked west, and found an enthusiastic and welcoming fan base waiting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Despite his promises to keep the team in Boston and try to build a fan base; despite the fact that opening day was only weeks away, Lou moved the team to Milwaukee in March 1953. Many baseball historians cite Lou's popularity with the other owners as a key reason he was able to pull off such a maneuver. Cincinnati Reds owner Gabe Paul was quoted as saying "How could I vote against the Braves? Lou is such a good fellow." (Kaese 286) It was the first franchise move in modern baseball, and many diehard fans never got over it. The Braves had been organized in Boston in 1871, thirty years before the Red Sox! Lou's daring and foresighted move paved the way for baseball's expansion west, and within a few years the people of Baltimore, Kansas City, Los Angeles and San Francisco all welcomed relocated franchises to their cities.

Upon Lou Perini's death in 1972, his son David became president and CEO. David Perini served in those positions until his retirement in 1999, marking the end of three generations of family leadership of the company.

Through its many acquisitions of smaller companies, Perini Corporation has become one of the largest construction companies in the world. It is a publicly traded national corporation, with offices across the globe. Its list of construction projects is impressive, and too vast to include in its entirety. Some of the more well known projects the company has worked on are: the Trans-Alaskan oil pipeline, the Maine turnpike, Mohegan Sun in Connecticut, the Prudential Center, Copley Place, Logan Airport, and Big Dig in Boston, and Framingham South High School (current Fuller Middle School), Barbeiri, Farley and Cameron Middle Schools in Framingham. In recent years, Perini has

concentrated much of its contracting work in the hotel and hospitality industry, developing large resorts and casinos in Las Vegas. Its eastern operations headquarters has been located on Mt. Wayte Avenue in Framingham since 1989 when old equipment sheds were transformed into sleek, modern offices. The company employs over 5,000 and is valued at close to a billion dollars.

Lou Perini was passionate about baseball, and his views on the game give insight into his business philosophy and the motivations of many successful first generation Americans. Writing in 1968 on the occasion of the company's 50th anniversary, Lou had this to say about the state of some baseball franchises, in particular, their playing facilities:

“In some cities however, the trouble with baseball is much the same as with the cities themselves. The ball parks are obsolete and located in depressed, crowded sections with no parking facilities and poorly lighted, sometimes dangerous streets. Too many of these parks are symbolic of a past way of life. The need to renew, to roof, to air condition, and to have upholstered and cushioned seats is urgent and is in keeping with the times. Amenities must keep pace.” (Perini 24).

This passage captures the motivating factors behind the success of many immigrants and their native born children. Perini rejects the obsolete “past way of life.” The need to renew refers not only to ballparks but to a way of life, for individuals as well as the nation. Bonfiglio Perini arrived in America just as this renewal was taking place. He had the appropriate and necessary skills to help transform small valleys into giant reservoirs, dusty roads into highways, rundown neighborhoods into sleek, modern complexes. For those people living in the five towns displaced by the Quabbin Reservoir in central Massachusetts, or living and working in Boston's Scollay Square before Government Center was built, Perini's construction projects may not seem like “progress.” But as has been proven by the “good son” Bonfiglio Perini and generations of other newcomers to

America, success, sometimes even *survival*, requires severing the ties to the past and moving forward on the road to the future.



<i>Five C's</i>	<i>PRIMES</i>
<p>Context: <i>America – Land of Opportunity</i></p> <p>Contingency: <i>If he had not had the spirit of the American Dream, he would not have built a successful empire</i></p> <p>Causality: <i>He came at a time of expansion of America's infrastructure and urban landscape</i></p> <p>Change Over Time: <i>From common laborer to industrial construction giant</i></p> <p>Complexity: <i>Perini Brothers continues to thrive when other, more well established Framingham industries have long since closed</i></p>	<p>Political: <i>The Perini Corporation's work has influenced politics and government workings.</i></p> <p>Economic: <i>The Perini Corporation continues to be a significant influence on economics in the region.</i></p>

Annotated Bibliography

Bisha, Pat A. "Perini Corporation: A Family Affair." The Metrowest Business Review

Sept. 1986: 8-15.

All of the magazine articles and Perini newsletters (except one) used for this paper were found in the Framingham History Center's files. Volunteers work to gather articles about local topics and continually add these to the files, which makes the research much easier.

Caso, Adolph. They Too Made America Great- Lives of the Italian Americans.

Wellesley, MA: Branden Books, 1978.

A small book with an eclectic sampling of biographies of Italians and Italian Americans; this book contained the relatively obscure Lou Perini as well as Columbus and Rudolph Valentino. Many of the biographies contain commentary along with factual information.

"Jimmy Comes of Age." Perini News September 1969.

LaGumina, Salvatore John, et al. The Italian American Experience: An Encyclopedia.

New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000.

This is a comprehensive encyclopedia of Italian American culture and personalities historical and contemporary, famous and infamous. The book is huge (735 pages) with hundreds of entries documenting events, people, traditions and contributions of Italians from Christopher Columbus to Mother Cabrini to Madonna.

Patterson, Charles J. "The Perini Story." America's Builders 2-4, 1954:1-8.

The most detailed information about Bonfiglio Perini's early life was found in this article, which was in the vertical files of the Framingham Public Library.

"Perini-Celebrating 100 years." F. W. Dodge Construction Profile 1994.

This is a magazine celebrating 100 years of the Perini Corporation.

Perini, Louis. "The Past 50 Years and Then Some- How Fast, How Far, How Changing."

Perini News December 1968.

Lou Perini wrote a column in each issue of the company newsletter until his death in 1972. In this column, he reflects on his company and baseball, revealing some interesting insights into the Perini philosophy.

Kaese, Harold. The Boston Braves 1871-1953. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.

Great reading if you are interested in baseball and Boston history. Perini and his ownership of the team are only a small (but important) part of the history of the team.

Rossi, John P. A Whole New Game: Off the Field Changes in Baseball, 1946-1960.

Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999.

An inside look at the business of baseball and how events such as the Boston Braves move to Milwaukee, the signing of Jackie Robinson and the development of the Players' Union helped improve baseball in the period just after World War II.