

Greater Utica

The Business Di\$trict

The legacy of the John L. Matt Funeral Home is a story shaped by immigration, family devotion, and a deep commitment to service—values passed down through generations for more than a century.

In 1893, Luigi and Caterina (Summa) Meta emigrated from the Province of Catanzaro in Calabria, Italy, bringing their children Carmen, Joseph, Rose, Amodel and Anthony to the United States in search of opportunity. They later had three American-born children: Stella Teresa and Paul. After a short stay in New York City's Little Italy, the family settled in Utica, where they established their home. As was common at the time, their surname was anglicized when the children attended Bleeker Street School, and "Meta" became "Matt," a name that would define the family's future.

The Matt family quickly became known for their strong work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit. Over the years, they operated a meat market, owned a Bleeker Street apartment building, and ran the Eagle Ice Cream Company, which once operated an ice house and as many as thirty horse-drawn wagons. As the children matured, each followed a professional calling—Carmen and Joseph entered real estate, Paul became an attorney, and Anthony found his vocation in funeral service.

In 1914, Anthony F. Matt established the Matt Funeral Home in East Utica. Serving a growing Italian, Lebanese, and Syrian population, Anthony was known for his cultural sensitivity, compassion, and respect for religious traditions. Fluent in multiple languages, he provided families with dignified care during their most difficult moments, earning trust throughout the community. In 1920, he married Lena J. Viscosi of Rome, New York, and together they strengthened the family's ties to Utica. Anthony devoted thirty-three years to funeral service before his passing in 1947 at the age of fifty-six.

The family's history also carries stories of loss and remembrance. One such story is that of Teresa Meta, who died tragically in 1899 at just three years old from severe burns. Baptized at Mt. Carmel Church, she was buried at St. Agnes Cemetery—a distinction at a time when many Italian immigrants were laid to rest in unconsecrated ground. Decades later, through careful genealogical research, John L. Matt, Jr. was able to rediscover her grave despite errors in cemetery records. John, Jr.'s cousin Robert Matt paid to have a stone placed on her grave. Her story underscores the importance of honoring family history and preserving memory.

After Anthony's death, leadership of the funeral home passed to his son, John L. Matt, Sr. His life was shaped by service both at home and abroad. During World War II, John Sr. served in Italy and North Africa with the United States Army, working in graves registration and as a French and Italian interpreter. He was awarded the Good Conduct Medal and two Bronze Battle Stars for his service. Upon returning home in 1947, he assumed ownership of the funeral home and relocated it to a larger facility in East Utica, where he lived with his family above the business. John Sr. and his wife Grace shared seventy years of marriage before retiring together in the 1970s.

John L. Matt Jr. began helping his father with the family business at the age of eleven. Through years of hands-on experience, he learned not only the profession but the principles that guided it—faith, family, and service to country. After completing his education at Simmons School of Embalming and Mortuary Science and an apprenticeship in Rochester, John Jr. returned to Utica in 1977 to continue the family tradition.

In 2003, John, Jr. became manager of the Francis W. Fisk Funeral Home in Chadwicks. One year later, he purchased the business, continuing operations at the same location while upholding the values instilled by generations before him. Today, the John L. Matt Funeral Home is known for offering a private, comfortable setting and affordable services without sacrificing dignity or quality.

Viewing funeral service as a form of ministry rather than an occupation, John remains personally accessible to families even after services conclude. The photographs lining his office walls—of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents—serve as daily reminders of a legacy built on compassion, trust, and respect, and of a commitment to carry that legacy forward for future generations.

John L. Matt Funeral Home

