

Caruso's Memorial Candle to Burn 1800 Years

The Touching and Enduring Tribute to the Great Singer from the Penny Contributions of the Little Orphans He Had Befriended Which Will Burn in the Church in His Beloved Naples for Centuries to Come



Caruso at Rest on His Deathbed in the Hotel Vesuvius, Naples.

SOME time before midnight of All Saints' Day—November 2, 1921—a priest in the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii at Naples will light a long taper and light the wick of a candle towering like a spire twice the height of a tall man above the priest's head. A mass will be said and solemn prayers be offered for the repose of the soul of Enrico Caruso.

For this immense candle, eighteen feet high and seven in circumference at its base, is a touching and enduring memorial to the charitable heart of the greatest tenor the world has ever known.

Touching, because it was made possible, in part at least, by penny contributions from orphans whom Caruso had befriended.

Enduring? Some time before midnight of All Saints' Day eighteen hundred years from now, in that same Church of Our Lady of Pompeii, a wick set in a thin disc of beeswax will be burning with a clear, white flame. Before dawn of the next day—November 3, 3721—the wick will have gutted out, and in place of the flame the fragrance of roses will rise from the pool of wax and drift about the dim gray arches.

After eighteen hundred years the great Caruso Memorial Candle will have burned out.

Eighteen hundred years! What cannot happen in the length of time the flame in that huge cylinder of wax will be kept alive? Only a little more than that number of years ago the Saviour walked the earth and was crucified. Between then and now empires have fallen and new empires arisen; scores of conquerors have lived and died. During that time the Dark Ages cast their shadow on Europe, threatening to eclipse all the painfully gained knowledge of man—a knowledge saved only by the sheltering walls of that same Church of which that of Our Lady of Pompeii, which will guard the candle, is a part.

But how, it will be asked, is it possible to make a candle which will burn for 1,800 years? And how is it possible to make it so that it will be known, almost to the minute, just how long it will burn?

The construction of the Caruso memorial has demanded calculations as unusual and delicate as those scientists use to measure the heat from distant stars; and these calculations have been as unusual as the memorial itself.

Two factors enter into its making—the wick which is set aflame and the material upon which the flame must feed. Between these two things the most delicate balance had to be determined, so that the wax melted neither too fast nor too slow and would be entirely consumed. This balance was at last attained to such a degree that it is mathematically certain the candle will diminish slightly less than one-eighth of an inch in every twenty-four hours.

If it were to be set alight and the flame kept burning continuously the candle would last for 43,200 hours; that is, it would burn for almost five years continuously. But it is the plan to light it only once a year on the first second of All Saints' Day, and to keep it burning until the last second of that twenty-four hours. The commission to construct it was given to Antonino Ajello, of the foremost firm of candle-makers, who knew and loved Caruso.

The first step in its making began with the construction of the wick, just as the keel of a ship is laid before the hull is begun, for it is obvious that the shape and size and quality of the wick must determine the shape and size and quality of the candle whose material feeds it.

The wick for the Caruso candle is slightly over eighteen feet long, and tapers from the approximate size of a half-dollar at the top to that of a dollar at the base. The number of strands, the method by which they are spliced on as the wick becomes thicker, and certain other details as to the wick are closely guarded secrets in the Ajello family—secrets which, Mr. Ajello says, other candle manufacturers, mostly English, have tried to glean from him by writing under the guise of newspaper correspondents to ask for details of the wick that none but a candlemaker could think of.

Suffice it to say, that at the base the number of strands is twice that of the top and numbers a round one thousand. The wick itself is made of unbleached sea-island cotton. It is impregnated with a

secret chemical and is woven in such a way that it absorbs the molten wax.

This preparation of the wick, and the fact that the proportion of the wick to the candle has been carefully worked out, make possible a candle that will neither drip over the sides nor hollow out around the wick.

If the wick is too small in proportion to the thickness of the candle, it is obvious that the flame cannot consume the wax to the outer circumference. The result would be that the flame would eat out a cup in the centre of the wax and would eventually put itself out.

On the other hand, a wick that is too large not only burns too fast, but causes the wax to run over and form drops and streaks on the sides.

But even if the wick is in just the correct ratio to the diameter of the candle, it will not burn steadily and cleanly unless it is designed to absorb some of the wax.

In addition to the impregnating process the eighteen-foot wick has been perfumed with priceless rose extract, given by an American perfume manufacturer. Roses were Caruso's favorite flower.

Almost everyone is familiar with the smell that the snuffing out of a candle causes. The unpleasant odor from the Caruso candle would be great if measures were not taken to prevent it. But not only will there be a faint odor of roses when the candle is burning, but when it is extinguished the odor will become greater.

After the wick had been made and prepared it was suspended from a sort of derrick in the Ajello factory on Long Island, over a huge gas-heated tank especially constructed for this particular candle. The candle, when completed, contained more than 900 pounds of wax, and the tank, in order to hold 1,000 pounds, was made 145 gallons in capacity.

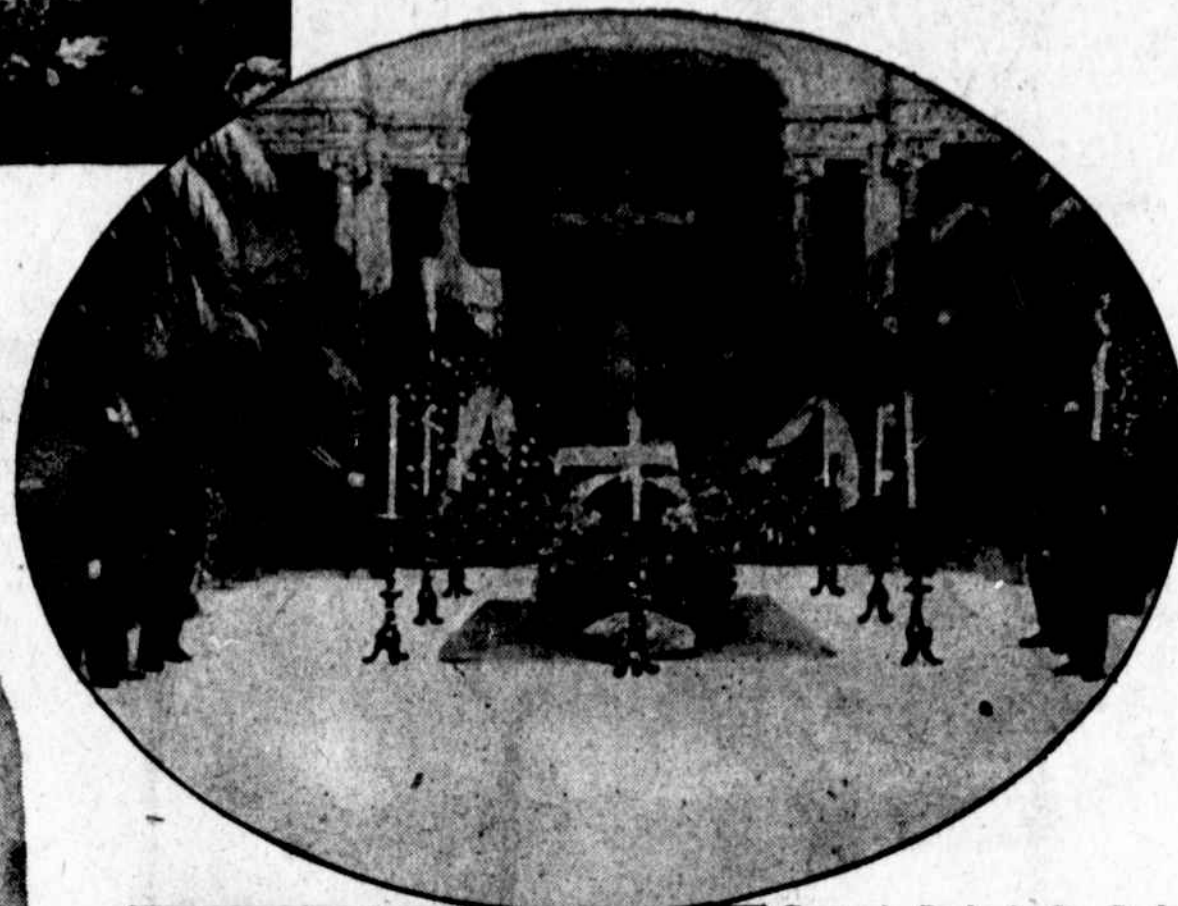
The wax—unbleached, refined beeswax—was heated to a temperature of about 120 degrees, and then the wick was lowered vertically in it. After the wick had remained in the molten wax for a short time it was withdrawn and allowed to cool for about two hours—longer, if the weather happened to be hot.

This dipping left a coat of wax on the wick—a coat that tapered in exactly the same shape as that of the wick. The dipping process was repeated again and again—in all, about 600 times.

It required almost four months of dipping until the candle reached the size called for in the designs!

It is this method of construction that makes a candle staunch and strong enough to bear its own weight without bending. Tubular construction, it might be called, for the candle is really composed of sheaths of wax, one over the other. If it were cut in half it would look much like a sliced onion.

Then the top of the candle was tapered off in the conventional Greek shape—for the design of the candle closely follows the "Tipe Greco," as Ajello calls it. But the surface was rough and lumpy still, and before the ornamentation could be applied it must be smoothed off. This was done by passing a steam-heated, expanding metal ring over the candle from top to bottom. The surplus was melted off and a true cone shape given the shaft.



Restivo's Painting of the Saviour on the Cross Was Caruso's Favorite Picture, and the Candlemakers Have Carefully Copied It in Miniature on the Great Memorial Candle.

Meantime, Antonio Ajello, Jr., who is an accomplished artist, had designed the embossing shown in the picture. Each unit of design—roses, lilies, scrolls—had been carefully worked out and steel dies prepared. A sheet of wax, dried and "annealed," was laid out on a slab and kept at a lukewarm temperature. With the dies young Ajello carefully stamped out the various motifs

in that particular shade. Seizing them with a long-handled pair of pincers he applied them, still warm, to the shaft of the candle, and held them in place until they united with the wax of the shaft. This operation was repeated for each unit of design. Those that called for gilding were left uncolored and gold leaf was applied later. Then, in the oval toward the base, was copied, in oil colors, a picture by Restivo of the Crucifixion—a picture

Caruso's Body in Its Casket Lying in State in His Beloved Naples.

that Caruso had many times admired when he visited his friend.

Somewhere in New York is an orphan asylum to which Caruso gave \$10,000 a year for many years. These orphans, of whom there are now between four and five hundred, each gave their pennies to help defray the expense of shipping the candle to Naples. Ajello himself made the candle for nothing for these grateful little proteges of the tenor. In labor and materials it cost, of course, many thousands of dollars—just how much its maker does not like to say.

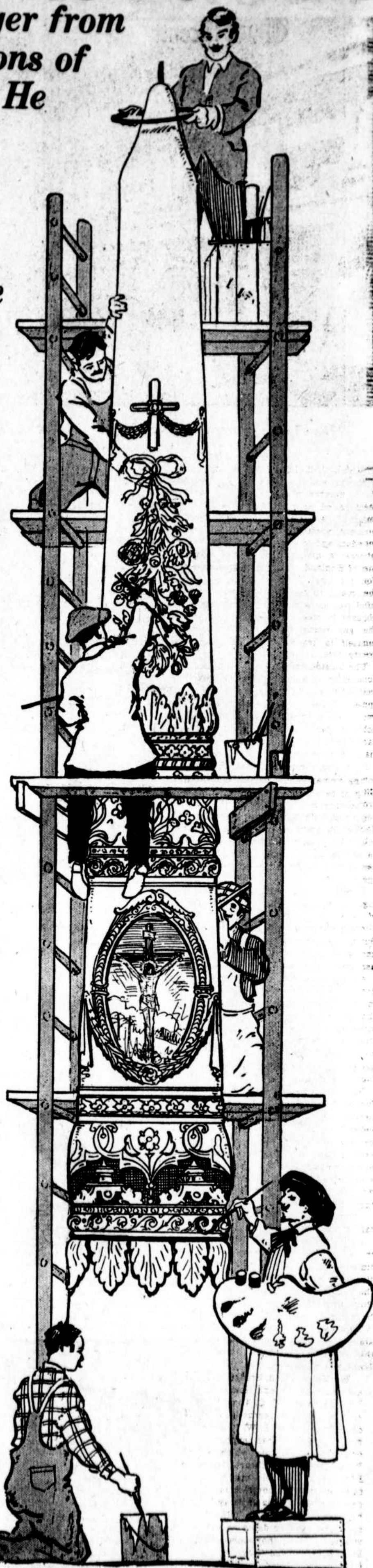
As Caruso had desired that this beneficence of his be kept secret, the people who look after the little orphans do not want the name of the institution where they live made known. But at the base of the candle was engraved the names of the boys and girls and that of Ajello, the maker. After these names were placed the candle was done.

It is interesting to note that this is not the first votive candle having to do with Caruso. Back in 1912, when the grand opera king had been suffering from sore throat, he offered to Saint Blagio, patron of the throat, an eleven-foot candle—then the largest of its kind. Caruso offered this at a shrine of Saint Blagio in gratitude for his recovery from his illness. Ajello has made many unusual and touching sacred gifts of this character. Only recently he took molds of the breasts of a girl cured of tuberculosis. It is said, by prayer alone. From these molds he has modeled replicas of the breasts in the finest wax, and these will be given to the shrine of the saint, either to rest there or to be burned as candles, as the mother of the child may determine.

It is interesting to speculate as to what may happen in those eighteen hundred years, during which for twenty-four hours every year the great candle will shed its soft lustre and odor of roses in the Naples church. That it will keep Caruso's memory alive is unquestioned. Lovers of music, tourists, the devout will flock there on All Saints' Day to regard with wonder the slowly diminishing shaft of wax.

Even in the days when it does not burn it will be an object to attract the devout and curious alike.

What changes will it see in this world of ours?



Artisans at Work in Antonio Ajello's Candle Factory Polishing, Painting, and Enameling the Great Eighteen-Foot Candle.