



REPORT

Report Date: April 26, 2022
Contact: Wilma Clarke
Contact No.: 604.873.7479
RTS No.: 14855
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: April 26, 2022
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Arts, Culture, and Community Services
SUBJECT: Official Apology to the Italian Canadian Community in Vancouver

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council approve the draft apology, attached to this report as Appendix A, for the injustices and harms to members of the Italian Canadian community that occurred as a result of the City of Vancouver's actions, policies and/or public support of measures, including reference to "enemy aliens" during World War II (1940-1945);

FURTHER THAT the formal apology be issued during the Italian Heritage Month, in June 2022.
- B. THAT Council receive the overview of the historical background that outlines the discrimination and decision to intern members of the Italian Canadian community, the requirement to report to the RCMP on a regular basis, and impacts on women, children and the Italian community at large during World War II; and direct staff to create a plan on how to use this overview for public awareness and education.
- C. THAT Council direct staff to consider a public art installation to commemorate the Official City Apology for the discrimination against Italian Canadians during World War II in alignment with and following the completion of the City-wide Commemoration Policy.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the June 2021 Council motion that directed staff to work on the following:

- Conduct research, in consultation with organisations representing the Italian Canadian community in Vancouver, including 'Il Centro' – the Italian Cultural Centre, for a proclamation of Official Apology from the City of Vancouver to be delivered during the Italian Heritage Month (IHM) in 2022, for any historical actions, policies, or public support of measures that contributed to discrimination against Italian Canadians because of their ancestry; and this Official Apology to be posted on the City of Vancouver's website.
- To work with The Italian Cultural Centre – Il Centro and the Public Art Committee to consider and possibly identify opportunities for an installation of Public Art to commemorate the City of Vancouver's Official Apology to the Italian Canadian community in Vancouver.

This report reflects research completed with advisors from the Italian Canadian community, including the Italian Cultural Centre, that informed the draft apology attached to this report as Appendix A. The overview of the historical background describing the discrimination against the Italian Canadian community will be used for the purposes of public education as described in the section below.

Staff in Arts, Culture and Community Services and Vancouver Park Board are leading a city-wide process to develop a Commemoration Policy that will guide citywide commemoration, expected in Q4 of 2023. Both City and Park Board staff have paused consideration of new commemorative projects until a Commemoration Policy is adopted by Council and Park Board. Staff can collaborate with the Italian Cultural Centre and relevant stakeholders in the interim to prepare for future work to consider and possibly identify opportunities for commemoration extending from the apology.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

[Framework for City of Reconciliation](#), 2014

[Healthy City Strategy](#), 2014

[Apology for Historical Discrimination against Chinese People](#), 2018

[Standing Up to the Rise in Anti-Asian Racism, All Racism & Hate Crimes](#), 2020

[Equity Framework](#), 2021

[Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the City of Vancouver](#), 2021

[Komagata Maru Apology and Remembrance Day Proclamation](#), 2021

[Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the City of Vancouver](#), 2021

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

Subject to Council's approval, the proclamation of Official Apology to the Italian Canadian community will be delivered during the Italian Heritage Month in June 2022. The Official Apology demonstrates the City's commitment to upholding the principles of human rights, justice, and reconciliation.

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Background/Context

The Official Apology to the Italian Canadian community in Vancouver is taking place as part of broader reconciliation and equity work that the City has embarked upon. The Reconciliation Framework acknowledges that Vancouver is located on the unceded traditional territories of the x̣ẉməθḳẉəỵ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) and commits to uphold Indigenous rights and establish lasting relationships with the host Nations and Urban Indigenous Peoples.

The apology to Chinese Canadians came forward in 2016, followed by a 2018 Council motion to include Italian Heritage Month in the City of Vancouver's official Celebrations and Observances. Approved in 2021, the Equity Framework marked a significant milestone in the City's commitment to an overall approach to addressing existing inequities. Council's motion to issue an Official Apology to Vancouver's Italian Canadian community is further demonstration of the City's commitment to upholding the principles of human rights, justice and reconciliation.

Over the past three years staff have undertaken Anti-racism and Cultural Redress work that flows from Council motions: motion to stand up to the rise of anti-Asian racism, all racism and hate crimes; motion to combat anti-Semitism in Vancouver; motion to address historical discrimination against people of South Asian descent in Vancouver; Council-supported work to address anti-Black racism in Vancouver, and a number of motions directing further work related to the implementation of the City's Access Without Fear Policy. As well, there is work underway in Chinatown by the Chinatown Transformation Team through the leadership of the Chinatown Legacy Stewardship Group in response to the 2016 Apology to the Chinese Canadian Community and in North East False Creek related to NEFC Plan's commitment to address the historic displacement and erasure of the Black Canadian community of Hogan's Alley.

The Italian Canadian community is among the multiple communities that have historically experienced stigma and discrimination due to their cultural identity and place of origin. Like other migrant groups, Italians faced discrimination upon their arrival in Canada in the late 19th century. Their language, customs, and foods were strange to the Canadian host society, and they were stereotyped as overly passionate, violent, and possibly involved in criminal activities. The impact of the injustices against this community was most evident between the years 1940 and 1945, during World War II. Across Canada, the Canadian Government interned approximately over 600 Italian Canadians and required reporting of an additional 31,000. In Vancouver, approximately 33 members of the Italian Canadian community who were deemed to be Enemy Aliens and an additional 1,300 to 1,800 Italian Canadians were required to register with the RCMP and report to their headquarters on a monthly basis.

Strategic Analysis

Following years of advocating for the acknowledgement and an apology for the injustices against the Italian Canadian community, the Federal Government offered an apology on May 27, 2021. Further to the Federal Government's apology, the City Council passed a motion to offer an Official Apology for the discrimination against Italian Canadians residing in Vancouver. This acknowledgement of the harms that many individuals and families experienced during and

after World War II is a significant part of redress and ensuring that the City of Vancouver does not repeat these mistakes in the future.

Research of the historical overview

Staff engaged an advisory group to support the research on the historical overview of the treatment of Italian Canadian community during World War II and the draft apology. Council directed staff to prepare the draft apology to be presented during the Italian Heritage Month (IHM) in 2022. Within the allocated time, the advisory group was able to collaborate and seek input from descendants of family members who were interned, and those from the broader Italian Canadian community, including members of the IHM planning committee. Overall the work was led by the historian and author, Raymond Culos and lawyer, Celso Boscariol, QC, with contributions from professors, business leaders and the president of Il Centro.

Summary of research findings (See Details in Appendix B):

- Following Canada's declaration of war on Italy in 1940, the Canadian Government instructed the RCMP to round up all known members of The Fascist Party in Canada (Partito Nazionale Fascista), including members of the BC group (i.e., Giulio Giordani). These men were perceived as a threat to Canada because of their association with the Fascist Party, but none was charged with any wrongdoing.
- In the February 16, 1942 Council motion, Vancouver City Council made reference to "enemy aliens," and as the current Council indicates, this reference was viewed as unjustly and unfairly directed at the Italian Canadian community and contrary to the principles of fundamental human rights.
- Those classified as Enemy Aliens underwent an initial interrogation by Vancouver police detectives and/or RCMP personnel prior to being summarily interned. Twenty-nine of the 33 Vancouver men listed on the RCMP's list were arrested on June 10, 1940 under the provisions of the Defense of Canada Regulations, with others being taken into custody during the following weeks.
- Internment meant that the men were incarcerated at Kananaskis, AB and Petawawa, ON without the right to consult with private counsel nor contact their families except through limited and censored letters. None of the internees were charged with a crime against Canada initially nor at any time during the incarceration period of BC's Enemy Aliens, which averaged fifteen and a half months in duration.
- The RCMP, with the cooperation of the City of Vancouver Police Department, instructed between 1,300 and 1,800 Italians to register with the RCMP. These residents were required to report on a monthly basis to RCMP Headquarters at 33rd Avenue and Heather Street, some for the duration of the war with Italy. Those required to register were Italians who arrived in Canada from Italy after October 1922. During their brief monthly reporting sessions, they were required to confirm place of work, home address, activities, etc.
- Following World War II, interned Italian-Canadians lived in silence, burdened with feelings of shame and stigma for their arrest and detention. As the post-war wave of

immigration saw more Italians come to Canada, the truth about the internment remained concealed and largely unknown among these newcomers.

- In 1990, the National Congress of Italian Canadian (“NCIC”) and Canadian Italian Business & Professional Inc. (“CIBPA”) initiated a campaign to have unjust internment acknowledged by the Canadian government with an apology and educational recognition of the wrong.
- Public meetings were held across Canada to hear from the internees and their families about the shame, indignity and pain suffered because of the wrongful internment. In Vancouver, Celso Boscarol, QC, organized a public meeting on April 7th, 1991 at the Italian Cultural Centre.
- Although then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney acknowledged the wrongs in 1990, no apology was made until 2021 when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized in the House of Commons for the unjust internment of Italo-Canadians during World War II. Few, if any of the internees lived to hear the apology. Many of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren had the opportunity to hear the apology.

Draft Apology to the Italian Community (See Details in Appendix A)

The impacts were not isolated to individuals alone and were detrimental. The people interned were men, many who were forced to abandon their families, in many cases including young children, businesses, and entire livelihoods. In addition to the economic hardships that many families experienced because their breadwinners were taken away, the stigmatization, humiliation, and shame experienced due to being targeted and having to report to the government on a regular basis remained for several years after the war ended.

Testimonies from Italian Community members who support an apology are attached to this report and they provide rationale for an apology. As one individual recounted:

...I believe that the government should apologize for the harsh and brutal manner in which this was done. Heads of family were bodily seized and restrained in their homes and workplaces with no explanation and dragged away, often in front of their shocked families including impressionable small children (I was one of them). The government should recognize that, without warning, many dependents were left with no means of support at a time when there was little or no community safety net available to help them....I was 10 years old and I remember that I couldn't understand why my father was suddenly imprisoned at a time when I most needed him. I believe that my lifelong feelings of anxiety are directly attributable to this period of my childhood.

Should Council approve the draft apology, Council demonstrates understanding of the truth and historical wrongs, while acknowledging and taking responsibility for the harms created and the City's active role in these. As noted by historian and author, Raymond Culos, “They deserve an apology and recognition of the injustice. The entire community deserves the same as injustice inflicted upon one citizen is an injustice inflicted upon all.” In doing so, Council will also help to prevent the City from engaging in such harmful acts in the future.

Public Education and Commemoration

Should Council approve the recommendations in this report, staff will work with internal and external advisors on public awareness and education. The Communications and Protocol teams would support the launch of the attached historical overview and draft apology through internal and external websites, social media platforms and other city communication channels. The approved apology would be read in a Council meeting in June, coinciding with the launch of the Italian Heritage Month. Additional public education strategies would also be identified during the planning of these celebrations.

Finally, to ensure that the truth about the injustices visited upon the Italian Canadians during World War II is not forgotten, a public art instalment would be considered as directed by Council. Staff in Arts, Culture and Community Services and Vancouver Park Board are leading a City-wide process to develop a Commemoration Policy that will guide all commemoration initiatives at the City of Vancouver going forward. Opportunities for commemoration of the Official Apology to Italian Canadians will be considered in alignment with and following the completion of the City-wide Commemoration Policy in Q4, 2023.

Implications/Related Issues/Risk

Financial

There will be budget requests related to the installation of Public Art to commemorate the City of Vancouver's Official Apology to the Italian Canadian community that will be carried out in alignment and following the completion of the Commemoration Policy.

CONCLUSION

While none of the interned Italian Canadians are alive today in Vancouver, their descendants are here and deserve a recognition and apology for the injustices visited upon their families. The historical overview and the apology provided herein serve to acknowledge this truth about the past and are a crucial part of moving forward in ensuring that past injustices are not repeated in the future.

* * * * *

City of Vancouver
OFFICIAL APOLOGY TO THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY
June 2022

Acknowledging Injustice of Internment and Improper Monitoring of Italians in Vancouver, June 1940 to September 1943

“You can’t change history. But you can change the consequences.”

Professor Geoffrey Palmer

Immediately following the declaration of war against Italy, June 10, 1940, the Canadian Government directed the RCMP to round up certain members of Canada’s Italian communities who were deemed to be Enemy Aliens. Invoking the terms of Canada’s War Measurers Act and armed with lists of Italians, some of whom were Canadian citizens, RCMP officers apprehended many of these suspects at their homes or places of employment. As a result, approximately three dozen men living in Vancouver underwent an initial interrogation by RCMP personnel. With the odd exception, all were subsequently placed in cells at the Immigration Building located near the Marine Building at the north end of Burrard Street. Once accommodations had been completed in Alberta, the Enemy Aliens, in two waves, were chained to pullman seats and transferred by train to the Kananaskis POW Internment Camp.

Many families of the internees were not notified as to the disposition of their loved ones or given definitive reasons as to why or when they had been taken from them. In this regard, no communication between those incarcerated and their families existed for approximately two weeks.

Not a single Vancouver internee was ever charged with a crime against Canada. Not initially nor at any time during incarceration at Kananaskis, AB and Petawawa, ON, which averaged a total of fifteen and a half months in duration.

Internees were not extended the right to engage or consult with private counsel. Moreover, the families of the internees were not permitted to visit or contact them by telephone. However, each internee was entitled to send or receive one or two censored letters per month.

A majority of family members whose breadwinner had been interned experienced major emotional trauma and/or financial hardship. One family’s business failed, requiring the wife of an internee to declare bankruptcy. The two daughters of another internee had to quit school in order to seek employment in order to meet the family’s financial obligations. These are but two examples of the tragic and traumatic consequences of the arbitrary and wrongful internment.

Moreover, the RCMP, with the cooperation of the City of Vancouver Police Department, instructed upwards to 1,800 Italians to register with the RCMP. They were required to

report on a monthly basis to RCMP Headquarters, some for the duration of the war with Italy. Those required to register were Italians who had arrived in Canada from Italy following October 22, 1922 the date Benito Mussolini formed government in Italy. During their brief monthly reporting sessions, they were required to confirm place of work, home address and general activities.

A majority of the Enemy Aliens who trekked up to the RCMP Headquarters on a monthly basis felt mortified, indignant and sickened by having been labelled Enemy Aliens.

Acknowledgement of Injustice

In the years following World War II, formerly interned Italo-Canadians and their families tried to put this episode behind them. Their feelings of shame for being arrested and interned outweighed their sense of justice for the wrong inflicted upon them. Despite the humiliation and injustice, Italo-Canadians picked up the pieces and carried on with their lives. In so doing, they worked tirelessly to show fellow Canadians that they were good citizens contributing to their communities. Many lived in silence, burdened with the stigma of arrest and detention, while others suffered the indignity of having to report monthly to the RCMP as Enemy Aliens.

The postwar wave of immigration brought hundreds of thousands of Italians to Canada. They too, like those that preceded them, were imbued with the motivation to carve out better futures for their families, working hard and ensuring their children were educated to take their place in Canadian society. The wartime Italian internment in Canada was unknown to many of them and for those who heard of it, it was spoken of quietly with a sense of shame and resignation by those that endured it. It affected the way Italian immigrants were regarded. The consequences of internment radiated beyond the internees and the event itself.

In 1990, the National Congress of Italian Canadian and Canadian Business & Professional Inc. initiated a campaign to have unjust internment acknowledged by the Canadian government with an apology and educational recognition of the wrong.

Public meetings were held across Canada to hear from the internees and their families about the shame, indignity and pain suffered by them because of the wrongful internment. A good number of the internees were still alive then and able to recount their experiences firsthand. Their testimonials were augmented by their children who had grown with the stigma of interned parents. Their stories were moving and heart wrenching. Some of the internees broke down in tears recalling the indignity of arrest and humiliation without cause. Almost all the internees have since died and their children are now senior citizens, also aging rapidly. Soon that generation too, will not be with us.

Although then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney acknowledged the wrongs in 1990, no apology was made until 2021 when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized in the House of Commons for the unjust internment of Italo-Canadians during World War II.

Few, if any of the former internees lived to hear the apology. Fortunately, many of their children and grandchildren heard the apology.

Vancouver City Council, therefore, extends a heartfelt apology to all members of our Italian community for the past harms as outlined above. We do so in the belief that an injustice inflicted upon one citizen is an injustice inflicted upon all.

A brief History of Vancouver's Italians Classified as Enemy Aliens During World War II

Introduction

During the period between 1935 and 1940, it is estimated that Vancouver's Italian born residents numbered four thousand, five hundred.

The majority of these citizens arrived during the early years of the twentieth century and following the end of World War I. Italy, an ally of Canada and other Western Alliance countries during the First World War, declared war against the Austria-Hungarian Empire in 1915 and Germany in 1916.

Italy invaded and annexed Ethiopia (Abyssinia) in 1935/36 much to the consternation of Great Britain and France. This unpopular event precipitated the demise of the League of Nations.

IN 1937, Mussolini joined Hitler in sending veteran 'volunteer' troops and modern weaponry in support of Generalissimo Francesco Franco's fascist legion's successful takeover of the Spanish Government in 1937.

Imperial Japan invaded China July 7, 1937.

Germany invaded Poland Sept 1, 1939.

Great Britain declared war on Germany, September 3, 1939

In May 1940, Italy and Germany formally became allies by signing the infamous Pact of Steel Agreement.

The Axis powers, Germany, Italy and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact on September 27, 1940.

At this point Canada, already at war with Germany, embarked on preparing dossiers on Italians living in Canada who arrived during Benito Mussolini's tenure in office i.e., commencing in October 1922. In particular, these men included members of Fascist Clubs which were legally registered in a few Canadian cities including Vancouver. The local Fascist organization was known as the Giulio Giordano Club.

Italy declared war on Britain and France, June 10, 1940.

Canada declared war on Italy June 10, 1940.

Vancouver Italians pledge their loyalty to Canada

Under the auspices of the Canadian War Vigilance Association of Vancouver, approximately 300 Italian men under the leadership of lawyer Angelo Branca attended a rally at the Hastings Auditorium coincidentally also on Monday, June 10, 1940. During the proceedings all members, in a single voice, pledged allegiance to King and Country.

Immediately following the declaration of war against Italy, the Canadian Government instructed the RCMP to round up all known members of The Fascist Party in Canada (Partito Nazionale Fascista) including members of the BC group i.e., Giulio Giordani. The membership of the local Fascist club likely comprised 50 to 60 men in 1940. Those classified as Enemy Aliens underwent an initial interrogation by Vancouver police detectives and/or RCMP personnel prior

to being summarily interned. Twenty-nine of the 33 Vancouver men listed on the RCMP's list were arrested on June 10th under the provisions of the Defense of Canada Regulations with others being taken into custody during the following weeks. They had been apprehended either at their residences or place of work. Many were taken without the direct knowledge of their spouses.

Suspected Fascists and Enemy Aliens living in Vancouver apprehended and taken into custody.

Initially, those 'arrested' and taken into custody were incarcerated in cells situated on the second floor of the Canada Immigration Building located near the Marine Building at the foot of Burrard Street. Many families of the internees were not notified as to the disposition of their loved ones or given definitive reasons as to why or where they had been taken from them. In this regard, no communication between those interned and their families existed for approximately two weeks.

Once camp accommodation had been arranged for the 'Enemy Aliens', they were transferred to Kananaskis, Alberta by rail in two waves during the summer of 1940. While in transit, they were secured by leg chains attached to pullman seats.

Not a single internee was charged with a crime against Canada initially nor at any time during the incarceration period of BC's Enemy Aliens which averaged fifteen and a half months in duration.

POWs were never extended the right to engage or consult with private counsel. Moreover, the families of the internees were not permitted to visit or contact them by telephone. However, each POW was entitled to send/or receive one or two letters per month.

Moreover, the RCMP with the cooperation of the City of Vancouver Police Department instructed between 1,300 and 1,800 Italians to register with the RCMP. They were required to report on a monthly basis to RCMP Headquarters at 33rd Avenue and Heather Street, some for the duration of the war with Italy. Those required to register were Italians who arrived in Canada from Italy after October 1922. During their brief monthly reporting sessions, they were required to confirm place of work, home address and activities, etc.

During the author's research on the conditions maintained at the Kananaskis POW Camp, no acts of discrimination, cruelty or retribution were found to have taken place. There was one incident, reported by an inmate regarding an unconfirmed physical confrontation between himself and a staff member at the POW camp. Moreover, no Italian internee is reported to have attempted to escape from Kananaskis.

Acknowledgement of Injustice

In the years following World War II, interned Italo- Canadians and their families tried to put this episode behind them. Their feelings of shame for being arrested and interned outweighed their sense of justice for the wrong inflicted upon them. Despite the humiliation and injustice, Italo- Canadians picked up the pieces and carried on with their lives, working tirelessly to show their fellow Canadians they were good citizens contributing to their community. They lived in silence burdened with the stigma of arrest and detention.

The postwar wave of immigration brought hundreds of thousands of Italians to Canada to the point where Italian became Canada's third most widely spoken language until the 1990's. The newly arrived Italians included many veterans of the Italian armed forces who had fought against the Allies. They too, were imbued with the motivation to carve out better futures for their

families working hard and ensuring their children were educated to take their place in Canadian society as doctors, teachers, lawyers, accountants and other honourable well-paying vocations. Consequently, the issue of wartime Italian internment in Canada was unknown to them and for those who heard of it, it was spoken of quietly with a sense of resignation. Italian veterans tended not to talk about the war. Thus, the issue was concealed, or at best obscurely spoken of.

In 1988, after many years of lobbying and campaigning Japanese Canadians succeeded in obtaining an overdue apology and compensation from the Canadian government for their community's wrongful internment and dispossession under the *War Measures Act* in 1942 following Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbour and entry into World War II.

Inspired by the Japanese Canadians' courageous and principled pursuit of redress for the injustice inflicted upon them, Italo- Canadians began to seek an acknowledgement of the similar injustice visited upon the Italo-Canadian internees, their families and the community.

In 1990, the National Congress of Italian Canadian ("NCIC") and Canadian Italian Business & Professional Inc. ("CIBPA") initiated a campaign to have unjust internment acknowledged by the Canadian government with an apology and educational recognition of the wrong.

Public meetings were held across Canada to hear from the internees and their families about the shame, indignity and pain suffered by them because of the wrongful internment. A good number of the internees were still alive then and were able to recount their experiences firsthand. Their testimonials were augmented by their children who had grown with the stigma of interned parents. The Vancouver public meeting held April 7th, 1991, was organized by Celso Boscariol, QC, at the Italian Cultural Centre. The testimonials were moving and heart wrenching. Some of the internees broke down in tears recalling the indignity of arrest and humiliation of detention without cause. Almost all the internees have since died and their children are now senior citizens, also aging rapidly. Soon that generation too, will not be with us.

Although then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney acknowledged the wrongs in 1990, no apology was made until 2021 when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized in the House of Commons for the unjust internment of Italo-Canadians during World War II. Few, if any of the internees lived to hear the apology. Many of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were fortunate to hear the apology.

As the historian and author, Raymond Culos documented in his book, *INJUSTICE SERVED*, Italo-Canadians from British Columbia were interned. These were hard-working law-abiding people who came to Canada to establish futures for their children in what was considered a free and democratic country. Today none of them remain. Their descendants are among us. They deserve an apology and recognition of the injustice. The entire community deserves the same as injustice inflicted upon one citizen is an injustice inflicted upon all.

With June designated as Italian Heritage Month across Canada and in Vancouver, it would be most fitting if the City of Vancouver acknowledged this wrong as the contributions of the Italo-Canadian community are celebrated in Vancouver.

Recognition and acknowledgment of past wrongs is essential to reconciliation of the past with the present to assure we strive for a better future for our children and theirs, newcomers to Canada and to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Culos

rayculos@shaw.ca

Celso Boscariol, QC

cboscariol@watsongoepel.com

**The following are excerpts from Raymond Culos' publications;
1) Vancouver's Society of Italians, Harbour Publishing 1998 and
2) INJUSTICE SERVED, Cusmano Books, 2012**

Of the 44 BC residents arrested and detained by the RCMP in the summer of 1940, 33 were Italians living in Vancouver. All were alleged to be members of the Circolo Giulio Giordano, a fascist leaning organization. Included among them were a number of Italian war veterans, nationals and immigrants who arrived in Canada during Mussolini's pre-war tenure in office 1922 -1940. Moreover, during Canada's war with Italy an estimated 1,300 to 1,800 Italians residing in Vancouver were required to register with the RCMP.

Interestingly, an anomaly existed in the case of Bruno and Attilio Girardi. Although born in Canada, the brothers who had lived in Italy for several years during their youth, were known to the RCMP as important members of the *Fascio*. As a result, they were accosted, arrested, denied counsel, and rendered prisoners of war.

Another set of brothers suspected of being *Fascio* members were the Marinos. Giacinto (George) Marino worked at the Vancouver Harbour's Board. In early July, as he stepped out of his house at 6:30 to start his morning trek to work, he was arrested by the RCMP and whisked away with dispatch. His brother Olivio (Oliver), a foundry worker, had been picked up a few weeks earlier. They were the sons of Cav. Carmine Marino, a fascist sympathizer, and as a result may well have been considered prominent fascists by the police. This rationale appears to have led to a police team decision to conduct a search at the family's East Vancouver home.

In the early light of day, Mrs. Antonietta Marino, Oliver's wife, stood before the laundry room window separating clothes for the Monday wash. As she momentarily glanced away from her activities, she noticed through the window that three strangers were briskly making their way up to the front entrance of her house. Mrs. Marino scampered down the stairs and promptly opened the door concerned by the unknown. She immediately drew back as one of the men, pressing forward, entered the house demanding to know where her husband's desk was located.

"Just like this. 'What desk?' I say. 'I don't have no desk,'" recalled the startled Mrs. Marino.

Over her protests, another of the still unidentified intruders rummaged through her purse while his two officers searched the house; first the upstairs, then the main floor and finally the basement. Finding no incriminating evidence, they prepared to leave. At the door, one of the policemen stopped and said to Mrs. Marino, "Your husband is a fascist. You won't be seeing him again for a very long time." His words proved prophetic as it was 22 months before she would see her husband again.

Vincenzo Ricci also was arrested on that fateful Monday. His nephew and namesake Jimmy Ricci, a 12-year-old youngster at the time, has vivid memories of learning of the news. "I was on my way into the house when I realized that my mother was crying as she came down the stairs."

"They've taken uncle Vincenzo away," she sobbed. The RCMP arrested my uncle at his home at 531 Victoria Drive. But before being taken away by the police, he left a key to his shoe repair shop for Benny Thomas, who worked for him.

“My uncle was taken away because he was an alien. That’s what they said. He could become a problem because he belonged to the Italian society. They didn’t come out and say, ‘fascist’ but they said the Italian society.”

“My uncle was a shoemaker and was happy to be Italian. The only thing he seemed to be guilty of was that he was an Italian army veteran of World War I and he came to Canada around 1926. Patsy Valente, who was my uncle’s close friend and another veteran, also was sent away. Santo Pasqualini lost his bakery; Leonardo D’Alfonzo was all broken up. He had no family here except for his brother. He was just an innocent little guy.”

RCMP officers arrived at Santo Pasqualini’s home, 834 East Georgia Street, at 2 p.m., exactly five hours after Italy’s declaration of war was announced. Upon entering the property, they spoke to a young 12-year-old boy sitting on the porch steps. “Where is Mr. Pasqualini?” they asked. The youngster, son of renters living at the Pasqualini residence, took the officers into the house and into the bedroom where Pasqualini lay asleep. He had been there since returning from his night-shift job at the bakery he owned, located within walking distance of his home.

That day, as was her regular routine, Alice Pasqualini had gone down to the Paris Bakery after her husband’s shift to handle retail sales until closing time. When Santo failed to pick her up, she became anxious and hurried home on her own. When she got there, she was greeted at the door by Louisa, her boarder, who informed her that Santo had been arrested and taken away. With no relatives in Canada other than her own family, and with limited English, Alice became distraught. In desperation, she literally ran the two-block distance to the home of Marino and Phyllis Culos. The Culos’ soon realized that Alice was confused, emotional and desperate. They consoled and counselled her while assuring her that they would do what they could to help.

Fortunately, Pasqualini had been allowed to send a form-letter postcard to his wife. It was dated June 12th, and simply stated that he would write to her soon. Actually, he and his associates had been incarcerated in cells situated on the upper floor of the Canadian Immigration Building located behind the Marine Building. Once Culos understood this, he systematically began the process of petitioning Canadian authorities in an effort to gain information about Santo’s status.

At first opportunity, Alice and her two children set out for the Canadian Immigration Building. Alice and six-year-old Lina walked the four kilometers while three-year-old Lino rode his tricycle alongside. En route they were joined by four or five Italian women also headed toward the same destination.

Standing on the platform across from the Immigration Building, Alice caught a glimpse of her husband. Santo waved to his wife and children from behind a second-floor window. Emotion overwhelmed young Lina. Waving and calling to her father she darted to the building’s entrance in an attempt to reach him. But she was prevented from doing so by a rifle-toting security guard. The tears which streamed down this innocent child’s face were symptomatic of a tragedy which would forever haunt her dreams.

The brief glimpse of her father waving from behind the bars of the window was the last she would see of him for 25 months. Santo and the other men rounded up in the initial wave of arrests remained incarcerated in their cells for weeks. Overcrowded conditions required that some of the men, including Santo, take turns sleeping on the floor. Once expansion of facilities at the Kananaskis Internment Camp were completed those in custody were transferred.

In the meantime, Alice became increasingly agitated. Her inexperience in business contributed to the bankruptcy of the Paris Bakery. It also signaled the end of the family's only source of income. Desperate and disillusioned, she suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized.

The Zanon family who virtually lived around the corner from Alice rushed to her aid. Others did so as well, including the Luigi Moretto and John Scodeller families of Woodfibre, BC. Deprived of both parents, Lina and Lino were taken in by friends who cared for them during the interim.

Culos worked assiduously in an attempt to convince authorities that Santo's place was with his wife and children. His appeal to the Minister of Justice requesting Santo's release failed to impress. In conjunction with this endeavour, he collaborated with Angelo Branca, Dr. Paul Ragona and Rev. Fr. Gioacchino Bortignon in protesting Alice's hospital care as the poor woman had been strapped to a bed in the hospital's psychiatric ward. In addition, Culos continued his efforts to negotiate with a number of creditors vying for the remaining business assets of the once thriving Paris Bakery.

One of 23 letters written by Culos relative to Pasqualini's internment status and business problems is dated June 8, 1942. It is addressed to the Deputy Minister of Justice in Ottawa and reads as follows:

"Re Santo Pasqualini (40-257). Once again, I wish to ask of you a favour. This time my reason is to avert probable serious consequences in the home of Mr. Pasqualini.

"On Tuesday, April 28, the Advisory Committee heard testimonies in favour of Mr. Pasqualini. To this date, Mrs. Pasqualini has not heard anything from the Committee.

"Mr. Pasqualini is a baker by trade and made his living by operating a bakery in Vancouver. When the authorities placed him under custody and later when interned, Mrs. Pasqualini did her best to carry on the business. It soon got the best of her and her health broke down. The business was closed. She has been under the doctor's care almost continually since then. A few days ago, she suffered a relapse. The worry and nervous strain caused by the detention of her husband and the fact that she knows that the majority of internees have been released has created a most difficult mental depression as well as physical suffering. The enclosed Doctor's certificate will bear witness to her condition.

"She is taking care of two small children. What has to be done with them if she should be taken to the hospital is a very serious problem. How long she will take to snap out of it and get well is something difficult to determine. No relatives live here."

Culos continued by expressing the view that if Santo could be home to assist with the care of his wife and children, Mrs. Pasqualini's health would surely improve. He concluded with: "Sir, I do not know exactly what Mr. Pasqualini has done, however, this much I can assure you of – he is an honest, hard worker who loves his wife and children. What more can I honestly say!"

"I beg of you to recommend the speedy consideration of his case to the Advisory Committee which heard the testimonies from seven persons in Vancouver and to forward a letter so that it may help to further show that his release will be a Godsend and that it may save Mrs. Pasqualini from a most complicated and grievous situation."

Thousands of immigrants who had arrived in Canada from Italy during Mussolini's years in office, especially those who remained Italian nationals, were required to report monthly to the RCMP. In Vancouver as many as 1,300 enemy aliens did so by trekking up to Division E Headquarters at 33rd Avenue and Heather Street, a short distance from the city's picturesque Little Mountain district. Later the location of the monthly sign-in was transferred to an office at the main post office building in downtown Vancouver.

Lilly Albo. "My parents Mary and Gregory Castricano reported monthly to the RCMP just because my mother belonged to the Italian Women's Lodge. When war was declared by Mussolini the people in our community were scared because the RCMP were rounding up Italians. They were scared and asking, 'What did we do?' Only thing that they might have done was to have given gold rings for the Ethiopian campaign."

Cyril Battistoni. "My wife Josie Paolella – who was born in Agassiz, BC – had to register with the RCMP. I came from Italy in 1910 when I was four. I went up to the RCMP detachment a couple of times but after that I didn't bother to go back."

Gina Benetti. "My mother also had to register. I remember going up Oak Street and walking up Oak to the RCMP. To this day, I can remember. And there we were four of us little kids. Four! I don't know how we did it. My mother dragged us with her. Can you imagine? In 1941 I must have been 11. But it was really something. It was a very traumatic experience. She was a lady with four kids having to drag them along with her to report to the RCMP. And we had all been born here. I really think that that was a travesty for which the government should apologize."

Laura Bianchin. "My parents had to report. In fact, the family name Micieli was changed to Mitchell because of the war. And to think my brother was in the RCAF."

Nellie Cavell. "We went up to 33rd and Heather to the RCMP building. All you had to do was to march in, sign the book, and march out. No one said anything to you, no one asked any questions. And I was a Canadian citizen, a British subject. I remember having to sneak out of work at lunch time, going up because you had to do it once a month. If you didn't, you would be in trouble. You just sneaked out because you wouldn't want to have to tell your friends about it. And I always remember doing that by taking a number 16 street car and then taking the Oak Street car after which I would walk up the hill to the RCMP building, across from St. Vincent's Hospital."

Gabriele Iacobucci. "I arrived in Canada in 1923 and became a citizen in 1930. When Mussolini declared war on the Allies, I had been working at the Vancouver Airport for 16 years. That very day the foreman came over to me and said, 'Iacobucci, that's it!' And I was fired because Canada was at war with Italy. My wife and I reported to the RCMP. I only went three times but she continued to go for some time reporting to the office at the downtown Post Office."

Margherita McPherson. "My parents and my siblings lived in Powell River. When mother became ill dad took her to Italy for medical treatment. That was in 1920. While in Italy I was born – April 1920. We returned to Canada when I was four months old. As a result of having been born in Italy, I had to report to the RCMP as did my father Paul Girone who became a naturalized citizen in 1928.

"We had to be careful. I had to carry a paper [Registration Certificate] and couldn't leave Vancouver without their permission (RCMP). If I wanted to go to Victoria, I had to tell them I

was going. And when I got to Victoria, I had to phone the HQ there and declare myself. And every day I had to report while I was gone, which was terrible. And I had to go every month to the RCMP at 33rd and Heather. We would have to be there at a specific time. In other words, you could go any evening you wanted but you had to be there between certain hours. We used to go with the streetcar across the Oak Street bridge. I was late a couple of times because my husband Jack's uncle was living with us and he was working over at the shipyards. So, I had a war-worker in the house and couldn't always get away when I needed to. I can remember that if you didn't report and it came up that you hadn't been there for your stamp – I believe that they stamped every time I went – they would pick you up. One night I got there late. They had just closed the office for five minutes. And I said look, 'I can't come back, I've got a war-worker in the house and I have to go home.' They said, 'You will come back or else we will pick you up.' I said, "So pick me up." And I walked out. And Mr. Fraser – I've forgotten his title – was the one who phoned me and said, "We will let you get away with it this time but don't do it again. I'm doing this this one time because of your father." So, I know I was certainly being called on the carpet for it. And I made a remark to one of the fellows one day. I said "I probably have been in Canada longer than you." And this was directed to the RCMP fellow with all of us there. And he made some caustic remark, you know, "WOP, WOP, whatever" to which I took offense. I said, "For gosh sakes; you would think I was going to blow up the darn water works." I was told afterwards that I should never have made a remark like that. If somebody chose to do just that, and I had been heard making that remark, I could have been held responsible."

Emma Lussin Maffei. "My father and mother had to report, which I think was wrong as they were Canadian citizens. And I never heard them talk about fascists or any of that stuff."

Mary Pettovello. "I was born in Vancouver in 1912 and married my husband Louie in 1938. Although he was in the process of getting his citizenship, his application was put on hold when the war with Italy broke out. As he was an Italian national, I assumed his nationality. Such were the rules in those days. So, I had to report monthly to the RCMP, be fingerprinted and classified as an enemy alien. How ridiculous was that!"

Enemy Aliens Removed from BC's Coast

At the time when Italians voluntarily surrendered their firearms to the police, others were ordered to leave the Protected [Pacific] Coast Area. Unfortunately, there are no figures available regarding the number forced to relocate beyond the 100-mile restricted area. It is presumed, however, that they had been exempted from confinement because of extenuating circumstances. Fortunately, the documented experiences of the Carotenuto, Negrin and Sanvido families serve as examples of this forced exodus.

Gina Benetti. "I can recall that during the desperate thirties my father Emilio Sanvido left Vancouver to work in the mines at Anyox a year at a time." One of 12 children, Sanvido was born in 1900 and served in the Italian Army during World War I. He was instructed to leave Vancouver in 1940. Experienced as a heavy construction worker, he first went to Calgary looking for a job. Unable to find suitable employment, Sanvido went to Michel, BC, obtaining accommodation near Bert and Elisa Negrin's temporary quarters.

"My father never belonged to any Italian society but was an Ex-Combattente. While he was away, the family's financial situation deteriorated. That's when my mother asked me to quit school. Although I was only 16 and respected my parents, I protested. I had always dreamed of finishing school and becoming a teacher which eventually I succeeded in doing. A compromise was set when I continued to work at two part time jobs. I would go with her to the

RCMP to report. In fact, it was my mom, my three siblings and me. To this day when I go to church which is located at 33rd and Cambie just east of where the RCMP HQ had been located during the war, I am reminded of that embarrassing experience.”

Mother, a non-Canadian who arrived during Mussolini’s tenure in government, was obliged to register with the RCMP and to sign in every month. We five children would accompany her via two streetcars. At first, we travelled along Hastings Street and then transferred onto an Oak Street car. Once we alighted, we then would trudge the rest of the way, up a hill with one of us pushing a stroller to the RCMP detachment at 33rd and Heather. After a few months of this, the authorities came to the realization that this non-citizen hardly was a threat to Canada. So, she was excused from further reporting.

In the meantime, my father, unsuccessful in finding work in Calgary, was in no position to forward money to his family. As a result, my mother was forced to apply for “Relief,” a form of government support. Soon after, father became aware of Italian friends living in the Kootenays who had left Vancouver for the same reason he had. Through their kindness, he was welcomed into their home and helped to find a job at a mine. This heartening act proved to be a godsend. He stayed and worked in Michel near the Negrin family until he was allowed to return to Vancouver in 1943. All of this happened to a man who had never belonged to any ethnic or political association.

Elisa Negrin. “Government regulations required that my husband not remain on the coast while Canada was at war with Italy. It had something to do with his citizenship status. Therefore, Bert and I, with our infant son Nino, moved to Michel-Natal in the Kootenays. Gina Benetti’s father, Emilio Sanvido, left his family in Vancouver for the same reason. He was looking for work in Calgary but when he heard that I was going to Michel-Natal, he decided to do the same. When we were settled, he and others would come over to our place regularly to visit or to have meals with us.”

Nino Negrin. “In June 1940, we were living in Port Alberni where my dad was employed by Alberni Pacific Lumber Company Limited. Late one-night provincial police knocked on our door. They came to inform my father whom they referred to as a parolee, that he had 24 hours to pack up and leave the Protected Coast Area. Friends recommended that dad go to the twin mining towns of Michel-Natal because coal was essential to the war effort and jobs were available there. And so that we would all be together, mom readily chose that we go with him.”

Pete Carotenuto. “During the war a number of Italians were not permitted to live within 300 miles of British Columbia’s Pacific Coast. Although dad was a Canadian citizen, he had to leave Vancouver because Canada was at war with Italy. I had been shining shoes for 10 cents a shine at the BCER Interurban Tram Station, Carrall and Hastings. I wasn’t getting much, just 50 cents a day and tips, so I decided to leave with my father.”

After an unsuccessful attempt at finding work in Toronto, the father-son team decided to try their luck in Calgary. “Dad got a job shining shoes at a barber shop owned by an Italian named Pace and I was hired on at a foundry picking up scrap and taking it to the industrial waste furnace facility.”

Later Pete found a better paying job which allowed the pair to send money home in support of Mrs. Carotenuto and the two younger children. After working in Calgary for nine months or so and with Italy nearing defeat, a thankful Carmen and Pete returned to Vancouver and a very happy family reunion.

Pete's brother Fred was a preschooler when the RCMP served notice that his father would have to leave Vancouver because in their view he posed a security risk. "I was around four years old when the RCMP came to our house. They came in reeking of cigarette smoke. As my dad and brother left, each with a suitcase, I hid my face behind my mother's skirts," Fred recalled rather emotionally.

Lori Hedin. "My parents Antonio and Giudita Brandolini arrived in Canada in 1911 and 1912 respectively but didn't apply for British Subject citizenship until 1920." For reasons that are not clear, they were compelled to report monthly to the RCMP. The stress from this questionable and embarrassing situation adversely affected Mrs. Brandolini's nervous condition. Finally, after months and months of dutifully reporting to the RCMP she asked her doctor to intervene. After a complete examination, her doctor issued a medical certificate which served to exempt her from having to continue to report to the police.

Angelo Branca. As the Italian community's prime advocate, Branca provided legal advice to many of the families whose breadwinners had been interned. He also represented a number of Canadian Italians who were required to report monthly to the RCMP. Although Branca had clearly pledged allegiance to King and country, the RCMP maintained a dossier on the young accomplished barrister.

Peter Ruocco and family suffered many indignities associated with the internment question and the contradictions of war. Shortly after Peter Ruocco had been detained at the Immigration Building, his son **Silvio** attempted to join the Canadian Forces.

A recruitment officer allegedly refused Silvio's application to join the military on the basis of his racial origin. This happened in spite of the fact that two of Silvio's uncles had served in the Canadian army during World War I. One of these family members was his dad's brother Jimmy Scatigno Ruocco, who served in the Canadian Medical Corps. The other was his mother's brother, Fio Teti, who made the ultimate sacrifice at Vimy Ridge.

MP James Sinclair was aghast at the way Silvio had been treated. He wrote a letter of reference for Silvio and introduced details of this unacceptable and discriminatory recruitment practice in Parliament. As a result of this intervention, Silvio was given his opportunity to fight for his country, which he did with distinction.

Silvio's older brother **Victor** joined the RCAF six months later. After taking part in repeated bombing raids over Germany, Victor was given leave to return to BC where he remained on active duty with the Pacific Squadron at Pat Bay, Vancouver Island. At one point in 1944, he volunteered to fly US military personnel to Washington State. During the flight the wings of his aircraft iced up at 10,000 feet. Losing control of his aircraft he crash-landed on Whidbey Island, WA. There were no survivors.

Mario Ghislieri's three-year incarceration was the longest of the Vancouver internees. Once released from Fredericton, New Brunswick, he went to Toronto where he and his friend and fellow internee Tony Granieri set up a construction company. After five years Ghislieri returned to Vancouver but spurned opportunities to take an active role in the affairs of the Vancouver Italian Canadian Society. Blessed with a wonderful and appreciative family, he led a rather low public profile existence for the rest of his life.

Herman Ghislieri was reinstated at the Hotel Vancouver in mid-1943 and began a brilliant career culminating as catering manager. He attributed his success largely to his family background and an indomitable spirit. A linguist, Ghislieri was conversant in English, French and Italian. He also possessed a smattering of Spanish and German – all of which helped him to surface as a true professional in his field. Unfortunately, health problems eventually forced him to take on less onerous activities. Yet, it was difficult for him to subdue his entrepreneurial nature which ultimately led him to acquire the Ferguson Point Tea House located in Stanley Park. This he accomplished in partnership with Emilio Barazzuol. Later he completed stints as general manager of North Vancouver's Coach House Motor Inn and manager of the Quilchena Golf and Country Club in Richmond, BC. Ghislieri officially ended his working career as a food service instructor at Vancouver Vocational Institute.

Frank Federici's good name remained untarnished. Although interned in June 1940, he was released a month or so later by the Canadian government, which acted judiciously and with compassion. An investigation by the RCMP had determined that the 61-year-old Federici had not been a member of the *Fascio* since 1932 as previously thought. He therefore immediately resumed his position as manager-franchisee of the Hotel Vancouver Barber Shop. Moreover, his expertise in acquiring stocks and bonds resulted in his becoming very comfortable financially. He remained alert and articulate beyond his 100th birthday which he celebrated in 1979.

Peter Ruocco had also been arrested on June 10th and he, too, was released the following month. In his case, an internal memo from the RCMP – marked secret – was sent to the Minister of Justice on July 25, 1940. It read in part: "This man, who attained citizenship in Canada prior to 1929, was recommended for internment and was interned as a result of information and evidence mistakenly attributed to him... it is recommended that this man be released unconditionally from internment forthwith.

W.G. (Willy) Ruocco, the longest serving president of the Sons of Italy Society, 1927-1939, never quite forgave the society's executive for suspending his membership during the duration of his incarceration. Although he consented to rejoin the club, he never again took an active role in its affairs. He finished his years in business as manager of a local hotel and pub.

Gregorio Fuoco, the former secretary of the Circolo Giulio Giordano, had been interrogated repeatedly by the RCMP. On his return from the camps, he continued to practice his shoemaker's trade as did his brother Jimmy, who settled in the Okanagan. Gregorio again became active in the Sons of Italy Society, serving as president in 1963. Mrs. Fuoco was unable to leave Italy during the war. She arrived in Canada after a long separation from her husband. Eventually, the Fuocos returned to Italy following retirement.

Alberto Boccini, the passionate editor of *L'Eco Italo-Canadese* in 1938 became ill while in captivity. He died soon after war's end. His widow Elfie Iussa, a wonderfully talented pianist and teacher, made a new life for herself and her two sons in Montreal.

Vincenzo Ricci, convinced that informants had caused him to be arrested in 1940, vowed never again to take up residency in Vancouver. Instead, he moved to Montreal where he established a successful shoe repair business.

Piero Orsatti opened a studio on Granville Street and once again attracted bright and talented singers as students and protégés. He continued to entertain audiences with his masterly voice well into his seventies.

In 1992 representatives of the National Congress of Italian Canadians (NCIC) held a series of meetings and interviews across the country with former internees, family members and community leaders. **Celso Boscariol** chaired the video recorded proceedings which were held at the Italian Cultural Centre in Vancouver. A wide range of topics were discussed including the possibility of redress, compensation and an official apology from the Government of Canada.

Among those in attendance was **Eugenio Pavan**, an aging former internee, who became very emotional as certain aspects of the internment story unfolded. Such was his anxiety level that he was encouraged to withdraw from participating in the dialogue. **Alice Pasqualini D'Appolonia** supported by her daughter Lina, recounted the family's financial losses. She also placed emphasis on her life-threatening health issues stating that she endured incredible stress following the internment of her husband Santo. Moreover, she articulated succinctly the trauma and mental anguish experienced by her children during the crisis. Clarifying her husband's status as a member of the Circolo Giulio Giordano, she stated that he had been encouraged to join the club on a *pro quo* arrangement. Apparently, Santo had been approached by a member of the club who said, "We are happy to support you by purchasing your bakery products for our meetings and banquets. In return you should - as an *ex-Combattente* – support us by becoming a member of the club." The recruiter added a compelling enticement: "Join the *Fascio* and you and your family will become eligible for free passage to Rome during the Anno Santo in 1940." Due to the advent of war, of course, this religious pilgrimage never materialized.

At one point, **Bruno Girardi** took to the microphone. He chided the panel members by suggesting that the proceedings were taking place rather late in the life of former internees. "If you're looking for the government to offer compensation or an apology, they need just wait another ten years and the problem will take care of itself. By then there won't be any of us around." When asked his position regarding his political affiliations, he responded, "I was a fascist then, and I remain a fascist today."

Once the NCIC research was complete and a report prepared, the executive made contact with the PMO. The intent had always been to gain an official apology from the members of parliament and to have the MPs debate the appropriateness of redress and compensation. Instead, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney agreed to address the members of the NCIC and guests at the association's convention luncheon. His remarks delivered on November 4, 1990, included a direct reference to the "enemy aliens" issue. "What happened to many Italians is deeply offensive to the simple notion of respect for the human dignity and the presumption of innocence. The terrible injustice was inflicted arbitrarily, not only on individuals whose only crime was being of Italian origin. In fact, many of the arrests were based on membership in Italian Canadian organizations much like the ones represented here today. None of the 700 internees was ever charged with an offence and no judicial proceedings were launched. It was often, in the simplest terms, an act of prejudice organized and carried out under law, but prejudice nevertheless.

"In 1988 my government revoked the War Measures Act – so that never again will such injustices be inflicted on innocent and unsuspecting Canadians. By creating the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, we are also saying 'never again.' But to say 'never again' without explicitly and formally recognizing as well that a wrong has been done is not enough.

“Forty-five years of silence about the wrongs is a shameful part of our history. The silence was maintained by Government who thought the interests were either right or inconsequential. Well, we know that they were neither. They were legally wrong and morally offensive. They showed as well that, when things got tough, the Government of Canada was not above blaming the newcomers with unusual sounding names, not beyond scapegoating minorities still struggling in many cases to learn English or French. This is a critical issue and I want to be clear. That kind of behavior was not then nor is it now acceptable in a civilized nation that purports to respect the rule of law.

“On behalf of the government and the people of Canada, I offer a full and unqualified apology for the wrongs done to our fellow Canadians of Italian origin during World War II.”

Remo Caldato – *The government should apologize ...*

I believe, however, that the government should apologize for the harsh and brutal manner in which this was done. Heads of family were bodily seized and restrained in their homes and workplaces with no explanation and dragged away, often in front of their shocked families including impressionable small children (I was one of them). The government should recognize that, without warning, many dependents were left with no means of support at a time when there was little or no community safety net available to help them. My mother, an attractive 33-year-old woman, was one of those who was left on her own for 18 months. As a result, she was subjected to a good deal of social ostracism and the unwanted attentions of several men in the neighbourhood. I was 10 years old and I remember that I couldn't understand why my father was suddenly imprisoned at a time when I most needed him. I believe that my lifelong feelings of anxiety are directly attributable to this period of my childhood.

As mentioned, I have never seen a copy of the charter of the Circolo Giulio Giordano and I know nothing of the contents. I don't know whether my father ever signed the membership application form. Like many other Italians and non-Italians at the time my father was an admirer of Mussolini but was not by any means a violent or aggressive adherent of fascism. He was a mild-mannered sociable person who loved his family, opera, and jovial company. I never knew him to be violent or to espouse violence. He had a grade five education and was not a literate person. If he did in fact sign the application, I am convinced that he did so unthinkingly and was not aware of its sinister implications. He would never have carried out its belligerent commitments. In judging these Italo-Canadians it should be remembered that for many years in the 1920s and 1930s they were looked down upon as “wops” and “dagos” and exploited both socially and in the workplace. Before the Ethiopian imperialistic adventure, and the alliance with Hitler, Mussolini enjoyed a good deal of public admiration in Canada, England and the U.S.A. Many Italo-Canadians were proud of what they believed were Il Duce's achievements in reforming Italian society, and they readily supported the propaganda of the fascist government.

As it is commonly known, Italy was an ally of Canada during World War I. As a 19-year-old, my father was on active service on the Austrian front as a *Carabiniere* – the Italian militarized police. He served with distinction and was decorated for his services. After the war, he was asked to stay on and make a career in the service. He declined, however, as he had decided to join his brother in Canada.

Upon graduating from UBC, Remo Caldato eventually found his way into the Canadian diplomatic service. He has served as First Secretary, Counsellor and Consul, and acting Chargé d'Affaires at various foreign postings (London, Rome, Budapest, Buenos Aires, Milan, Warsaw). He is retired and lives near Rome.

Nellie Cavell – I was mortified at having to report to the RCMP

I was only two and a half years old in 1922 when I arrived in Vancouver with my mother from San Giovanni di Casarsa (PN), Italy.

Although there was no one more Canadian than I, the fact that I had been working for the Italian consul obviously was a factor in their decision to want to keep tabs on me. On the day I checked-in and was finger printed, I had gone to the RCMP headquarters with Marino Culos. I was mortified. I was embarrassed. I was livid to think that I was being classified as an enemy alien. I didn't tell anyone and did my best not to be noticed as I reported monthly to the detachment at 33rd and Heather. In fact, I arranged to go during my lunch hour so as to be less conspicuous. I would take the street car from the Catholic Charities office on 16th and travel up Cambie to a stop near 33rd Avenue. And I would walk the rest of the way doing my best not to be seen by anyone on the street.

Although I have since found success, solace and much happiness, I will never forget the hurt and humiliation of that time.

Alice D'Appolonia – I was lonely, sick and with no money

My husband Santo Pasqualini who died in 1961 sold bread and buns to the Circolo Giulio Giordano of the *Fascio*. And a member of that club – Bruno Girardi - said to Santo, "Since you're doing business with the club, you should become a member."

They told him Italy was going to have the *Anno Santo* in 1940. Santo could have a trip to Italy and it would be free. So, Mussolini had made the offer to everybody to go to Rome. I liked it because we could go to see Santo's mamma and mine, too. They never had a chance to see my children. So, he went and talked to the Giordano Club. When he came home, he said, "What do you think – should I go in?" "Well, if you did, we could take time to visit our families – each for a week." So, we decided yes let's do it.

Then Mussolini went to war. It was on the radio. *Mamma Mia*. Santo came home at two o'clock in the afternoon from our Paris Bakery. As he came in, I left to walk down to the shop to sell leftover breads until closing time between 5 and 6. Santo was asleep and our borders 12-year-old son was playing in the front when the police came. The detectives asked him if Mr. Pasqualini lived at this address. He said, "Yes." "Where is he now?" "Oh, he's sleeping." "So," they said, "take us there." The boy took the detectives into the house and into the bedroom. Santo woke up and they went into the kitchen where they put the handcuffs on him. The police said they were taking him away because he was a fascist.

The fascist club was registered in Ottawa. So, the Mounted Police had the names. When they came for Santo, they said, "Mr. Pasqualini you are a fascist." "So," he said right away, "I am not a fascist." They went into the drawers and found a medal from the *Fascista* – of Mussolini. When I came home, I couldn't find him.

After about a week, the police let Santo send a postcard. He told me the RCMP had arrested him. The next day I went to the Immigration Building with Lina and Lino and four or five women

who were going to see their husbands too. The place was behind the Marine Building where Santo had to sleep on the floor. That's why he got a sore back. The Ghislieris were there with Pavan, Facchin and Girardi.

When they put Santo in the camps, they asked him why he joined the Giordano Club. "You are a fascist." But he said he was not. What happened is hard to believe because he never was in jail and had a very clear name. He just worked for a living. Santo always said he never was a *Fascista* and had joined the club only for the business and not for the politics. I'm not mad at Canada because the government has to save the nation. It was the war that the fascists started. Mussolini made a terrible mistake to go with Hitler.

Santo became a cook at Kananaskis and Petawawa. He liked to make spaghetti the way the men got it at home. When he was taken away, I tried to look after the business but I couldn't do it. There were a lot of debts and bills to pay. People like Marino Culos tried to help me but I couldn't go on. We lost everything, including a new truck. And then I was so tired and I become nervous. I was given only \$26 a month by the government for relief. I paid six dollars a month for renting the house and had only 20 dollars for me and my children. I couldn't do it and I got really sick. My friends took my children to live with them. I had no relatives in Canada. I was lonely, sick and with no money.

They put me in the hospital and Dr. Paul Ragona sent a telegram to Ottawa asking them to send Santo home to help me or I would die. And Fr. Bortignon asked the people at Sacred Heart Church to pray because he thought I was going to die. And here I am now at 102. Santo die, John, my second husband die, and my Lina die.

I don't know how I am in life. I think it is just God. Life is a mystery. And I think it is nice to be good. But when I think about the government helping the Japanese, I wonder why they don't do something for us, too.

Trentino (Paul) Di Fonzo - *I went from enemy alien to Canadian soldier*

When I was 16, I received notice that I was to register with the RCMP along with my parents. We had been classified as enemy aliens. I can recall going alone by streetcar to the Little Mountain headquarters. Subsequently, I left Britannia High School in grade 12 to work in a camp at Oyster Bay near Campbell River, BC. However, I was instructed to contact the RCMP detachment in Campbell River where I would be required to report on a monthly basis. Remember, I was only 16 years of age and a naturalized British Subject through my dad!

While on Vancouver Island, I received my draft instructions to present myself to the Canadian Army recruitment centre. The notice was dated February 23rd, the day of my 19th birthday. Returning to Vancouver, I reported to the army barracks at Little Mountain for my orientation. I was given an opportunity to declare myself for active service overseas or to serve in the Home Guard. I chose the latter because I couldn't be guaranteed that I would not be sent to the Italian front. I was apprehensive about the possibility of having actually to fight Italians as I had cousins fighting for Italy.

Cousin Mike Marino served on the Russian Front. He spent two winters in Russia during which he experienced serious trauma during the retreat. His brother Joe served in Libya and was captured by the British.

Mike eventually spent several months as a POW in Great Britain. During his incarceration Fascist Italy capitulated and the new government joined the Allies.

Although technically a prisoner, he was permitted to mingle among the public provided he was in prison garb which included wearing a shirt on the back of which was a red patch. He represented no threat to the public.

On April 14, 1943, I was shipped to Vernon for basic training. Then in October 1944, I was transferred to Kamloops where elements of the Army, Navy and Air Force had ammunition magazines stored. I remained with the Canadian Army Engineers until my discharge in July 1946.

As a young man I devoured books on the world political situation prevalent in the 1930s. And yet, I can honestly say that I never realized what was happening closer to home. For example, I had no knowledge of the existence of the Circolo Giulio Giordano or the Canadian *Fascio*. Moreover, I wasn't aware that some Italians from Vancouver had been arrested and interned because the RCMP considered them possible threats to the State.

The only memento I have of that wartime experience is my Army Pay Book which contains all my information. In my latter years of service in the Army, I qualified to be a cook. At that time my regular private serviceman's pay was \$1.50 per day. However, being a cook, I earned an additional 25 cents a day, the total of which was quite considerable at the time. And I saved money out of that!

Upon being discharged, I enrolled in Government of Canada courses being offered to veterans. Whereas my father and brother already were in the barber business trade, I started to think about the other end of the business - that of serving the ladies. The hairdressing course I took had been funded through the government program and, after working for the hairstyling department at The Bay, I established my own business. I am pleased to say that Paul's Hair Styling Salon in Vancouver East truly became a successful and lucrative business over a period of 38 years. In 1949 Eva Mantine and I were married and together we were blessed with two daughters, Paula and Brenda.

Alita Emanuele Gibson - My teacher said I should have been sent to the concentration camp

While I was attending Britannia High School, I was subjected to a very unkind and humiliating experience. My social studies teacher, Mr. Montague Saunders, speaking with an English accent, said this to me, "You don't belong in this classroom – the day Italy entered the war – you should have been sent to a concentration camp." That's what he said to me at Britannia High School. And I was what – 16 years old. Although terribly embarrassed and humiliated, I stood up and said, "Well, I don't know about that Mr. Saunders as I have never been to Italy and I know nothing about Italians and the war. I am a Canadian." And do you know he immediately backed off. He knew he had done wrong. Later when I was working at Woodward's – I ran Woodward's record department for eight years – he came in periodically to see me and to ask how I was doing. He knew he had overstepped himself by allowing his emotions to get the better of him. To give him his due, however, he had been a British patriot. Nonetheless, he had a nerve to say that to me.

Attilio L. Girardi – My Canadian-born father was classified as an enemy alien

During the year and a half that my dad was in the camps, my mother and I lived with my maternal grandparents, Pietro and Luigia Cima. Without their love and attention, I don't know how we would have survived. At one point my mother was refused medical assistance from a doctor who was obviously prejudicial to the wife of an "enemy alien." My dad later said that he was treated very well as a prisoner of war and that his time in the camps was a holiday in comparison to what the wives and families of internees experienced.

Notwithstanding my father's political leanings, the Government of Canada should at least issue a letter of apology for the way my mother, a Canadian, was treated throughout this sad and regretful affair. However, I won't be holding my breath.

The irrefutable thing about my dad is that he was a proud Canadian who loved being Italian.

Tony Padula – *My mother was witness to the arrest of the Girardi Brothers*

It was early in the morning, perhaps between 8 and 9 o'clock. Attilio Girardi, a border at our home at 627 East Georgia Street, was asleep as he worked evenings as a waiter at the Hotel Vancouver. My mother was out back in the garden watering the tomato plants with Gerry our little Fox Terrier. Suddenly, the dog became agitated and began barking as he ran toward the front of the house. Mother somewhat anxiously followed him. Knocking on the front door were two burley men dressed in dark suits. "Yes, what do you want?" They identified themselves as RCMP officers. "We urgently need to speak with Attilio Girardi," one of them answered. Going through the basement and up the stairs she opened the door and cautiously let them in. She explained that Attilio was asleep in the bedroom at the top of the stairs. With her tentative approval they quickly climbed the stairs and rapped firmly on Attilio's bedroom door. I guess Attilio was 23 at the time. He must have been flabbergasted to see the Mounties staring back at him as they entered his room. After being ordered to get dressed he was summarily escorted out of the house and to a vehicle in which he was secured before being driven off.

Herman Ghislieri - *My father, brother and I were at Kananaskis at the same time*

We arrived in Vancouver in 1934 from Johnson Lake, Saskatchewan, where we had been ranchers and farmers. My father, Mario Ghislieri, had cultivated an impressive 3,000 acres in wheat at that location. Due to the Great Depression the enterprise collapsed.

I remember giving the eulogy at the Marconi memorial service at the Holy Rosary Cathedral in 1937. At Brancucci's behest Nino Sala and I wore black shirts to honor Senator Marconi who, of course, was part of the Italian fascist government.

Fred was the first to be released, then me and finally my dad who, by this time, was confined at Fredericton with other heads of Italian societies.

When I came back to Vancouver in 1942, I was ordered to report to the Little Mountain Recruitment Centre. "How confusing" I said. Although a Canadian citizen, I was earlier referred to as an enemy alien and now I am being inducted in the Canadian Army. We mustered at Peterborough for basic training during which time I severely reinjured my back. In due course, I was discharged and hospitalized. After surgery, I remained at the Kingston Hospital for three months. Shortly thereafter I was able to resume a normal life and my career at the Hotel Vancouver.