

**Entertaining Ethnicity: Identity, Place, and the Italian Festival
in Vancouver and Trail, British Columbia, 1945-2001**

by

Stephen A. Fielding
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Approval

Name: Stephen A. Fielding

Degree: Master of Arts

Title of Thesis: **Entertaining Ethnicity: Identity, Place, and the Italian Festival in Vancouver and Trail, British Columbia, 1945-2001**

Examining Committee:

Chair: **Dr. Luke Clossey**
Assistant Professor of History

Dr. Andrea Geiger
Senior Supervisor, Assistant Professor of History

Dr. Karen Ferguson
Supervisor, Associate Professor of History

Dr. Coll Thrush
External Examiner, Assistant Professor of History,
University of British Columbia

Date: 10 December 2007



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Abstract

This thesis examines the postwar history of Italians in Vancouver and Trail, British Columbia through the lens of festivals. It argues that ethnic identities have been constructed at the local level within what is often considered to be a single ethnic group—Italian Canadians—and that these identities were both cultivated and expressed at cultural events. Italian ethnicity in Vancouver and Trail was influenced by a set of variables: the time of arrival, size, regional diversity, and spatial concentration of the Italian population; the role of governments in funding material and cultural projects; rural and nostalgic forms of Italian culture versus those of high culture; Italian participation in the labour market; and relations with the local non-Italian population. These variables combined in locally distinct ways and at Italian festivals took the form of two different historical conversations about what it meant to be Italian in Vancouver and Trail.

Keywords: Italian Canadians; ethnic identity; festivals; Italianness

For Larissa

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I

Introduction

In the spring of 1998 the Royal British Columbia Museum, as part of the celebration to mark the arrival of a Leonardo da Vinci collection, launched an exhibit to honour the contributions made by Italians to the history of British Columbia. Titled *Festa Italiana*, the display travelled to five cities—Powell River, Kamloops, Fernie-Sparwood, Trail, and Vancouver—where volunteers from the Italian communities worked in tandem with museum officials. The Museum loaned photos and artefacts from its own archives, but the majority of pieces were contributed by local Italians. The pilot project in Trail evoked memories of an earlier period in the life of its Italian “community.” The symbols and photos of the exhibit spoke of a time marked by working-class means and Italian folklore. There were images of successful sport teams and labourers at the local zinc and lead smelter, video strips of 1950s-era folkloric dancing at the Colombo Lodge, kitchen tools used by the early “pioneers,” and demonstrations of folk handicrafts and traditional foods. The message was clear: the greatest contributions made by Italians to the City of Trail were hard work and the preservation of Old World customs. The Vancouver leg told a very different story. As in Trail, there were folkloric components such as handicrafts and dance, but greater emphasis was placed on what was considered Italian high culture, which was packaged under the theme of Italian artisanry. Space was dedicated to more “refined” subjects such as local Italian architecture, musical craftsmanship and successful entrepreneurs in the food and construction industries.¹ Although both groups shared the

¹ “Royal BC Museum’s ‘Festa Italiana’ Travelling Exhibit, 1998: List of Artifacts and Captions,” provided compliments of Dr. Lorne Hammond, curator, Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, BC.

same Italian ethnic background, the festivals articulated two different perceptions of what it meant to be Italian in postwar Canada.

Festa Italiana was one of many Italian celebrations that took place in the cities of Vancouver and Trail, British Columbia between the years 1945 and 2001. This thesis argues that festivals were moments when Italian ethnic identities were expressed and constructed at the local level. On a broader level, it argues that diverse perceptions of what it meant to be Italian on Canadian soil emerged within what is often considered a single ethnic group. Italian Canadians were not merely an ethnic fragment from Italy transplanted in Canada, but were *themselves* fragmented. The cities of Vancouver and Trail are well positioned for an examination of the local construction of Italian ethnic identity. First, they constituted the two largest Italian populations in British Columbia, respectively. Second, the cities represented two different historical trajectories of Italian ethnic identities. On one level, Vancouver is a cosmopolitan port city with a diversified economic sector and Trail is a small working-class “company town” whose fortunes rose and fell with its lead and zinc smelter. Beyond this, each Italian ethnic “community” developed through conversation with a local matrix of variables. These included the time of arrival, size, regional diversity, and spatial concentration of the Italian population; language; generational lines; the role of governments in funding material and cultural projects; Italian participation in the labour market; and relations with the local non-Italian population.

This thesis intersects with three growing bodies of scholarship: Italian Canadian historiography, ethnicity, and ritual. The historiography of Italian immigration and social life in Canada is marked by an uneven distribution of scholarly inquiry. There is

extensive coverage of the “First Wave” of Italian immigration (late 19th Century to 1914), but most analyses conclude with the period of Benito Mussolini, when Italian migration slowed to a trickle of its former rate.² Historians have until recently overlooked postwar Italian communities in Canada, despite the fact that more immigrants arrived during this period than in all those that preceded it.³ Between 1947 and 1977, during what is often called the “golden age” of Italian emigration, Canada received 415 177 arrivals.⁴ The vast majority of these settled in the three largest metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Roughly 5.5% of the total established themselves in the latter.⁵ Apart from a brief survey of Italians in Alberta and British Columbia by Patricia Wood, Laura Quilici’s insightful M.A. thesis on ‘Italian housewives with boarders between 1947 and 1961,’ Dominique Scardellato’s short article on an Italian club in Trail, and Ray Culos’ three seminal illustrated volumes on the Italians of Vancouver, little scholarly attention has been given to the Italian populations of British Columbia.⁶ In the wider field of

² Some notable examples include John E. Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity, 1875-1935* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988); chapter 6 of Kenneth Bagnell’s book *Canadese: A Portrait of the Italian Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1989); Bruno Ramirez, *The Italians of Montreal: from Sojourning to Settlement, 1900-1921* (Montreal: Editions du Courant, 1980); Robert F. Harney and J. Vincenza Scarpacci, eds., *Little Italies in North America* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981); Franc Sturino, *Forging the Chain: A Case Study of Italian Migration to North America, 1880-1930* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1990); and A.V. Spada, *The Italians in Canada* (Ottawa: Riviera Printers and Publishers Inc., 1969). The latter gives some attention to the early postwar period.

³ Franca Iacovetta was among the first to address the postwar period with a monograph on the intersections of class and gender in Toronto during the 1950s and early 1960s. Also worthy of mention is anthropologist Nicholas DeMaria Harney’s recent study of the cultural life of Italians in Toronto. See, respectively, Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto*, paperback edition (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993); Nicholas DeMaria Harney, *Eh Paesan! Being Italian in Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁴ 36 061 migrants returned to Italy during the same period. Table 1, “Postwar Emigration to Italy and Return Migration from Italy,” compiled in Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 204.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁶ Patricia K. Wood, *Nationalism From the Margins: Italians in Alberta and British Columbia* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Laura Quilici, “‘I Was a Strong Lady’: Italian Housewives with Boarders in Vancouver, 1947-61” (Master’s Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995); Gabriele P. Scardellato, “Beyond the Frozen Wastes: Italian Sojourners and Settlers in British Columbia,” in *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada*, eds. Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino

Italian Canadian studies the most overlooked aspect of Italian social life has been the festival.⁷ This thesis aims to fill these gaps. It is the first effort to navigate the space intersected by ethnocultural festivals, questions of identity and the role of public policy within a Canadian context. In this approach theme is privileged over chronological account. Rather than an exhaustive analysis of the local goings-on within two Italian “communities,” this thesis takes an ethnic category as its subject.⁸ It maps the construction of Italian ethnic identities over a sixty year period through a sequence of festivals or *snapshots*—moments when the boundaries of Italianness were cast and recast.

There now appears to be a consensus among scholars that ethnicity is an unstable entity, historically contingent and non-conducive to definitive markers.⁹ Benedict Anderson, Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm have each made significant contributions in this regard.¹⁰ Starting with the assumption that ethnicity is never a given but rather a historical process, some scholars now attach greater significance to how ethnic groups express themselves through ritual. Cultural events, particularly festivals—here understood as *festive* events coordinated by Italian individuals or committees—are

(Montreal: Guernica, 1989); Ray Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, 3 vols. (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1998-2006).

⁷ To the best of my knowledge, the only works that have directly addressed the field are Bruce Giugliano, “*Sacro o Profano?: A Consideration of Four Italian Canadian Religious Festivals* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976); and Jordan Stranger-Ross, “An Inviting Parish: Community without Locality in Postwar Italian Toronto,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (Sept., 2006): 381-407.

⁸ The central contention in Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 3. Harmon approaches the category “Indian” as a discourse between aboriginals and the dominant society. She argues that historically, the latter has played a greater hand in shaping what it meant to be an Indian, while the former has had to advance their causes within this imposed rubric.

⁹ The vast majority of scholars since the 1960s have abandoned the categories of race and ethnicity as concrete entities.

¹⁰ See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 1991). These authors demonstrate that ethnicity, and nationalism for that matter, are not concrete or cosmic, though they often appear as such. Instead, they are constructed to fit the present aspirations of the “group.”

beginning to figure into these discourses. There are, however, multiple perspectives on the relationship between festivals and ethnicity. Richard D. Alba, for example, claims that cultural events are all that remain of ethnic groups by the third generation in a modern capitalist society. He contends that Italian ethnicity faded away as the residents of former “little Italies” moved to ethnically mixed neighbourhoods and failed to pass on the mother tongue to latter generations.¹¹ What remains are a few surviving traditions based on food consumption and formal events, such as weddings and funerals, and most relevant to our discussion, festivals.¹² In this trajectory, an “Italian” only distinguishes herself from the mainstream consumer during moments of leisure. The festival is the last vestige of Italian ethnic identity on the path to assimilation. More recently, Cynthia Thoroski and Audrey Kobayashi concluded that ethnic “heightened events” are merely superficial, feel-good endeavours.¹³ The ethnic group expresses itself in garb that is apolitical, nostalgic and innocent—what Thoroski calls “mcmulticulturalism.”¹⁴

¹¹ Richard D. Alba bases his assessment of ethnic survival among Italian Americans on certain gauges of “assimilation” into the dominant group—namely, intermarriage with non-Italian partners, loss of fluency in Italian, and movement from traditional “Little Italy” spaces to less ethnically structured middle-class neighbourhoods. Richard D. Alba, “The Twilight of Ethnicity among Americans of European Ancestry: The Case of Italians,” in *The Review of Italian American Studies*, eds. Frank M. Sorrentino and Jerome Krase (New York: Lexington Books, 2000), 57-8. However, what appeared to be evidence of immigrant assimilation was often guided by “Italian” values. Dino Cinel shows that the movement of Italians in San Francisco to the middle-class did not result in a breakdown of the traditional family. In fact, fewer numbers of Italian children in that city left home after completing secondary school than those of other ethnic groups. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 162-227, passim.

¹² Rudolph J. Vecoli’s “dynamic” view of ethnicity is antithetical to that of Alba. Although he concedes that Italian Americans became “white” during the 1960s (largely in response to positioning themselves alongside whites in relation to “coloured” immigrants and the black civil right movement), he affirms they did not vanish or assimilate but maintained important markers of ethnic distinction. See Rudolph J. Vecoli, “Are Italian Americans Just White Folks?” in *The Review of Italian American Studies*, eds. Frank M. Sorrentino and Jerome Krase (Boulder, CO: Lexington Books, 2000), 78.

¹³ Cynthia Thoroski, “Adventures in Ethnicity: Consuming Cultural Identity at Winnipeg’s Folklorama,” *Canadian Folklore* 19, no. 2 (1997); Audrey Kobayashi, “Multiculturalism: Representing a Canadian Institution,” In *Place/Culture/Representation*, ed. James Duncan and David Ley (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁴ Thoroski, “Adventures in Ethnicity,” 111.

Expressions bear little relevance to the everyday because the ethnocultural festival is a virtual Disneyland: *here* is the happiest place on earth.

Italian ethnicity and ritual are approached differently in this thesis. First, for the populations of Trail and Vancouver, Italian identity was not a choice between two antipodes—either Italian in the sense of how life was before migration or fully Canadianized.¹⁵ Their experiences fell someplace in between the two. Theirs are histories characterized by both continuity and change, a tension within which they maintained certain customs and invented or adopted new ones through interaction with other Italians and non-Italians.¹⁶ Italian ethnicity in Vancouver and Trail was an unstable entity, created and re-created in accordance with present needs. Second, by relegating festival ritual to ephemeral culture, one overlooks its political weight. The Italian festival was not a surface-level addendum to Italian ethnic identity. To paraphrase April R. Schulz and Kathleen Conzen, it was an event where multiple generations of Italian Canadians expressed how they understood themselves as Italians and wished to be perceived by others.¹⁷ Participants of this study perceived festivals to be concrete statements about being Italian. One first-generation Italian man affirmed: “these celebrations give Italians

¹⁵ The debate over what it meant to be Canadian is a long-disputed topic among scholars. Ramsay Cooke is reported during the late 1960s to have pleaded with fellow historians to let the subject rest until the year 2000 at the earliest.

¹⁶ See introduction of John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985). However, Bodnar focuses on the myriad ways that immigrants responded to capitalism in their new land. This thesis is concerned with ethnic identity as a category of analysis.

¹⁷ These historians developed and applied this approach to nineteenth-century Norwegian and German Americans, respectively. See April R. Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American Through Celebration* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); and Kathleen Conzen, “Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth-Century German America on Parade,” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Also worthy of mention is H.V. Nelles’ brilliant work on the political struggles among Quebecois politicians, clergy and Anglo-Canadian lobbies that formed the backdrop of Quebec’s Tercentenary. H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

a home base, a feeling of identity... a sense of 'where I come from' and 'who I am.'"¹⁸ A woman born in Canada to northern Italian parents explained: "Festivals keep us together and our traditions and culture alive. If we stop doing this we're going to lose them."¹⁹

Third, ethnicity is viewed here as an event.²⁰ Festivals were moments when the local terms of Italianness were debated. The interaction between festival discourses and Italian social bonds is best understood by the use of anthropologist Victor Turner's term *communitas*, meaning social relationships in which the taxonomic orders of everyday life are temporarily suspended.²¹ The Italian festival was an "alternative economy of status."²² It provided a physical opportunity for participants to see themselves not as individuals from various social and economic backgrounds, but as members of a group linked by ethnic or regional bonds. In other words, they *became* Italian (or a regional version of it) by association. Italian festivals in Vancouver and Trail also drew boundaries between the *communitas* of the organization hosting the events and "others"—whether there were Italians from other regions or non-Italians. This clause takes Turner's conceptualization of *communitas* a step further. It permits an "in-group/out-group contrast"²³ in which festivals emphasized certain identities that set celebrators apart.

¹⁸ F.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

¹⁹ P.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁰ In a similar approach Jordan Stranger-Ross recently examined Italian religious processions in Toronto and demonstrated that despite the large size and dispersed nature of the city's population, these events helped forge a sense of common Italian bonds. Stranger-Ross, "An Inviting Parish."

²¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 94-134.

²² Paul Bramadat, "Toward a New Politics of Authenticity: Ethno-Cultural Representation in Theory and Practice," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2005): 1-20.

²³ Turner likens bonds formed by drawing distinctions between "the group" and "outsiders" to Durkheim's concept of solidarity. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 132.

When Italians in British Columbia celebrated, they confronted their own set of obstacles to congregating as a single ethnic group. The first obstacle was regionalism, which was rooted back in Italy. Prior to the *Risorgimento* or unification of Italy in 1861, the Italian peninsula consisted of numerous kingdoms and lesser states. Some of these, such as Naples, Calabria and Friuli-Veneto-Giulia, passed through the hands of many foreign dynasties before their annexation into the modern Italian State. Even today, despite cultural, institutional and linguistic homogenization campaigns by the central government, the country is marked by stark regional disparities in dialect, food practices, distribution of wealth (particularly between the south and the north) and climate. For this reason, Italian immigrants were at first more likely to identify themselves according to their town, rather than country, of origin.²⁴ At the heart of these bonds was the institution of *comparaggio* or ritual kinship, which “incorporated into the family friends encountered at work, in the neighbourhood, or through the church, by giving them familial status as ritual *compare* or godparents.”²⁵

Migration to Canada set in motion new processes of social networking and identity construction. Most extended families were fragments of their former size, making impossible the institution of *comparaggio* as it existed in Italy. Moreover, many migrants were for the first time forced to rub shoulders with Italians from other regions and non-Italians. The relationships and identities formed out of these confrontations outside of Italy have preoccupied scholars of Italian American and Italian Canadian history.²⁶ Three examples illustrate the range of conclusions reached by these studies.

²⁴ World Cup soccer matches are a notable exception

²⁵ Harney, *Eh Paesan! Being Italian in Toronto*, 129.

²⁶ Stuart Hall argues that ethnic bonds emerge out of shifting political alliances. He uses the term “articulation lorry” to describe how an ethnic group maneuvers itself by forging new alliances and

Dino Cinel saw that Italian identities in San Francisco progressed over time from town or regional-based, to pan-Italian, and finally, Italian American. Rudolph Vecoli evidenced the survival of regional sentiments in Chicago. Lastly, John Zucchi, in his study of Italians in pre-Second World War Toronto, observed the co-existence of regional and town-based identities alongside nascent Italian national sentiments.²⁷ Considered together, the three case studies make two statements about Italian ethnicity in North America: first, there was not a standard historical progression of Italian ethnic identity on North American soil; and second, Italian ethnic identities have been constructed at the local level.²⁸

In this thesis Italian identities were intimately linked to the sense of *communitas* formed through “New World” social bonds. This process took place most strikingly at the clubs and societies. Originally designed to provide mutual aid to new arrivals and to families in financial difficulties, these institutions were safe zones apart from a foreign and sometimes hostile Canadian culture. In contrast to the former practice of *comparaggio* or extended family unit, clubs and societies were social networks that

redrawing community boundaries. It ‘hooks and unhooks’ through various coalitions *ex hypothesi*. See Clifford’s critique of Hall theory in “Indigenous Articulations,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (Fall, 2001): 477-8.

²⁷ Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco*; Rudolph Vecoli, “Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of the Uprooted,” *Journal of American History* 51, no. 3 (Dec., 1964): 404-417; John Zucchi, “Italian Hometown Settlements and the Development of an Italian Community in Toronto, 1875-1935,” in Robert F. Harney, ed., *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985), 121-146.

²⁸ The late Robert F. Harney called for studies of this order in 1993. He wrote: “[W]e need to abandon definitions of ethnicity, or nationality, based on descent rather than consent. Ethnicity is a North American process; it is a continual negotiation of identity within a context of the concentric circles of loyalty and patriotism toward family, friends, town, region, country of emigration, as well as nascent loyalties to his new friends, neighbourhoods, cities, and country of immigration.” Harney, “Undoing the Risorgimento: Emigrants from Italy and the Politics of Regionalism,” in *From the Shores of Hardship: Italians in Canada*, ed. Nicholas DeMaria Harney (Welland, ON: Soleil Publishing, 1993): 115.

would not have been possible in Italy.²⁹ Three types of institutions were established, each based on geographical descent: pan-Italian, regional and *paesani* or town-based. The latter two cases more closely resembled pre-migration relationships, as they encapsulated bonds among descendants of the same geographical space.

In an effort to define the *communitas* (the relational basis for expressions of Italianness) each festival was a conversation about what was “authentically” Italian. Organizers selected historical figures, cultural accomplishments, events from their “own” history and supposedly quintessential Italian qualities to define who they were as a *communitas*. However, to borrow the words of Paige Raibmon, authenticity was “not a stable yardstick against which to measure ‘the real thing’ [but rather] a powerful and shifting set of ideas that worked in a variety of ways.”³⁰ These ideas were debated within the context of certain themes. The first of these was the “Old World,” which was imagined as a rural way of life characterized by strong familial bonds, the maintenance of older labour-intensive food and cultivation practices, traditional values, and an emphasis on the collective over the individual. To some extent, this theme was rooted in shared experience. The vast majority of people of Italian descent in Vancouver and Trail were semi-skilled workers from the rural Italian countryside and their kin. In both cities, Italian clubs and societies sought to recreate memories of this space and time through events such as picnics and banquets. However, as mentioned there were three different types of

²⁹ Rudolph Vecoli states that mutual aid societies were commonplace in Sicily by the 1870s. However, I have not encountered any evidence to either challenge or support this contention. This suggests to me that Sicily was an exception. Vecoli, “Contadini in Chicago,” 412.

³⁰ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 3. Raibmon’s work closely followed Harmon’s *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound*. See citation in footnote 8. It should be mentioned that the issue of authenticity takes on a different, particularly political, significance in Aboriginal Studies because it is linked to land claims and the interpretation of treaties, many of which were made centuries ago.

institutions: pan-Italian, regional, and *paesani*. Each searched out themes, presentations and items of material culture that reinforced the geographical identity of its membership. In other words, each group celebrated *its* perspective of Old World Italy. Paradoxically, the “Old World” was a “New World” creation. As clubs and societies tried to evoke a shared sense of group *communitas*, certain symbols came to represent the Old World to an extent that would have been unfamiliar to Italians living in Italy.³¹ Bocce, for example, became a regular fixture at picnic events and was understood to be a quintessentially pan-Italian activity on Canadian soil. At the regional Famee Furlane and San Martino clubs of Vancouver and Trail, respectively—both of which descended from the northeastern region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia—the traditional *fogolar* stove around which rural families congregated became a regular fixture at parades and banquets. These practices offered no material benefit, but served as continual and “essential” markers that distinguished one Old World form of Italianness from another.

Perceptual links to the Old World did not fade in either city, but rather took on different meanings over time. By the 1970s Old World Italianness in Trail was rooted not in Italy but in shared memories and symbols from a more recent time and place—the “Gulch” or Italian quarter where the city’s Italian population lived before the 1960s. Trail, rather than Italy, was imagined as an Old World reference point. Banquet themes and wine-tasting contests recalled a way of life that existed before Italians achieved greater socio-economic mobility and moved into middle-class neighbourhoods. However, the passage from “authentic” Old World identities rooted in perceptions of Italy to a sense of ethnic place in Trail was marked by anxieties within the Italian “community”

³¹ Masumi Izumi explains that taiko drumming took on greater importance as a symbol of Japanese culture in Canada than it had in Japan. Masumi Izumi, “Reconsidering Ethnic Culture and Community: A Case Study on Japanese Canadian Taiko Drumming,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001): 35-56.

over *who* was an authentic Italian. This debate played out most vividly at the 1976 Colombo Lodge beauty pageant, when a female contestant with an Italian mother and Scottish father sought permission to compete in the event. In this struggle the sites where Italian authenticity was negotiated moved from symbols and themes to the bodies of Italians themselves.

Old World expressions in Vancouver, by contrast, were not reinvented as belonging to a recent time and place on Canadian soil. Instead, they were negotiated alongside a second theme of authentic Italianness—high culture.³² In contrast to the Old World, which gave the sanction of perpetuity to pre-modern food practices and family bonds, Italian high culture was characterized by progress, individual achievement and the high arts. These celebrations of high culture were organized in Vancouver during the 1970s by a new *class* of Italians; a partnership between the Italian Consulate with a new “generation” of volunteers. The latter consisted of those who grew up in Italian cities and educated second generation Italian Canadians. However, this coalition did not attempt to replace the multitudinous, mostly regional, forms of the Old World with Italian high culture. Instead, they hosted an array of festivals that communicated the co-existence of multiple authenticities under the rubric of a single Italian *communitas*. These forms were united through the theme of multicultural Italianness. Following the inaugural local celebration of Italian Republic Day in 1973, for example, a spectator could see pasta made by hand, an opera performance, fine wine and folk dancing. Italianness re-emerged

³² Kathleen Conzen proposes a binary in ethnic festivals between “peasant” atavistic expressions on the one hand and high cultural and national ones on the other. However, no such distinction existed in Vancouver. Post-1973 pan-Italian celebrations carried the theme of Italian multiculturalism, which brought together (mostly regional) Old World forms, Italian patriotism, and ethnic solidarities. Conzen, “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (Fall, 1992): 15.

as something simultaneously Old World and high culture, regional and national—a format that reflected the diversity of identities within the “community.”

Italian ethnicity in Vancouver and Trail was shaped through discourses among individuals of Italian descent over what geographical background constituted a *communitas* and what forms of culture were authentic. Over time, however, outside political actors also played role in this process. Two different governments, each guided by its own agenda, exerted considerable influence on how Italianness came to be expressed at festivals. In so doing, they provided the impetus for the creation of new bonds among Italians and, for the first time, regular cultural exchanges between Italians and non-Italians. The primary political catalyst in Trail was the City itself. In 1969, it brought together local Italian lodges and clubs to participate in its annual carnival, Fiesta Days. Italians over the next decade responded positively to the City’s invitations and used this annual event to express a closer identification with both one another and the local community. This relationship reached new heights in 1982, when the City remodelled Fiesta Days into a celebration of the local Italian culture. Ironically, what began as a political gesture to include a former subaltern group in civic culture developed into a full-scale re-interpretation of this culture in which the City defined itself by the customs and local experiences of its Italian minority. Put simply, to be Italian was to be from Trail, but the local Italian population enjoyed a privileged status in this exchange.

The primary political player in Vancouver was the Italian Foreign Office, which got involved in “community” affairs in the early 1970s. Through cash infusions and social networking, it provided the impetus for the construction of the Italian Cultural Centre, a space where Italians of all regions came together. The Centre emphasized a

sense of a pan-Italian *communitas* through a sequence of new festivals such as Republic Day, anniversary banquets and Italian Week. As indicated above, the Consulate also found a new “generation and class” of volunteers, who brought to these festivals forms of high culture that reflected their perception of authentic Italianness. Thus, in a very short period the Italian “community” of Vancouver surmounted institutional and ideational tensions. Institutionally, all Italian clubs and societies came together for the first time at the new Cultural Centre. Ideationally, the new level of social bonds was made visual through a new itinerary of festivals. These events emphasized the compatibility of regional and pan-Italian loyalties and Old World and high culture modes.

This thesis is divided into three parts: an introduction; two chapters on the historical construction of Italianness in Vancouver and Trail, respectively; and a conclusion. By dividing the discussion by city it becomes possible to isolate and contrast the locally distinctive factors that shaped Italian identities in each place. This thesis draws from a wide spectrum of primary sources. A good portion of these are conventional in nature: provincial and civic government files, the Colombo Lodge archival collection, the Italian Cultural Centre annual reports, Italian language weeklies, and local papers. Unconventional historical sources—such as picnic and banquet posters and programs and photo albums—are also considered. Sources also include a series of fourteen interviews with Italians who had each participated in festivals in the capacities of leader and regular volunteer. Each interviewee was asked the same set of seven questions, which can be visited in Appendix A. The subjective accounts of the participants offer important insights into areas where material sources are silent. The addition of subjective *meanings* provided an additional level of interpretation to this study. In order to ensure the

confidentiality of their statements, names have been replaced with initial pseudonyms. Every attempt was made in the selection of interviewees to consider the broad range of Italian experiences in the cities of Vancouver and Trail. Participants came from both cities and genders, first and second-generation cohorts, and regional and national Italian associations.

Clifford Geertz once noted that when researching history and culture “it is impossible to get to the bottom of anything.”³³ This navigation into the cultural life of Italians in Vancouver is no exception. Being the first of its kind, it raises many questions while it seeks to answer others. It is hoped, however, that the tips of many icebergs are brought into view, and that the conclusions reached here provide a workable starting point to explore the how other “ethnic” identities have been constructed within Canadian society.

³³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 7.

II

Vancouver

This chapter explores the historical development of Italian social bonds and expressions of Italianness in the city of Vancouver. More specifically, it examines the changing institutional, spatial and political patterns that conditioned the modes through which Italians celebrated and communicated what it meant to be Italian. Italian festivals in Vancouver are divided into two eras—before and after the mid-1970s. During the first two decades of the postwar period festivals expressed certain pre-existing cultural practices. These events sought to recreate elements of the simple and structured life of the Old World. This theme came in various, particularly regional, forms. The arrival of Canadian multiculturalism in 1971 and—more importantly—the Italian Consulate in 1973 disrupted this pattern. These political projects provided the impetus for new relationships or *communitas*. During the next three decades, Italianness took on additional, sometimes paradoxical, shapes. It was simultaneously Old World and modern, nationalistic but open to “outsiders,” high cultured and traditional, family-oriented and individualistic, atavistic and progressive.

Most scholars agree that there were two major waves of Italian immigration to Canada: 1896-1914 and 1947-1973. Most of those destined for Vancouver during these periods were relatively poor semi-skilled labourers.³⁴ There was an imbalanced gender ratio in the Italian “community” because males typically sought to secure work and

³⁴ The 1971 Canada Census indicated that 43.4 percent of Italians in BC worked in “blue collar” professions. *Canada Census* (1971), Occupational Divisions of Total and Italian Ethnic Labour Force in Canada. Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, in Clifford J. Janzen, *Education and Social Mobility of Immigrants: A Pilot Study Focusing on Italians in Vancouver* (Toronto: York University Institute for Behaviourial Research, 1981), 40.

establish themselves before arranging for the arrival of a spouse, fiancé or female family member.³⁵ Most of the extended families in the New World were fragments of their former size. Many members remained on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean or had immigrated to other destinations in North and South America. Lacking the same extended kinship networks—most notably, the financial security these offered during periods of sickness or unemployment—ambitious migrants formed mutual aid societies or *le societa' per mutuo soccorso*. Originally created out of pecuniary necessity, the new institutions were also spaces for social interaction and identity expression. Mutual aid societies were safe zones apart from a foreign and sometimes hostile Canadian culture—locations where various forms of Italian *communitas* were constructed.

Diverse and Disconnected: 1896 - 1970

The forms of Italian social bonds and modes of expressing Italianness established between the turn of the century and the Second World War laid the groundwork for those of the postwar period. The first society established in Vancouver in 1905, the Sons of Italy, was pan-Italian in nature.³⁶ It was the first example of Italians coming together in ways that would not have occurred back in Italy, where intense inter-regional and inter-urban suspicions and rivalries remained. The Sons of Italy carried a pan-Italian membership because the Italian population of Vancouver was too small and dispersed throughout the city before the Second World War to support regionally-specific institutions. The 1911 Canada Census put the Italian population at 2535, most of which lived in “multicultural” neighbourhoods to the immediate south and east of downtown

³⁵ One estimate is that three quarters of the Italian population of Vancouver were single men. Scardellato, “Beyond the Frozen Wastes,” 148-9. For a similar pattern in Montreal see Bruno Ramirez, “Workers Without a Cause: Italian Immigrant Labour in Montreal, 1880-1930,” in Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino, eds. *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada* (Montreal: Guernica, 1989), 124.

³⁶ Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. I, 19.

Vancouver.³⁷ By 1931, this number had only increased to 3469.³⁸ Unable to organize with people from one's town or region, Italians turned to their compatriots. Other pan-Italian groups followed during the 1930s, including the Vancouver Italian-Canadian and Cristoforo Colombo societies. The lone exception was La Società Veneta di Mutuo Soccorso Inc. (of the northern Veneto region), which emerged in 1911 out of a dispute within the Sons of Italy in which northern Italians complained that southerners dominated the decision-making processes.³⁹ With the possible exception of the Cristoforo Colombo Society, each institution had a women's auxiliary which collaborated with the men at major cultural events and also coordinated their own activities. Local historian Ray Culos explains that these institutions celebrated three major annual *feste*: the picnic; the beauty pageant "weekend," which included a runner's marathon, dinner and dance, church service and the crowning of a "queen," and the annual journey to the cemetery to honour deceased club members. These celebrations were strictly for the Italian club members: only on rare occasions were non-Italians privy to staged expressions of Italianness before the Second World War.⁴⁰

The Allied victory over Nazi Germany in 1945 was followed by the monumental period of Italian emigration. In 1947 the Government of Canada lifted a ban on immigrants from Italy, creating the conditions for the monumental Second Wave. In

³⁷ *Canada Census* (1911), *Origins of the People by Sub-districts*, Vol. 2, Table 7, pp. 168-173.

³⁸ Number includes Vancouver (3330) and Burnaby (139). *Canada Census* (1931), *Population Classified to Principle Origins for Municipalities*, Vol. 2, Table 33, p. 482-493.

³⁹ Founding dates and group names gathered from *Ibid.*, 19-64, *passim*. Gabriello Scardellato claims that members from the southern region of Calabria dominated the power structure. Scardellato, "Beyond the Frozen Wastes," 149-151.

⁴⁰ A few notable exceptions include: the plaster Roman-style arch that bore the inscription "The Italian Colony of Vancouver" to welcome the Duke of Connaught in 1912; the float of the Società Veneta in the 1927 Vancouver Jubilee Parade; the participation of both the Sons of Italy and Veneto Society to honour the visit of King George VI and Elizabeth I in 1939; and the annual All Saints Day march and mass at Sacred Heart Church. *Ibid.*, 36, 58, and 100. Culos adds that both societies used the latter occasion to honour dead members. The itinerary concluded with a visit to Mountainview Cemetery. *Ibid.*, 34-5.

Vancouver, between the census years 1951 and 1971, the Italian population swelled from 7328 to 28 510.⁴¹ By 1996 the number of Vancouverites claiming Italian descent reached 64 285.⁴² As during the wave that preceded it four decades earlier, male arrivals heavily outnumbered females.⁴³ The Second Wave brought an explosion of new clubs and societies—particularly regional and *paesani*⁴⁴ or town-based groups—to the urban cultural landscape. In contrast to the First Wave, the postwar Italian population of Vancouver was large and diverse enough to sustain a wide range of geographically-limited social institutions, representing regions of the Italian peninsula from Trentino in the Alpine north to Sicily in the south. Italian government registers show that between the years 1962 and 1971 the geographic breakdown of emigrants destined for Vancouver was 38.9 percent northern, 1.6 percent central, and 59.5 percent southern.⁴⁵ Within a short period, the Italian population was further divided into a constellation of new groups, each representing their own regional identity.

Further contributing to “community” diversity was the fact that Italians never composed a majority of the population in any part of the city. Patricia K. Wood demonstrates that many of the first Italian migrants to Vancouver (between 1890 and

⁴¹ Expectedly, a good portion of this number included children born to Italian immigrants, but unfortunately neither census makes this distinction. *Canada Census* (1951), Population by Origin and Sex for Counties and Census Divisions, Vol. 1, Table 34, pp. 21-22; and *Canada Census* (1971), Population by Ethnic Group and Sex, for Canada and Provinces, Urban Size Groups, Rural non-farm and Rural farm, Vol. 1, Part 3, Catalogue 92-723, pp. 11-12.

⁴² *Statistics Canada* (1999), Profile of Census Tracts in Abbotsford and Vancouver, Ministry of Industry, Table 1, p. 60. Of these 18 680 claimed Italian as mother tongue (based on 20 % sample). *Ibid.*, Table 1, pp. 58.

⁴³ For housing arrangements between single male workers and more established Italian female homeowners and the subculture that emerged out of these relationships see Quilici, “I Was a Strong Lady.”

⁴⁴ Clubs in which the membership consisted of people from the same Italian town or village. Hereafter *paesani* clubs will be included under the “regional” category for conventional purposes. However, the title will be used when a distinction is needed between the two.

⁴⁵ Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *Popolazione e Movimento Anagrafico dei Comuni*, Roma, 1963-1972, Compiled in Clifford Jansen, *The Italians of Vancouver: A Case Study of Internal Differentiation of an Ethnic Group* (Toronto: York University Institute for Behavioural Research, 1981), 46.

1914) lived near Main Street in East Vancouver, which was then a “multicultural” enclave of minority workers. In 1976, native Italian speakers comprised only 3 to 5 percent of the population of the “core” Italian settlement areas of Greater Vancouver, from Commercial Drive east to North Burnaby.⁴⁶ By 1996, in the heart of the Italian “core,” Italians were the third largest ethnic group.⁴⁷ Thus, during the first hundred years of Italian settlement in Vancouver, there was not a “core” residential space where migrants and their kin rubbed shoulders with one another.

The *modus operandi* of the clubs and societies formed during the postwar period was primarily social and cultural. Beginning in the early sixties, the need for mutual aid diminished for the Italians of Vancouver. This improvement can be attributed to advances in workers’ rights, the introduction of government social services such as welfare and worker’s compensation, and the general upward economic mobility of Italian Canadians. Italian clubs by this time operated first and foremost to soften the social and cultural dislocation brought on by the migration experience. With the notable example of beauty pageants (at least until the late 1970s), the festivities established by First Wave immigrants set the precedent for their Second Wave counterparts.⁴⁸ The two most

⁴⁶ Patricia K. Wood, “Border and Identities among Italian Immigrants in the Pacific Northwest, 1880-1938,” in *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies*, John M. Findlay and Ken S. Coates, eds. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 110. Clifford Jansen uses the category of ‘Italian as mother tongue’ in the 1971 and 1976 national censuses to identify the “core” of Italian settlement in the city. The statistics do not include latter generations of Italian Canadians for whom English was the first language. Nevertheless, his research indicates that Italian Canadians did not constitute a majority in any part of the city. Jansen, *The Italians of Vancouver*, 35-39.

⁴⁷ Chinese and English were first and second, respectively. The region was bordered by Adanac Street, south to First Ave.; Commercial Drive east to Renfrew St.. *Statistics Canada* (1999), Profile of Census Tracts in Abbotsford and Vancouver, Ministry of Industry Table 1, p. 151.

⁴⁸ Culos, *Vancouver’s Society of Italians*, Vol. I, 85-88. Due to scant archival records, it is not possible to dedicate much space to the role of beauty pageants in Vancouver Italianness. The first postwar society to host a contest was the Associazione Pugliese della BC. By the early eighties three or four others held similar events. Winners from these “regional” groups went on to the larger “Miss Italia” spectacle at the Italian Cultural Centre. This larger inter-regional event was cancelled in 2001. L.S., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 9 March 2007; B.T., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 25 January 2007.

important occasions were picnics and banquets. These events provided opportunities to recall the Old World way of life, but they were also celebrations of the geographical region of Italy from which the group originated. The extended kinship networks that existed in the Italian towns were reinvented in the New World through the creation of three types of institutional bonds: *paesani* or village-based, regional, and national. Each praised the virtues of food, family, folklore and fraternity, but adjusted them to fit the geographical background of their membership. In short, each club and society celebrated *its* perspective of Old World Italy.

Banquets were an extension of pre-migration cultural practice. The large meals of the former life took on an “official” role for the New World clubs and societies. However, the “guest lists” in Italy and Canada differed greatly. The extended family, which included blood relatives and close friends, provided the basis for banquet attendance in Italy. Following migration to Canada, the notion of extended kinship was extended to include Italians from a particular geographical area. Participation was thus limited only to “members.” For the reason, physical and sensual markers of the banquet experience took on greater importance because they *defined* the geographical *communitas*. The pan-Italian Sons of Italy, for example, hired a band to play mainstream Italian numbers and limited their menu to generic ingredients—normally an antipasto, ravioli and chicken dish—that signified no particular region of the country.⁴⁹ Composed of primarily Canadian-born Italians, who identified with a national rather than a regional culture, the Sons of Italy banquets staged a generic form of Italianness. The Famee Furlane, by contrast, used food to communicate the distinctiveness of the northeastern

⁴⁹ *Ray Culos' Personal Archive*, banquet posters, 1951-1967, Burnaby, BC.

region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia from which they originated.⁵⁰ Their menu featured northeastern folk dance and cuisine with polenta (rather than pasta) as the staple. Members of the Circolo Abruzzese—a society representing immigrants from the central region of Abruzzo—donned the traditional peasant clothing of their region for their *Festa Della Campagnolo* each February.⁵¹ One year they decided to create a mural of Gran Sasso, the largest peak in the Apennine Mountains and most prominent geological feature in the region, for display at an upcoming banquet. Ironically, because the members came from a variety of towns they disagreed over what angle was most suitable. Each recalled the landmark differently, an indication that even among Italians from the same region a common cultural symbol provoked Old World village-based identities.⁵² In sum, menus, music, images and attire were strategies to visibly promote a sense of “us” and to draw a distinction between the group staging the event and “others,” whether they were Italians from other regions or non-Italians.

As with banquets, picnics were an extension of Old World forms of entertainment. Ray Culos identifies them as the “mainstays of Italian mutual aid societies’ social activities since the turn of the century.”⁵³ With the exception of the Second World War period—when large Italian gatherings were treated with suspicion—the clubs and societies coordinated one or two outdoor meals a year.⁵⁴ However, the expressed links between geographical descent and club *communitas* were less pronounced at picnics than banquets. Indeed, menus often represented the regional

⁵⁰ B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC. This group, founded in 1954, also spoke in its own regional dialect, Furlan, which some consider to be a language in its own right. It has been taught at the University of Toronto and University of Udine, respectively.

⁵¹ The Circolo Abruzzese of Vancouver was founded in 1966. G.A., interviewed by author, 19 December 2006, Burnaby, BC.

⁵² G.A., interviewed by author, 19 December 2007, Vancouver, BC.

⁵³ Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. I, 96.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

background of members. A society from northeastern Italy, for example, served polenta, stew, tripe and sauerkraut, to affirm a distinct regional identity.⁵⁵ However, expressions of Italian regional distinctiveness ended there. Many of the clubs and societies drew upon the same forms of competition. Popular activities included spaghetti and watermelon eating contests, soccer, horseshoe toss, bocce, climb the greased pole,⁵⁶ *la cucania*,⁵⁷ potato sack and sprinting races, and *la morra*, a physically punishing game in which participants wrap their knuckles on the table as they guess how many fingers their opponent is disclosing.⁵⁸ Three explanations account for this cohesive form of entertainment. First, the “all-you-can-eat” food competitions were a mode through which the first generation expressed having ‘made it’ in the New World. Many migrants had left homelands devastated by the Second World War—places where food was in short supply. Thus, the deliberate waste of large quantities of food was an opportunity to assert the relative economic success achieved by the *communitas*.⁵⁹ Second, the picnic was a unique example of a “national” Italian practice that cut across regional lines. In the “New World” it became a participatory nexus through which the cultural diversity within each group was managed. Third, in contrast to banquets, it was common practice for club and society members to invite “outside” friends to picnic events.⁶⁰ Often, these acquaintances

⁵⁵ B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC.

⁵⁶ The “greased pole” was a fifteen to twenty foot high piece of timber that was sanded down and covered in wax.

⁵⁷ *La cucania* is a game in which jars are tied to ropes and then hung from a tree. The jars are positioned at a great height so that participants have to reach them using a stick to retrieve the prize hidden inside.

⁵⁸ *Ray Culos' Personal Archive*, various promotional posters for picnics hosted by the Sons of Italy and Società Mutuo Soccorso Veneto, 1951-1967, Burnaby, BC; and B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC.

⁵⁹ The concept of abundance is further developed in Hasia R. Diner, *Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 48-83.

⁶⁰ This practice was confirmed by three participants in this study. S.B., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 5 March 2007; B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC; G.A., interviewed by author, 19 December 2006, Vancouver, BC. For a few years during the 1950s and early 1960s, clubs and

came from the larger Italian “community.” Organizers selected picnic activities that appealed to Italians from other regions. The picnic was thus an unusual Italian event because expressions of Italianness exceeded the boundaries of club *communitas*. This practice indicated that certain “Italian” cultural forms cut across regional boundaries.⁶¹ For at least one day a year, participants identified with both their regional kin and national compatriots, thus demonstrating an early shared, but limited, concept of being Italian.

The dual mandate of expressing regional identity through food practice and engaging other Italians through accepted activities contributed to the enduring popularity of the summer picnic. One participant in this study estimated that by the 1990s more than two thousand people attended the festivities of the Associazione Culturale Pugliese Della BC (descendants of the southern region of Puglia) at Confederation Park in Burnaby.⁶² During the last two decades of the century, clubs continued to select ingredients that reflected the geographical composition of their membership and stage many of the same competitions. In the late eighties, for example, the Società Mutuo Soccorso Veneto (of Venetian descent) served regional chicken and sausage specialities and concluded the festivities with bocce and soccer competitions.⁶³ During the same period, the Pugliese also served regional ingredients such as calzone and coordinated a large soccer

societies came together at a picnic. *Ray Culos' Personal Archive*, Various promotional posters, 1950-1961, Burnaby, BC.

⁶¹ Two participants interviewed for this study recalled playing the same games in Italy before migrating to Canada. I.G., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007; B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007.

⁶² There are no recorded statistics to verify this estimate. S.B., interviewed by author, 5 March 2007, Vancouver, BC.

⁶³ *Vancouver (BC) L'Eco d'Italia* 33 no. 9, 21 July 1988, p. 7-9. Additionally, all participants cited in footnotes 18 and 19 attested that the food and activities practiced during the 1950s continue to the present day.

tournament.⁶⁴ Predicated on a formula that balanced regional and national activities, the picnic remained a popular space through which both regional and pan-Italian expressions and relationships were fostered.

Italians rarely expressed their culture to non-Italians during the years 1945-1977. Instead, the focus of celebrations was the Italian institutions themselves. The few festivals that took place—and more importantly, the decision of whether to launch a “private” (for Italians only) or a “public” (open to the larger community) event—reflect three considerations: first, the weak financial position of the clubs and societies; second, the limited extent of shared *communitas* within the Italian population; and third, what themes and events best expressed Italianness to both Italians and non-Italians.⁶⁵ The Centennial celebrations of 1958 and 1967 are illustrative cases. These holidays commemorated, respectively, the founding of the colony of British Columbia and the birth of the Canadian nation.

Italians contributed to the 1958 celebration in both private and public ways. The Comitato Attivatà Italiana, a short-lived committee of representatives from various clubs and societies, rented the “Cave Supper Club”—a venue larger than the Italian institutions—for a “Festival Folkloristico Musicale.” The evening featured cuisine, songs in the Furlan dialect led by the Famee Furlane Society (of northeastern Italy), quartet and

⁶⁴ S.B., interviewed by author, 5 March 2007, Vancouver, BC.

⁶⁵ A few cross-cultural exchanges are worthy of mention. First, the Sons of Italy (later, the Confratellenza) hosted a banquet for the Interfaith Brotherhood of Christians and Jews and entertained guests with Italian food and entertainment. (I would like to thank author Ray Culos for informing me of this group). In the 1950s Italians hosted two annual sporting events. The Italian Canadian Bicycle Club sponsored a race at the velodrome at the corner of Broadway and Clark, and the celebrated Columbus Soccer Club challenged opponents at Callistaire Park. *Ray Culos' Personal Archive*, Promotional poster, 1967, Burnaby, BC. The Famee Furlane contributed a float to the Pacific National Exhibition parade in 1973. It featured a *fogolar* or traditional stove used in northeastern Italy and club ambassadors in peasant dress from that region. The float—the only contribution from Vancouver’s Italian groups—won second prize in the artistic category. It did not fare so well on a functional level. The six o’clock news captured the convertible pulling the float down Hastings Street as it erupted into smoke. A tow-truck was called in to complete the procession. B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC.

orchestral music, and ballet performances. The aim of the celebration was to bring together the disconnected clubs and societies for one evening. Admittance was limited to members and their families, thus calling into question the extent to which civic pride motivated the occasion. The Comitato held two other celebrations in honour of the 1958 Centennial. First, in early September, members of the Italia Bicycle Club challenged cyclists from Canada and the United States to a race at the now defunct Empire Cycle Track. Second, the Comitato invited non-Italians to a momentous banquet. The promotional poster welcomed “All [to] A Grand Finale of Italian Centennial Festivities,” a dinner and dance to mark “The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus”—a theme placed the event in a cosmic historical narrative.⁶⁶ The appeal to non-Italians was apparent in the promise of “a full complete Italian banquet”—a pledge that would have been superfluous at an exclusively Italian gathering.

Four observations can be gleaned from the events of 1958. First, it appears that public funds provided the impetus for Italian festivals to exceed “ethnic” parameters.⁶⁷ In contrast to the private evening of folklore, both the cycling competition and banquet received pecuniary support from the *Vancouver Centennial Committee*, a government-sponsored committee that oversaw the activities of 1958.⁶⁸ Second, the donation of public funds conveyed an important message to Italian organizers. The Province officially

⁶⁶ *Ray Culos' Personal Archive*, Poster, Printed by Committee for Italian Activities, 1958, Burnaby, BC.

⁶⁷ Lack of funds is one reason why Italian festivals were not opened to non-Italians. The BC Centennial came at a time when most Italian institutions still provided mutual aid, and some were struggling to remain in operation. For example, the Veneto Mutual Aid Society—one of the earliest ethnic institutions in Vancouver—was forced to sell its main hall, the “Silver Slipper Auditorium,” after only six years of operation in 1934 because of monetary constraints. See Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. 1, 50-61.

⁶⁸ The Commission's financial support is stated on the promotional poster for the event. The amount of pecuniary assistance is not specified in Provincial Government files at the BC Archives. *Ray Culos' Personal Archives*, Poster of “Grande Riunione Ciclistica,” Printed by Committee for Italian Activities, 1958, Burnaby, BC.

acknowledged the contributions of Italian immigrants to the history of British Columbia. This outside impetus gave Italians a measure of cultural distinction and the opportunity to demonstrate it at the Centennial. Third, the racing event was a strategic way to facilitate cross-cultural communication. Organizers selected an event that appealed to non-Italians (as opposed to bocce, or soccer, which did not attract large numbers in Canada at this time) and so established a cultural “middle-ground” that emphasized sameness. Paradoxically, the competitive nature of a race also made distinctions based on ability. The Italia Bicycle Club was positioned to demonstrate the prowess of Italian Canadians at an activity valued by both themselves and non-Italians.

Finally, the selection of ‘Christopher Columbus as discoverer of America’ as theme for the public banquet appears out of place at first glance. The year 1958 did not mark a significant anniversary after 1492, nor is there an obvious link between the explorer and the founding of the Colony of British Columbia. Instead, organizers read the celebratory mood of the Centennial as an opportunity to express to non-Italians how they wished to be perceived. By embracing Columbus as quintessentially Italian they claimed for themselves a pedigree as the ethnic descendants of a figure with whom both Italian and non-Italians could identify. Additionally, the selection of Columbus was a strategy to assert their presence among the continent’s first peoples.⁶⁹ The selection may also have been a response to perceived negative attitudes towards Italians. A public opinion poll taken in Ontario in 1955 revealed that fewer than five percent of those interviewed

⁶⁹ Robert F. Harney terms the adoption of well-known historical figures by an ethnic group “Mayflowerism.” See “Caboto and other Italian Canadian Parentela,” in *From the Shores of Hardship: Italians in Canada*, ed. Nicholas De Maria Harney (Welland, ON: Soleil Publishing Inc., 1993).

welcomed immigrants from Southern Europe.⁷⁰ Although no such survey was taken in Vancouver, it is possible that similar attitudes persisted there as well. Columbus therefore provided organizers with a symbol through which they claimed for Italians a sense of belonging and good citizenship in the presence of non-Italians.

The Italians of Vancouver responded differently to the Canadian Centennial of 1967. The primary objective of festival organizers at this time was not to communicate positive forms of Italianness to “outsiders,” but rather to form a single Italian institution. Ray Culos, author of *Vancouver’s Society of Italians*, explains that 1966 saw the formation of the Confratellenza Italo-Canadese—the culmination of fifty-four years of attempts by three societies to create a “brotherhood.”⁷¹ Upon its inauguration, the Confratellenza became the largest and most influential Italian institution in the city.⁷² This enterprise redirected much of the time and energy that might otherwise have gone into the Canadian Centennial. Italians had been conspicuously absent from the multi-ethnic “Pre-Centennial Carousel” festival and Canadian Birthday Folklore Celebration at Empire Stadium two years earlier. The only public performance was by the Vancouver Italian Folk Group at the “Centennial Folk Extravaganza.”⁷³

More important than participation in an inter-ethnic event was a festival where symbols of a single Italian *communitas* could be displayed. The Confratellenza sought to undue the local postwar division of Italian clubs and societies by region. The new

⁷⁰ Franc Sturino, “Italians,” in *Multicultural Canada*, Simon Fraser University, available online: <http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/ecp/content/italians.html>.

⁷¹ The pan-Italian Sons of Italy, Veneto Society (northern Italian), and later, the Meridionale Club (southern Italian). See Culos, *Vancouver’s Society of Italians*, Vol. II, 26-33.

⁷² Much of its influence can be attributed to its co-founder and first president Angelo Branca, a well-known judge and prominent person within the Italian “community.” *Ibid.*, *passim*.

⁷³ The team included eight female and eight male dancers and three accordionists. They performed a selection of traditional Italian dances, including “Avianese,” “Furlana dell’800,” and “La Quadrillia.” *BC Archives*, GR-1449, Box 8, File A-E-8, Vol. 2, Victoria. BC.

Confratellenza thus pursued two objectives: first, to express “Italian unity” to its new members; and second, to draw these clubs and societies into its brotherhood. For these reasons, organizers modified the Canadian Centennial to fit a private agenda. In the minutes of the *Ethnic Organizations Sub-committee*, the multi-ethnic group responsible for coordinating multicultural events, the Italian representative—who happened to be from the Confratellenza—explained that Vancouver’s Italians would have ‘their own’ festival.⁷⁴ On July 1, three months after the formal centennial celebrations, the Confratellenza came together on Columbus Day at the Pacific National Exhibition Grounds. The evening program booklet made clear the reason for the occasion. Emblazed on the front page of the program was the new symbol of the society, a handshake, and the moniker “*Uno per tutti. Tutti per uno*” or “One for all. All for one.”⁷⁵

In sum, Italian involvement in the centennial celebrations of 1958 and 1967 communicated a combination of both private and public imperatives. Civic celebrations “fit” into the ethnic agenda set by festival organizers. The objectives of 1958 were twofold: first, to bring Italians together for a rare dinner occasion; and second, thanks to the impetus of public funds, to communicate Italianness to non-Italians through mutually appreciated symbols, food and competition. The 1967 banquet followed the establishment of the Confratellenza a year earlier. This institution was preoccupied with swelling its pan-Italian membership with new members. For this reason it directed its finances and energies to an evening that promoted a sense of shared Italian *communitas*.

⁷⁴ *BC Archives*, GR-1449, Box 8 1966-7, File A-E-8, Vol. 1, Victoria, BC.

⁷⁵ *Ray Culos’ Personal Archive*, “Second Annual Cristoforo Colombo Banquet,” evening program, printed by Confratellenza Italo-Canadese, 7 October 1967, Burnaby, BC.

The Making and Conquest of Multicultural Italianness: 1971 - 1998

The campaign to establish the Confratellenza Italo-Canadese can be understood as part of a broader movement during the mid-to-late sixties among Italian Canadians (and Italian Americans) to, first, congregate as a single ethnic group and second, form political lobbies based on this configuration. The National Congress of Italian Canadians, for example, was established in 1974 to petition the federal government in areas of interest to Italian Canadians. Kathleen Conzen argues that this movement developed in part because of growing WASP anxieties about outsiders.⁷⁶ The aforementioned survey on attitudes towards Italians in Ontario during the 1950s supports this conjecture. Two decades later, the Italians of Vancouver were also the objects of xenophobic attitudes and negative stereotyping. In 1976, when the City of Vancouver formally rezoned a parcel of land along Grandview Highway for the construction of the Italian Cultural Centre, for example, over two hundred residents from the neighbourhood signed a petition demanding that City Hall abate the plan. The draft warned of “noisy festivals” and a “trattoria atmosphere,”⁷⁷ the implication being that Italians were less than ideal citizens and prone to social disorder. The appeal was rejected, but the whole process illustrated the often hostile social environment in which the Italians of Vancouver lived.

Xenophobic attitudes, however, were only one force influencing broader Italian cooperation. More important, the early seventies were marked by an epic struggle over what assumptions would form the basis of a broader Italian *communitas* in Vancouver

⁷⁶ She also cites the political mobilization of African Americans for civil rights as a second motivation. This connection is more difficult to make in the case of Italians in Canada, but is worthy of further investigation. Conzen, “The Invention of Ethnicity,” 30. Since its inception, the NCIC has also actively challenged negative stereotypes about Italians perpetuated in the media (particularly in films such as the *Godfather* trilogy).

⁷⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 27 February 1976, Sec. A, p. 8.

and, second, how these relationships would be expressed as Italianness. The Confratellenza encountered resistance to its attempt to bring all of the Italian clubs and societies under its auspices. Its membership primarily consisted of second and third generation Italian Canadians for whom Italy was an unfamiliar and culturally distant place. For this group, regional differences were antithetical to pan-Italian cooperation. Their version of *communitas* was an Italian Canadian melting pot, not an Italian multicultural mosaic.⁷⁸ The brotherhood was pan-Italian in composition but not premised on either a sense of loyalty to Italy or inclusion of its regional cultures. With the exception of the three societies (two of which were regional) that joined the Confratellenza, the other clubs and societies remained independent of a central institutional body. Most of these were regional or *paesani* in composition, and therefore unwilling to shed their respective *communitas* of regional bonds in exchange for membership. They identified primarily with limited geographical ties, rather than unfamiliar and generic bonds among Italian Canadians. These disparate groups came together during the seventies, but not in the way imagined by the Confratellenza. The Italian “community” divided into two camps—one that identified itself with both regional and pan-Italian ties and was open to formal exchanges with the Italian government, and another strictly pan-Italian in composition and opposed to Italian political intervention in local Italian affairs.⁷⁹

The impetus for a broad Italian *communitas* in Vancouver came from two political players: the Canadian and Italian governments. Two political developments provided a *modus vivendi* between pan-Italian and regional forms of *communitas*. First, in 1971 the

⁷⁸ The failure of the Confratellenza to build a *casa d'Italia* was also due in part to the inability of its president and other clubs to agree upon a plan. Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. II, 26-7.

⁷⁹ For an in depth analysis of personal attacks and battles in the media during this period see *Ibid.*, 90-94.

federal Trudeau government, in response to the Fourth Volume of the monumental *Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission*, declared Canada a “multicultural” society.⁸⁰ In the third pillar of the new policy Ottawa committed to “promoting creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity.”⁸¹ On an abstract level, the changes meant official recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of Italian Canadians. In one legislative move the federal government helped to diminish perceived contradictions between being “Italian” and “Canadian.” From this point forward, the Italians of Vancouver could proudly assert themselves as Italians and simultaneously declare their loyalty to Canada. In other words, by expressing and emphasizing their Italianness, they were acting in a way now declared to be quintessentially *Canadian*.

On a functional level, the government was willing to fund expressions of this layered identity.⁸² The Province of British Columbia and City of Vancouver also contributed to festive events. However, Italians could not always depend on government assistance. For the most part, public funds were only made available until the mid-1980s.⁸³ Archival records indicate strong financial support for pan-Italian cultural

⁸⁰ The fourth volume was more of an afterthought, a response to strong criticism from minority groups—most notably Ukrainian Canadians—to be recognized as what Trudeau later called the “third force” in Canadian society.

⁸¹ A key section from Trudeau’s speech reads: “The government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society.” Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau Responding to Volume 4 of the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Commissioners André Laurendeau and Davidson Dunton, 1971.

⁸² Funding was allocated by the newly minted Multiculturalism Directorate operated by the Department of the Secretary of State.

⁸³ The one exception after the mid-80s was federal support for “literary evenings” of Italian Canadian writers between 1987 and 1994. *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Annual Reports 1987-1994, Vancouver, BC. By the early 1980s the practice of funding so-called anachronistic cultural expression (particularly heritage festivals, derogatorily dubbed “singing and dancing” events) came under heavy criticism from legislators and scholars. A better alternative, it was proposed, was to address material inequalities caused by incongruous “race relations,” the second stage of Multiculturalism. A unit of this

initiatives before this time: \$333 333.00 from the province to build the Italian Cultural Centre in 1977; an annual stipend of \$1000.00 from the City to host “Italian Days” on Commercial Drive between 1977 and 1984; and \$500 dollar grant from the BC Government Cultural Services Branch for a commemorative plaque of Giuseppe Garibaldi.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, funding during the early years of Multicultural policy helped in small part to create spaces for Vancouver’s Italians to come together.

Second and more significant, during the early seventies the Italian Government began to take a keen interest in the cultural affairs of Italians throughout the diaspora. The Italian Government, in an effort to increase communication and support with Italian citizens abroad, passed a law that permitted consulates to fund cultural and educational projects in their spheres of influence. This process happened to coincide with the adoption of multiculturalism in Canada. Between the years 1973 and 1976, the Italian Parliament supported this legislation by increasing the local budget for consular educational and cultural programs from three to eleven million dollars.⁸⁵ This investment was aimed at four groups. In each case, the Consulate, an arm of the nation and composed of well-educated elite, proposed a mode of Italianness different from “Old World” forms practiced in Vancouver. The Italian Foreign Office stood for Italian

name was set up in 1981 to investigate participatory disparities in public life. Six years later the Conservative government ushered in the third stage with its “Multiculturalism Means Business” agenda.

⁸⁴ The sources for this information are as follows: Giovanni Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada: How a Community Centre is Born*, trans. into English by Felicity Lutz and Joyce Meyer (Florence, IT: Giunti Marzocco, 1977), 160; *City of Vancouver Archives*, Office of the City Clerk, 33-G-2 file 4, Vancouver, BC; *Ibid.*, 83-D-1, file 6; *Ibid.*, 239-G-4 file 6; and *BC Archives*, GR-1789 Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Government Services – Cultural Services Branch, Grants Files 1982/3 – 1983/4, Box 18, File 24, Victoria, BC. In March 1974, the Premier of BC personally asked Consul-General Germano to spearhead the Centre project. Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 160.

⁸⁵ An additional 5.5 million was granted for the salaries of Italian language instructors. The institution was also central to the creation of Italian language programs for both non-Italians and the offspring of Italian immigrants. These were held at a rented hall on Victoria Drive, Leonardo da Vinci Cultural Centre on Hastings Ave., and the grandiose Italian Cultural Centre, which replaced the former two locations in 1977. *Ibid.*, 78-9

nationalism, multiculturalism, individualism, progress, and high culture. The first group at which this definition of “Italian” was aimed were those born in Italy. A growing number of these migrants were returning their country of origin.⁸⁶ In fact, by 1977, the number of returning migrants was greater than emigrants to Canada.⁸⁷ The former were individuals who had found financial success in Canada and wished to retire in their original home. Cultural events sponsored by the Consulate served a pedagogical purpose for this group: they exposed the future returnees to a different and more contemporary version of the Italy than the one they left ten to twenty years earlier.⁸⁸ The Italian government had a different agenda for Italian emigrants who wished to remain in Canada: it wanted Italian citizens to integrate into Canadian society. Consul-General Germano equated integration with citizenship. He worried that a large percentage of emigrants were not pursuing this goal. His primary concern was that the general public and the three levels of Canadian government would not support endeavours in the Italian “community,” such as the Italian Cultural Centre or festivals, if Italian emigrants were perceived as resistant to fuller participation in Canadian society.⁸⁹

Foreign-born Italians comprised the third group. Italian law has since 1860 extended citizenship to those of Italian descent.⁹⁰ All who fell under this category could settle in Italy with relative ease. Italy saw these citizens abroad as cultural ambassadors

⁸⁶ In 1972, 4319 Italians left Canada for Italy. A decade earlier the number was 284. *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ In 1977, 2764 Italians returned to Italy. The number migrating to Canada was 2677. Table 1, Postwar Emigration to Italy and Return Migration from Italy, compiled in Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 204.

⁸⁸ Germano notes that in the late seventies 25 to 30 percent of Italians in Western Canada (Manitoba west to British Columbia) held Italian citizenship, but only 10 percent of this population would leave Canada. Most of these were destined for Italy. *Ibid.*, 73 and 24.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁹⁰ One has to be a descendant of an ancestor who was an Italian citizen after 1860. Only after 1948 could one claim Italian citizenship through matrilineage.

of Italianness in their respective countries.⁹¹ In the early seventies, Italian emigration to Canada was at its lowest level in a quarter-century and the Italian “community” of Vancouver was increasingly composed of the Canadian born.⁹² The Italian State worried that this cohort was unfamiliar with what it considered “contemporary” Italian culture. Through its consular arm, it directed educational projects at Italian Canadian children. Consul Giovanni Germano phrased the agenda in pedagogical terms. “We sought to maintain Italian as a way of improving the child’s identity and social progress.”⁹³ Many Canadian-born Italians knew only the regional dialects of their parents.⁹⁴ Additionally, the clubs and societies they attended celebrated “Old World” forms of Italianness such as picnics, banquets, and folk dances. The Consulate sought to ensure that these children’s understanding of what it meant to be Italian would not be limited to Old World cultural symbols and practices by helping to establish and fund Italian language courses and a new line of “high culture” festivals.

The fourth object of Consular policy was Canadian society itself. The Italian Government equated the new Canadian political climate of cross-cultural openness with popular sentiment.⁹⁵ It assumed that with better understanding non-Italians were more likely to appreciate things Italian and, by extension, seek harmonious relations with those of Italian descent. Additionally, the Italian government linked increased familiarity of non-Italians’ with the language, culture and customs of Italy with increased tourist

⁹¹ German, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 84.

⁹² In 1972, 4608 persons left Italy for Canada. This number is significantly lower than the characteristic “Second Wave” years of 1958 (28 564) and 1968 (19 774). Source: Data in L. Parai, *Immigration and Emigration of Professional and Skilled Manpower in the Post-War Period* (Ottawa 1965), Department of Manpower and Immigration (Ottawa 1962-78), compiled by Clifford Jansen and Lee La Cavera, *Fact Book on Italians in Canada* (Toronto: York University, 1981).

⁹³ Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 80.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹⁵ Consul Germano called the Italian foreign agenda and Canadian multiculturalism “uniting cultural policies.” *Ibid.*, 14.

revenue and interest in Italian imported goods.⁹⁶ The Italian Cultural Institute was established in 1980 as a space to familiarize non-Italians with these objectives. It was, however, a distinctly government initiative, staffed by Italian officials and independent of activities within the local Italian “community.”

The local Italian population was served by a new and different institution. The Consulate’s aims to familiarize Italian citizens and their children living in Vancouver with “modern” Italy and to open dialogue between Italians and non-Italians were made material in the Italian Cultural Centre in East Vancouver, which was built in 1977. The Centre brought Italians together into a single federation—a hitherto unachievable enterprise. It was not the first effort by the city’s Italians to build a *casa d’Italia*; however, prior to this time campaigners lacked the financial resources, political assistance, and in the case of the Confratellenza, broad support to sustain the project.⁹⁷ This campaign succeeded in large part because of financial assistance from two parties—the governments of British Columbia and Italy—and the efforts of the Consulate and a new generation of volunteers who shared the Consulate’s desire to promote an “up-to-date” version of Italy to Vancouver’s Italians. Roughly fifty Italian groups came together to form the Italian Folk Society of B.C., an organization that operated separately from the Consulate but enjoyed its financial support.⁹⁸

Despite intense opposition from neighbours fearful of a ‘trattoria atmosphere’ and the Confratellenza, which advocated a plebeian melting-pot Italian *communitas* in

⁹⁶ Luigi Sarno of Italian Cultural Institute, interviewed by author, 30 January 2006, Vancouver, BC.

⁹⁷ For a detailed account of the difficulties experienced by the Sons of Italy in the 1930s, the Comitato Attività Italiane during the 1950s and the Confratellenza Italo-Canadese, respectively, see Culos, *Vancouver’s Society of Italians*, Vol. I.

⁹⁸ Also, the Centre’s campaign would not have come to fruition without the dedication and work of many volunteers.

Vancouver, the Centre promoted a form of Italian cooperation that dovetailed nicely with Canadian multiculturalism. The Italian Folk Society of B.C. (which later became the Italian Cultural Centre Society) and its sponsor, the Italian Consulate, accommodated multiple “Italies of the mind.”⁹⁹ Then Consul Giovanni Germano found a balance between recognizing and supporting existing bonds (some pan-Italian but most regional) and uniting them under an inclusive pan-Italian banner. In the new ethos Vancouver’s Italians were part of a Canadian cultural mosaic, but *theirs* was also a multi-culture—a federation of pan-Italian, regional and *paesani* organizations. In multicultural Canada those Italians who celebrated their heritage asserted their place in the Canadian multicultural mosaic. Concomitantly, when Vancouver’s Italians expressed their limited affinities, the proud Furlan, Tuscan or Calabrese saw themselves as representative of what was “truly” Italian. Similarly, just as the Canadian polity brought minority groups into a national cultural framework, so the Italian Cultural Centre became the institutional adhesive for the Italian *multicultures* of Vancouver. The *communitas* of the Centre was a greater fragmentation of the “Italian” tile in the Canadian mosaic.

The Italian Cultural Centre and its parent organization, the Italian Folk Society of BC, actively pursued Italian diversity. First, they made possible the formation of new institutional bonds. Pan-Italian groups such as the Club Femminile Italiano emerged from the campaign to build the Centre. These upstarts and older assemblages maintained their independence as partners in the new federation, keeping alive their own festivities such as banquets and picnics. Many set up offices at the Centre, paid rent, and used the building for their own “private” celebrations. Other organizations, such as the Famee Furlane (est.

⁹⁹ The Italian Folk Society of BC was established in 1973 to coordinate cultural activities, and more important, to quarterback the campaign to build the Italian Cultural Centre in 1977. Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 52-3

1958) joined the federation but continued to use their own building.¹⁰⁰ Geographically-limited *paesani* groups were also encouraged. La Ciociara Societa' Culturale e Sportive, a fellowship of members from towns in the Province of Frosinone in Central Italy, for example, began to meet at the Centre in 1985.¹⁰¹ By 1984 all of the city's Italian clubs and societies were members of the Italian Cultural Centre.¹⁰² The establishment continues to carry its Italian multicultural character. Of the thirty-eight member societies which have used the facility since its inception in 1977, at least twenty-three are region-specific in nature.¹⁰³ However, the Centre only admitted clubs and societies that fit their ethnic criteria. In the mid-80s, an Eritrean Canadian institution requested membership and was rejected. Although Eritrea was an African colony of Italy between 1889 and 1943 and a large percentage of the population still speak Italian today, this group did not fit the Centre's definition of "Italian."¹⁰⁴

Interestingly, *individuals* were accepted into the Society regardless of ethnic background as long as they did not represent a non-Italian ethnic institution. This guideline suggested the existence of an Italian institutional core in which "others," but not other cultures, could be included. However, individual non-Italian members of the Society encountered additional boundaries. One could join the Society, but one could not

¹⁰⁰ The Famee Furlane building is located at 2605 East Pender Street in Vancouver, British Columbia.

¹⁰¹ Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol II, 138-9.

¹⁰² The construction of the Italian Cultural Centre from 1976-77 was marked by a struggle between the Confratellenza—the "older guard" of second and third-generation Italian Canadians who saw themselves as Canadian first and Italian second—and more recent arrivals who wished to both preserve and explore both components. The Confratellenza, however, finally admitted defeat and joined the Centre in 1984. It appears that certain individuals within the Italian "community" still objected to its presence in the Italian "community" at the end of the millennium. In 1998 *Festa Italiana*, the travelling exhibit sponsored by the *Royal BC Museum*, was held at the Vancouver Art Gallery rather than the Centre. A neutral site was considered a more suitable space for a festival dedicated to the local history of city's Italian population. *Ibid.*, 34-68.

¹⁰³ Statistics are for the 2006 year.

¹⁰⁴ This information was provided by a former Centre executive. L.S., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 9 March 2007.

be part of one of the pan-Italian, regional and *paesani* clubs that fell under its umbrella. The bases for inclusion in these groups remained both “ethnic” and geographical until the nineties.¹⁰⁵ In sum, the Centre made possible two levels of Italian *communitas*. Beyond this, a strange new coalition now expressed Italianness in the same space: previously unconnected regional and *paesani* groups, the pan-Italian Centre and its offshoots, and non-Italians. The clubs and societies however, continued to operate independently, retaining a rigidly-defined ethnic and geographical (in most cases, regional or *paesani*) criteria for membership.

Interestingly, membership and participation at the Centre were not considered equal. Participation was now open to both groups and individual performers. Expressions of Italianness were no longer treated as the preserve of persons with a common “ethnic” or regional heritage. One only needed to share an *interest* in Italian culture to participate in the festivities. The Consulate instigated this practice in 1976, when the Vancouver Music School was invited to sing ballads by Vivaldi and Fiosco at a festival it sponsored.¹⁰⁶ The Centre, designed to be an institutional beacon of Italianness to non-Italians, followed the former’s example. In 1982, a group of students from the University of British Columbia shared their experiences after spending a summer studying art and language in Venice. Non-Italian musicians also played Italian favourites at the annual Italian Week and Anniversary celebrations.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ See page 60 for examples of societies and clubs that opened their membership to non-Italians during the 1990s.

¹⁰⁶ The Consulate worked directly with a new institution called COASCIT (Italian Committee for Educational and Cultural Activities), which later became the Italian Folk Society of BC and was again renamed the Italian Cultural Centre Society, its current moniker. Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 128-30.

¹⁰⁷ *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Reports, 1982, 1983, 1986, 1990-1, 1996, Vancouver, BC. The Centre also accepted non-Italian applicants for employment. The current Cultural Coordinator, for example, is fluent in Italian but is of Ukrainian descent.

After the establishment of the Centre, the Italian Cultural Centre Society (formerly the Italian Folk Society of BC) set in motion an itinerary of festivals at which multicultural Italianness was articulated. These events demonstrated the compatibility of national and regional loyalties. The liberal Italian state came into being in 1870, but only became a republic at the close of the Second World War. The Centre and the Consulate, respectively, made the Italian polity *present* at functions in Vancouver. The first multicultural Italian event in Vancouver, a special gala evening of Italian cuisine and folkloric displays at Queen Elizabeth Theatre in June of 1974, marked the *Festa della Repubblica* or Birth of the Italian Republic.¹⁰⁸ More than 3000 people attended.¹⁰⁹ National allegiance was expressed through various acts and displays: young boys donned uniforms of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the revolutionary hero of the *Risorgimento* or Unification of the Italian states; attendants sang both Italian and Canadian national anthems; and the Alpini or mountain corps veterans of the Second World War marched in unison to the rhythm of their own instruments. The ceremony continued annually until the year 1977, but was later revived at the Centre in 1984 to smaller but consistent crowds.¹¹⁰ The later inclusions of the Bersaglieri and Carabinieri veterans—former employees of the State and symbols of national strength—were fitting additions to the patriotic atmosphere.¹¹¹ The Centre’s Anniversary Banquets were other occasions at which the relationship between Rome and Italians of Vancouver was reinforced. Honoured guests during the 1980s included an Italian Ambassador, Italian Consuls-

¹⁰⁸ Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 125-130.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹¹⁰ *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society of Vancouver, Annual Report 1983, Vancouver, BC.

¹¹¹ The Alpini are the elite mountain warfare soldiers of the Italian Army. The Bersaglieri are an infantry corps within the Italian Army. The Carabinieri are one of the two Italian police forces. *La Polizia* is the other.

General and numerous Canadian politicians.¹¹² The *Festa Della Repubblica* and Anniversary Banquet not only affirmed the glories of the Italian state, but also made visible the present link between the foreign polity and the Italians of Vancouver.¹¹³ The performances on stage declared that the Italian state was not “left behind” by the migration process but remained an active force in the cultural life of its ex-patriots.

Religion—specifically, Roman Catholicism—was an important national component of Italian multiculturalism. The first mass held at the Cultural Centre honoured the birth of St. Francis of Assisi, the canonical patron saint of Italy. More than 800 people attended the inaugural ceremony in October 1982.¹¹⁴ The mass became an annual event.¹¹⁵ Previously, the holiday was observed by the parish of his namesake.¹¹⁶ By extending the celebration from inside church walls to this secular space and incorporating religious forms as expressions of Italianness, the Centre executive tacitly acknowledged the central position of Roman Catholicism in the Italian *communitas*. Additionally, St. Francis served as an adhesive to unite Italians under a single “national” umbrella. The capacity crowd indicated strong support for the event. The regional Italian groups did not consider honouring the country’s patron saint a threat to more established

¹¹² The list included: H.E. Briagant Colonna, Italian Ambassador to Canada; Senator Libero Della Briotta; Charles Caccia, Federal Minister of Labour; and most frequently, the presiding Consuls of Western Canada. *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Reports 1977-2000, Vancouver, BC.

¹¹³ There is scant evidence of Italian political figures attending local events prior to the mid-70s. A notable exception is the 1967 Centennial “Christopher Columbus” Banquet of the Confratellenza Italo-Canadese, at which Alessandro Farace, the Italian Ambassador to Canada, was present. *Ray Culos’ Personal Archive*, Christopher Columbus Banquet Program, 1967, Burnaby, BC.

¹¹⁴ *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Report 1982, Vancouver, BC.

¹¹⁵ There were other important but infrequent religious services; for example, one to mark the visit of the Italian President in 1986. *Vancouver (BC) L’Eco d’Italia* 31, no. 24, 19 June 1986, p. 10-11.

¹¹⁶ The Parish of St. Francis of Assisi was never an Italian national parish, but rather held Italian-language services alongside English masses for the greater number of non-Italian parishioners. The first and only Italian “national” parish in Vancouver was Our Lady of Sorrows on East Pender Street. It took on this distinction following a letter from its priest, Fr. Della-Torre, to Archbishop of Vancouver Rev. William Duke in 1960. *Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver Archives*, Sacred Heart Parish File, Letter from Fr. Della-Torre to Rev. William Duke D.D., 6 April 1960, Vancouver, BC.

practice because it did not replace, but co-existed with commemorations at their own institutions. The Trentino Alto-Adige Cultural Society, for example, paid tribute to San Giuseppe, the FAMEE Furlane celebrated San Martino, and the Associazione Culturale Pugliese della BC honoured the Madonna of Bitritto.¹¹⁷

The significance of introducing St. Francis to the local pantheon of religious celebration went beyond the accommodation of national and regional religious identities. To a certain degree, Anthony of Padua, already served as the unofficial patron saint for Italian Canadian immigrants. As patron saint of shipwrecks and travellers, many migrants identified with him, giving him greater significance than back in Italy. The largest annual Italian religious procession in Toronto, for example, bears his name. So too does the Italian language parish in Trail. The selection of Anthony by these “communities” may have been guided by practical considerations. Italians in the New World came from a plethora of towns and cities, each of which has its own saint and festival. Thus, it may have been easier for parishes, pan-Italian and regional clubs to take the path of least resistance and collectively abandon these celebrations and create a new one. The regional Circolo Abruzzese Society in Vancouver chose this option, and designated St. Anthony the object of their annual banquet.¹¹⁸ That the Consulate and new generation of volunteers selected the canonical patron saint of Italy—rather than the one adopted by many Italians abroad—to communicate Italian unity demonstrated the extent to which the new multicultural Italianness was a local phenomenon with strong real and perceived links to the Italian state.

¹¹⁷ Sources for these events are, in order of appearance: Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. II, 153; B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC; and S.B., interviewed by author, 5 March 2007, Vancouver, BC.

¹¹⁸ G.A., interviewed by author, 19 December 2006, Vancouver, BC.

The Centre both launched and revived forms of national culture not practiced by Vancouver's Italians in the postwar period. In 1983 it celebrated *Carnivale*, the centuries-old Venetian celebration of wearing masks to disguise one's identity and class now celebrated throughout Italy. The occasion had not been observed in Vancouver since the Masquerade Balls of the Sons of Italy during the 1930s. Next, the Centre tried to introduce *Befana*, a holiday observed on January 6 since medieval times but nationalized more recently during the reign of Benito Mussolini.¹¹⁹ The first celebration in 1988 was poorly received.¹²⁰ Eight years later a short article in the first volume of *Quattro Stagione al Centro* or "Four Seasons at the Centre" complained that "Having adopted the more popular North American image of Santa Claus, today's [Italian Canadian] youth know relatively little about that kindred old spirit who delivered gifts to generations of Italian children now grown up with kids of their own."¹²¹ It is not clear whether volunteers rose to the challenge, as the Centre's annual reports do not list all events after the mid-90s. The difficulty the Centre experienced creating a *Befana* festival suggests that Italian Canadians celebrated the Christmas holiday according to North American customs rather than common practice in Italy, where acts of gift-giving are distributed between the two holidays. Christmas alone fulfilled this purpose among Italians in Vancouver.

Second, Italian multiculturalism, as engineered by the Centre and the Consulate, ensured that regional forms of Old World Italy were not limited to celebrations at the clubs and societies, but were complimentary to expressions of the national culture. The "Old World" was proudly displayed at three annual events: *Festa Della Repubblica*,

¹¹⁹ Popular Italian tradition holds that a witch visits the homes of children, leaving presents for the well-behaved and coal for delinquents.

¹²⁰ *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Report 1988, Vancouver, BC.

¹²¹ *Vancouver(BC) Quattro Stagioni al Centro* 1, no. 1 (1996): 5.

Italian Week Festival, and the Center's anniversary banquet.¹²² The regionally-based clubs and societies actively participated in the hosting of the first two of these events. The Sicilian Folk and Famee Furlane folkloric dance groups performed each year on Republic Day. Around the edges of the hall these and other groups set up booths and served delicacies native to their own regions to the pan-Italian audience. Volunteers decorated their kiosks with signifiers of their region such as flags, pictures of famous cathedrals and castles, and unique handicrafts.¹²³ Performers and servers wore traditional dress to make their regions physiognomically present. The Consulate supplied decorations to fit the image of Italian multiculturalism: regional maps, drapes, flags, posters of tourist hotspots and peasant attire from an earlier age.¹²⁴ The undertaking was coordinated by the Club Femminile Italiano, a pan-Italian women's group formed in 1978 to support cultural activities at the new Centre.

The Italian Days *festa* each June was the premiere space where the cultural strengths of the Italian state were expressed alongside those of its regions. The largest and most labour intensive celebration of the year, it was the signature event at which Vancouver's Italians showcased their culture to "outsiders." Expressed differently, it was the face of local Italianness seen by the greater community. Its popularity is evident from the strong financial support it received from non-Italian sources.¹²⁵ Italian Days initially

¹²² Some notable examples of pan-Italian clubs and societies were the Confratellanza Italo-Canadese and National Congress of Italian Canadians. There were also special interest groups, such as the Italian Rod and Gun Club, Italian Choir of B.C., Italian Canadian Bocce Club, and the Italian Canadian Sports Federation. Lacking any official links to Italy, these were pan-Italian but not "national."

¹²³ The Famee Furlane was particularly active in the demonstration of embroidery and handicrafts. *Il Centro*, the regular issue published by the Centre, praised them for this skill in 1977. *Vancouver (BC) Il Centro* 1, no. 8 (Aug/Sept 1977): 2.

¹²⁴ T.M., interviewed by author, Burnaby, BC, 8 December 2007.

¹²⁵ Donors included: the Italian Cultural Institute (an arm of the Consulate), local Italian newspaper *Il Marco Polo*, local Italian businesses, major banks, member societies, and for some years, the City of Vancouver. The City of Vancouver funded the festival from 1987 to 1992. The *Canadian Imperial Bank of*

took place along the storefronts of Commercial Drive, considered the heart of Vancouver's "Little Italy" before many upwardly mobile Italians moved to nearby suburbs in the mid-1970s.¹²⁶ In the early eighties it included a "mayor of Little Italy" competition. The elected winner one year was the owner of a travel agency on Commercial Drive.¹²⁷ The contest provided a way for local Italians to claim the street as an Italian space. At the same, this act illustrated, in a ludic sense, a sense of rootedness and belonging in the city of Vancouver. Italian Days was an outdoor affair on "The Drive" until a rowdy celebration of Italy's World Cup triumph in 1982 drove up security and insurance costs, eventually forcing its relocation to the Italian Cultural Centre in 1986, where it was renamed Italian Week.¹²⁸

Italian Week communicated the ethos of national and regional symbiosis within Italian multiculturalism. Many of its events were pan-Italian in nature. In 1986, for example, the Trevisani Nel Mondo Society coordinated the first annual bocce tournament. In so doing, they recalled a form of "picnic" entertainment common to clubs and societies in the pre-multicultural period to bring together Italians of various regional backgrounds. Regional expressions were particularly numerous. Clubs and societies—most notably those from Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Abruzzo, Veneto, and Sicily—performed

Commerce supported it 1992, followed by *VanCity Bank* in 1994. The absence of donor lists after 1999 makes it unclear if support from these institutions continued. See *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Reports, 1987-92, Vancouver, BC; L.S., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 9 March 2007.

¹²⁶ Commercial Drive is still considered by many Italians to be the symbolic heart of Vancouver's Italian population. Following Italy's 2006 World Cup victory, it was the destination of jubilant Italian soccer fans.

¹²⁷ L.S., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 9 March 2007.

¹²⁸ It is not clear whether Italian Canadians were responsible for the uproar or if the event attracted a group of non-Italian trouble-makers. One participant in the study claimed that the festival was "invaded" by non-Italians. L.S., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 9 March 2007.

In 1990, when a group considered reviving Italian Days on Commercial Drive, the liability insurance was set at \$14 000. Not surprising, the festival remained at the Italian Cultural Centre. Scott Simpson, "Festival back on Drive with Multicultural Daze," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 Aug. 1990, Sec. B, p. 3.

folkloristic dance and musical numbers.¹²⁹ The Centre sponsored guest vocalists to sing traditional ballads in various dialects. The first Italian Week at the Centre, for example, featured an evening of *Cantasud* or songs from Southern Italy. The parking lot was transformed into a makeshift Italian bazaar on Market Day. In 1989 the tourism magazine *Beautiful British Columbia* described vendors serving polenta, pork sausages, cornmeal patties brushed with olive oil and sprinkled with parmesan cheese, pizza ovens, and panzerotti—a repertoire that reflected some of Italy’s regional culinary diversity.¹³⁰ Demonstrably, guests to the *festa* were presented with a layered multicultural version of Italianness. Certain activities belonged to the entire “Italian” group while others were the custody of regional segments. Considered together, *Festa della Repubblica*, Italian Days and the anniversary banquet were formative events in the local Italian subculture. Through them participants were able to see themselves as a single ethnic *communitas*—diverse in dialect, landmarks, tradition, material culture and culinary practice, but bonded by national origin.

Italianness as High Culture

The mid-seventies saw the complementary pairing of national and regional expressions of Italianness in cultural events. However, Italian multiculturalism, as it was conceived during this period, came to incorporate an additional component best described as Italian high culture. As mentioned, the Italian Consulate was assisted by a new generation of Italian volunteers in its effort to build the Centre and coordinate activities.

¹²⁹ The participants were, respectively, the FAMEE Furlane, Circolo Abruzzese, Veneto Folkloristic Group, and Sicilian Folkloristic Club. *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Reports, 1986, Vancouver, BC.

¹³⁰ Ian Street, “Little Italy Goes Big,” *Beautiful British Columbia* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 20. During the 1980s the Circolo Abruzzese added the more esoteric porchette or roast pig to the fare. Polenta and other corn-based dishes are native to the north; parmesan cheese is made in the north-central city of Parma; and panzerotti is a southern invention also popular in Calabria and Puglia.

Many were immigrants who arrived after 1967, the year the Canadian government established the “points system” for entry.¹³¹ This model heavily favoured well-educated applicants. A small number of Italian arrivals after this point were financially endowed and well educated. They spoke the official Italian of the academy and modern literature, rather than regional dialects. Also, they left an Italy that was much more economically stable and prosperous than that of the fifties and sixties, the period during which most of Vancouver’s Italians emigrated. Understandably, they carried with them a very different “Italy of the mind”—marked by progress, individual achievement and the high arts—that differed from the so-called “Old World” cultural forms that originated in the Italian countryside but were still being observed and reinterpreted at local Italian festivals. In short, they were a different *class* of Italian immigrants. Anna Terrana, a key figure in the founding of Italian-language newspaper *Il Marco Polo*, future president of the Centre and Member of Canada’s Parliament, was characteristic of this group.¹³² The new generation also included second-generation Italian Canadians who for certain reasons had abstained from formal social bonds. Together this coalition provided a valuable cache of volunteers for Consular and Centre cultural initiatives.

The intent to “modernize” Italianness was made clear in a statement by Consul-General Dott. Gianfranco Manigrassi: “We are promoting an updated image of Italy in the minds of those who may have left the country 30 or more years ago.”¹³³ “Up-to-date” meant expanding the current expressions of Italianness beyond forms considered to be

¹³¹ See Table 9.1, Immigration Sections Factors under the Points System, Canada, 1967, in Manpower and Immigration Canada, *The Immigration Program: Canadian Immigration and Population Study* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1974).

¹³² The founder of *Il Marco Polo* was Rino Vultaggio. Culos, *Vancouver’s Society of Italians*, Vol. II, 36-9, 50-2, 201-3, 225-233; L.S., interviewed by author, 9 March 2007; Germano, *The Italians of Western Canada*, 53-6.

¹³³ Quoted in Street, “Little Italy Goes Big,” 21.

Old World. One person interviewed for this study from the new generation of volunteers had never seen a performance of Italian folkloric dance before immigrating to Canada.¹³⁴ The introduction of high cultural forms served the pedagogical purpose of educating Second Wave Italian immigrants, their descendants and non-Italians about a mode of Italianness with which they were unfamiliar. Despite their apparent, even antithetical, differences, Italian *haute culture* and the Old World were paired together at new Italian festivals as markers of Italianness.

Forms of Italian high culture were first visible at “Venice Lives,” an eight-day exhibition at the Italian Cultural Centre in October 1978. The event was funded and endorsed by the Italian regional government of Veneto, but carried out by a cadre of Italian Canadian volunteers.¹³⁵ Vancouver Mayor Jack Volrich gave the festivities official sanction by declaring “Venice Week.”¹³⁶ “Venice Lives” declared purpose was to advance publicity about the recent restoration of Venice’s historical buildings and art treasures, but it also presented an “up-to-date” Italianness to the larger community. Much of this was conveyed through a high-brow lens: art historians lectured on the city’s architectural beauty; a Venetian glass maker demonstrated his craft at the downtown Eaton’s department store; visitors were able to visualize recent restorations through slide shows and art displays; and a local Italian theatre company, “I Commedianti of Vancouver,” performed *Anonimo Veneziano* in English for the first time.¹³⁷

It was not the intended purpose of the organizing committee to replace with Old World forms of Italianness with high culture. Rather, it sought to demonstrate their

¹³⁴ L.S., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 9 March 2007.

¹³⁵ *Ray Culos’ Personal Archive*, “Venice Lives,” Program of Events, p. 2, 1978, Burnaby, BC.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

compatibility. The committee asked the Trevisani Nel Mondo di Vancouver, a society representing descendants from a province close to Venice, to host an evening of Venetian cuisine and folk entertainment.¹³⁸ A more outlandish “folk” event was the *gondolieri* race at Britannia Public Pool.¹³⁹ Presidents from various Italian institutions and local celebrities each commandeered a “gondolog” to mimic, in a humorous and palpably awkward fashion, the famous mode of transportation through the canals of Venice. The contest achieved the *multicultural* purpose of garnering the interest and participation of other Italian regional cultures in an event dedicated to the culture of a single region of Italy. It was also strikingly similar to the friendly competitions at annual picnics such as tug-of-war, egg toss and potato sack races. Though not an activity practiced by regions outside of Venice, the boat races, like picnic games, were an entertaining way for Italians of various regional institutions to come together.

Expressions of high culture also played an important role at the Italian Cultural Centre’s two major annual celebrations: Italian Week and the anniversary banquet. The 1989 Italian Week festival, for example, featured an exhibit of a local craftsman’s stringed instruments. Members of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra performed a concert, each playing one of his creations. Other years featured demonstrations by master ballroom dancers; live theatre in the piazza; art lectures on opera composer Giuseppe Verdi and the Risorgimento; poetry reading; and live operatic performances.¹⁴⁰ Exhibits at the 1983 and 1987 anniversary banquets included paintings and sculptures by local

¹³⁸ The Trevisani Nel Mondo di Vancouver is the local chapter of an international federation of societies of the same name and regional origin.

¹³⁹ Ibid. The gondola re-emerged at numerous festive events. The Comitato Culturale Veneto—a group of Italian Canadians of Venetian descent—re-used it as a symbol of their region. At the 1988 Pacific National Exhibition parade a man dressed up as a *gondoliere* and “Miss Veneto” waved to onlookers from the bow. Twelve years later, the gondola and its bearers competed in a parade in Victoria. *Vancouver (BC) L’Eco d’Italia* 33, no. 37, 22 September 1988, p. 9; and Ibid., 44, no. 35, 14 September 2000, p.10.

¹⁴⁰ *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Report 1987, Vancouver, BC.

Italians and, in 1989, a “literary evening” featured seventeen writers representing three generations of Italian Canadians. The latter became an annual fixture at the celebration in part because of federal grants from the Canada Council and Multiculturalism Canada. Interestingly, regional groups, formerly the bastions of Old World Italianness, began to embrace high culture forms. The Literary Evening in 1987, for example, was sponsored in part by the Circolo Abruzzese and FAMEE Furlane.¹⁴¹ Apparently, within two decades some regional societies were embracing efforts of the new generation of Italian Canadians and the Italian Consulate to inculcate high culture into the Italian “community.” Following the lead of their umbrella organization, the Italian Cultural Centre Society, these groups identified themselves with both Old World and high culture expressions of Italianness.

The anniversary banquet served a pedagogical purpose in the production of Italianness. Unlike Italian Week, which was open to the larger community, the banquet was intended for members of the Italian Cultural Centre Society. Most of those in attendance were people of Italian descent who were members of the roughly four dozen member clubs and societies.¹⁴² The Centre used this occasion to make two statements about the local Italian *communitas*: first, that although membership to the Centre was open to non-Italians, Italians themselves formed the core of the local *communitas*; and second, a certain type of Italian embodied the best qualities of the group. This dual objective was accomplished through the Centre’s Italian Hall of Fame. Each year one or

¹⁴¹ An unrelated “Literary Week” in 1986 attracted large crowds to the Centre for screenings of Italian cinematic legends Fellini, Ferreri and Franco Zeffirelli. *Italian Cultural Centre Archives*, Italian Cultural Centre Society, Annual Reports, 1983-1989, Vancouver, BC; *Vancouver (BC) L'Eco d'Italia* 33, no.37, 22 September 1988, p. 3. The 1986 celebration featured an exhibit on contributions by Italian Canadian architects to the city of Vancouver. *Vancouver(BC) L'Eco d'Italia* 31, no. 26, 3 July 1986, p. 13.

¹⁴² L.S., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 9 March 2007.

two exceptional Italians were inducted into this fellowship. These individuals were first, of Italian descent, and second, usually figures who made contributions to Italian high culture.¹⁴³

By publicly initiating someone into the pantheon of the city's premier Italian institution, the Centre was able to both affirm and "manage" the figures and qualities that best represented its perception of Italianness. The list of the endowed included: a sculptor, priest, cyclist, professor, politicians, teacher, soccer player, and a hockey player. Interestingly, both the Italian Cultural Centre in Vancouver and the Colombo Lodge in Trail have a portrait of the same hockey player in their halls of fame. The star goaltender, Cesar Maniago, spent his formative years in Trail and then played much of his professional career for the Vancouver Canucks franchise. As a result, two Italian societies from two different cities claimed him as a representative of their *communitas*. Another peculiar act was the posthumous election of Charles Marega, a sculptor from Friuli-Venezia-Giulia who designed many of the city's outstanding artistic landmarks, including the statue of Captain Vancouver at City Hall, detail work on the Burrard Bridge and the lion statues flanking the Lion's Gate Bridge. A link was made between Marega and the present-day *communitas*, despite the fact that he was born in Gorizo before the inauguration of the Italian state, an Italian-speaking region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and passed away decades before the creation of the Italian Cultural Centre. Each of the inductees attested to the heights of local Italian potential and embodied the qualities with which the selection committee sought to identify the *communitas*. Each figure in the pantheon was at once Italian, Canadian, and Vancouverite, three titles shared with those in attendance. Moreover, the fact that all inductees were ethnic Italians

¹⁴³ This statement is based on an observation of the Centre's Hall of Fame display in the library wing.

indicates that descent still mattered. Non-Italians could be members of the Centre and even perform at festivals, but the core of the Italian *communitas* consisted of individuals with Italian ancestry.

The chief demonstration of Italian high culture in Vancouver occurred when the city hosted the World Exposition in 1986. The local Italian population was not directly involved in the process. Instead, the Italian Pavilion was entirely funded and operated by the Italian government through the local Consulate. The celebration was significant because it demonstrated how different the Italian State's version of Italianness was from that presented at Italian festivals in Vancouver. The Pavilion was not a display of Italian multiculturalism—a Vancouver phenomena that hooked together the regional and national, Old World and high culture—but how the Italian government wished Italy to be perceived by non-Italians. The Italian Foreign Office clarified their position early in the planning stages. The Expo Communications and Marketing Department wished to include a strong folkloristic dance and cultural display component. It sent out 26 000 applications to “potential amateur groups for performance at Expo 86.”¹⁴⁴ The Consulate—the institution responsible for the Italian Pavilion—denied the request, ensuring that only forms of Italian high culture would be visible to visitors.¹⁴⁵

The theme for Expo 86 was “Innovation in Transportation.”¹⁴⁶ Upon confirmation of Italy's participation at the World Exposition in 1984, BC Minister for Expo 86 Claude Richmond exclaimed:

¹⁴⁴ *BC Archives*, GR-1986, Box 140, File 33, Victoria, BC.

¹⁴⁵ Folkloristic events took place at the Canadian Pavilion in a series called “A Taste of Centuries Past.” *BC Archives*, GR-1986 Box 140, File 36, Expo Commission, News Release, July 1985, Victoria, BC.

¹⁴⁶ The Exposition was originally dubbed “Transpo 86,” a title dropped early in the planning stage.

As school children, Canadians learn of the glories of the ancient Roman roads and viaducts and follow the travels of Marco Polo, Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Giovanni Caboto, Italy's famous explorers. It is with great pleasure that we welcome Italy, a leader in transportation for over 2,000 years, to Expo 86.¹⁴⁷

The events and displays at the Italian Pavilion, however, did not reproduce the image of Italy portrayed in Richmond's tribute. Instead, Italy was presented as a place of progress at the cutting edge of technological advancement. Rather than a repository of past accomplishments in transportation, organizers from the Italian government emphasized present-day innovations. These fit well with the "up-to-date" version of Italy espoused by Consul-General Manigrassi. Above all, Italian genius was given the sanction of perpetuity. The Italian Foreign Office did not want observers to distinguish modern Italy from the great Italian pioneers of innovation, but rather to see them as emblematic of an Italian innovative spirit that has existed for millennia. When the Expo Programming Department sent a request to the Italian government for a nineteenth-century Sicilian horse cart to be displayed at the international "Land Plaza," the latter balked, affirming that "Italy does not wish to be stereotyped with items such as gondolas, Sicilian carts, etc."¹⁴⁸ In the end the Sicilian cart was provided, but on the condition that it be placed beside a 1954 Fiat Turbo, the inspiration for the "Batmobile." Displayed alone, the cart would have been out of sync with the "modern" material objects on display at Expo 86.

The Italian Pavilion welcomed visitors with a pamphlet bearing the inscription "Una Nazione che si muove" or "A Nation on the Move." The exhibits made this claim material. Once inside visitors saw an *Iveco* amphibious vehicle docked on False Creek,

¹⁴⁷ The coordinating body of Expo 86, *The Expo Commission*, worked diligently for four years to convince the Italian government to send a delegation. In 1983 they hired an Italian Canadian living in Florence to liaise between the Commission and Rome and coordinate promotional work through the Canadian Embassy. The commission even requested that Pope John Paul II bless BC Place, the premiere site of Expo 86 activities, during his 1984 visit to the city. *BC Archives*, Expo Commission, News Release, 29 March 1984, GR-1986, Box 100, File 2, Victoria, BC.

¹⁴⁸ *BC Archives*, GR-1986, Box 6, File 3, Victoria, BC.

an 11 metre high trail of a 727 aircraft manufactured by *Aeritalia Boeing*, an old and new *Alfa Romeo* on a revolving platform, and a picture of an Italian satellite. Elderly and disabled visitors were transported between sites by an “ecological urban bus” donated by Fiat.¹⁴⁹ Perhaps most eye-catching was a display of more than 100 luxury car models by Italian manufacturers *Alfa Romeo*, *Ferrari* and *Maserati*. Interpretive exhibits covered the following subjects: the preservation of Umbria’s old cities and railway stations; the history of fibre optics from Marconi to the present; da Vinci’s visionary sketches as precursor to modern aeronautics; and water navigation from the ancient Roman *biga* ship to the Italian high-speed watercraft.¹⁵⁰ In the case of historical Umbria, the focus was not so much on Italy’s architectural past but the ways that modern Italian technology carried its legacy into the present. The positioning of the great inventors alongside modern technological breakthroughs, however, also asserted an Italian “claim” to their origins and development. The histories of air travel, sea navigation and telecommunications were, in short, *Italian* stories. The Pavilion also hosted a breakthrough technological event: the first video-conference between the North American West and Italy.¹⁵¹ The implications of this breakthrough were not lost on pavilion visitors: Italians on both sides of the Atlantic made it possible.

While the Pavilion’s displays communicated progress, live performances featured the zenith of Italian high culture. First, to mark the *Festa della Repubblica* in June, ninety-one performers from Italy and 150 local Italian Canadian volunteers and Pavilion

¹⁴⁹ *BC Archives*, GR-1986, Box 576, File 19, Victoria, BC.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Archival records do not identify the subject of this conference.

visitors competed in a game of human chess.¹⁵² The town of Marostica has observed this event since 1454. To mark its exportation to Vancouver, Rome provided over 300 fifteenth-century costumes, weapons, and four horses with riders. Actors performed under the glare of powerful stage lights to the rhythm of classical music from a loudspeaker system.¹⁵³ The scale of the operation and the phantasmagoria it produced left little doubt that the mode of Italianness on display was both modern and sophisticated. As with the pairing of deceased inventors and their crude progeny alongside modern machinery, the Human Chess Game of Marostica was an Old World phenomena refashioned in cutting edge fabric.

Second, prominent Italian fashion designers collaborated with their Canadian counterparts for an evening of high fashion. Television audiences in both Italy and Canada witnessed the spectacle. Third and most impressive, *Teatro alla Scala di Milano*, the most illustrious opera company in the world, made its first visit to North America since 1976.¹⁵⁴ A company of 350 musicians, vocalists and support crew performed Giuseppe Verdi's *I Lombardi* and *Messa ad Requiem* at the Orpheum Theatre for ten days. One memorable evening the troupe converted Pacific Coliseum, a hockey arena, into a makeshift opera house for more than 6000 guests. The *Vancouver Sun* marvelled at the 4500 square meters of floor to ceiling fabric, gold valances and red doors. "Instead of [hockey pictures, beer and dogs]," it observed, "patrons lined up to buy antipasto and

¹⁵² The legend of the match's origins follows that in 1454 two noblemen sought the hand of the Lord of Marostica's daughter in marriage. Instead of a fatal duel to decide the best candidate, the Lord opted for a game of chess. *BC Archives*, GR-1986, Box 100, File 2, Media Opportunities, News Release, 13 June 1986, Victoria, BC.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ The most recent performance took place in Washington, D.C. *BC Archives*, GR-1986, Box 100, File 2, News Release, 17 March 1986.

were in a concourse transformed by banners, fabric-swathed lights and a piazza with trees.”¹⁵⁵

The modes of Italianness presented at Expo 86 conveyed innovation, progress and cultural sophistication. The pavilion reflected on a grand scale the efforts put into motion over a decade earlier by the re-commissioned Consulate and a new generation of Italians. More compelling, it provided a distinction between the Italianness of the Italian Government and that of the Italian Cultural Centre, and demonstrated the uniqueness of local expressions of Italian identity. The former’s suppression of Old World forms showed that the Centre, a thoroughly Italian multicultural institution where forms of Old World Italy shared festival space with high culture, was a thoroughly Vancouver phenomenon.

Vancouver Italianness: A Compromise

Festa Italiana, introduced at the beginning of the first chapter, provides an appropriate conclusion to the postwar production of Italian *communitas* and Italianness in Vancouver. It was an initiative by the Royal BC Museum in 1998 to mark the contributions of Italians to the province of British Columbia. Museum officials worked with local volunteers in five host cities: Kamloops, Trail, Fernie-Sparwood, Vancouver, and Powell River. The greater emphasis, as expressed in the letter from the RBCM to coordinators, was local expression.¹⁵⁶ A “community” representative was selected and given a grant for the project. Well acquainted with local figures and club leaders, she formed a committee of thirteen members who ultimately determined what exhibits would

¹⁵⁵ “No beer and hot dogs as opera takes over rink,” *Vancouver Sun*, 25 August 1986, pg. 1.

¹⁵⁶ An excerpt from the letter: “What you may not know is that it is very unusual for a museum to create a traveling exhibit using the artifacts from each community...Our RBCM collection has only been used to support your artifacts.” “Royal BC Museum’s ‘Festa Italiana’ Travelling Exhibit.”

be displayed. Interestingly, the Italian Government and the Italian Cultural Centre were not directly involved in the exhibition. At *Festa Italiana* Italians expressed themselves independent of the two institutions that had been most active in the construction Italian identities and social bonds during the previous twenty-five years.¹⁵⁷ As such, the event indicated the extent to which a quarter-century of changes had taken root within the Italian population itself.

With the notable absence of Italian nationalism, the evening demonstrated the extent to which multicultural Italianness had taken root within the quarter-century since the entrance of the Italian Consulate and a new generation and *class* of volunteers. Exhibits carried the idea of a local “community” that was contemporaneously pan-Italian and regional, Old World and high culture. The theme ‘Italians as artisans’ bridged together these supposed antipodes. The virtues of food, family, folklore and fraternity were expressed alongside those of the high arts, modernity, liberalism and progress. One participant framed Italian craftsmanship in both historical and geographical terms. In her words, it was “the art that some of the Italians brought with them from the old country.”¹⁵⁸ In other words, artisanry was a capacity forged in Italy and transferred to Vancouver via a special group of immigrants. She also emphasized its cross-cultural and class significance: “Artisanry is the work that Italians do here, what they’re known for. I don’t think [Vancouver’s] Italians consider themselves working-class.”¹⁵⁹ Even though working-class consciousness is a difficult concept to gauge, her statement reflects the fact unlike other Canadian cities such as Toronto, or more important, Trail, Vancouver has

¹⁵⁷ C.D., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 18 December, 2006.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

never had a significant manufacturing sector.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, the argument that Italians are popularly associated with artisanry is telling because the greatest proportion of Italian immigrants in British Columbia since the Second World War have been semi-skilled manual labourers—particularly in the fields of construction and road repair. In the 1971 Census, for example, 43.4 percent fit this description.¹⁶¹ Vancouver’s Italian population composed more than half the provincial total, suggesting a sizeable blue-collar cohort. This reality was not emphasized at *Festa Italiana*.

Bound together with the title of “artisans,” the Italians of Vancouver were presented as a “community” marked by both Old World collectivist and modern high culture achievements. However, greater emphasis was placed on the latter. Old World forms of Italianness included a bocce-playing clinic and tournament, folk dancing by regional groups, and a workshop where female volunteers knit traditional handicrafts. The historical section was a tribute to high culture artisanry. The list of exceptional local Italian Canadians at *Festa Italiana* resembled the hall of fame at the Italian Cultural Centre. It included: Angelo Calori, architect of Europe Hotel or “flat-pan building” in the historic Gastown quarter; sculptor Charles Marega; Bruno Freschi, architect of BC Place Stadium and the giant “Science World” sphere for Expo 86; and the minds behind more recent high-profile projects such as the restoration of the Orpheum and Queen Elizabeth

¹⁶⁰ See Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*. Iacovetta shows that an Italian working-class consciousness in Toronto grew between the years of 1947 and 1961 in part due to mistreatment and threats to worker safety in the construction and manufacturing industries. These dangers posed an exceptional threat to the Italian male because they compromised his traditional position as family breadwinner.

¹⁶¹ This statistic represents provincial numbers and therefore includes a large number of Italian manufacturing workers from Trail. Statistics do not exist for the city of Vancouver. Blue-collar work is categorized as “processing, machining, construction, transport and other.” Canada Census (1971), Public Use Sample Tapes, Table 2.6, Occupational Divisions of Total and Italian Ethnic Labour Force in Canada, Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, in Jansen, *Education and Social Mobility of Immigrants*, 37.

theatres. A calendar on Italian contributions to Vancouver was sold as a visual reminder of these prolific Italians.¹⁶²

The spirit of high artistry was expressed in real time by volunteers. Fourteen different artisans performed their craft—among them, a violin maker, sculptor, mosaic artist, a man who did fine plaster work, and a stone mason. Through the movements of the performers' bodies, visitors were able to visualize a historical link between Calori, Marega, Freschi, and the present Italian Canadian population of Vancouver. Visitors could also conclude that local Italian artisanry—with the possible exception of the stone mason and the handicraft workshop—was not semi-skilled labour but the work of fine craftsmen.¹⁶³ Certain historical figures did not fit the description of high culture, but were “modern” in the sense of embodying an entrepreneurial spirit. Among these was a profile on the Tosi family who, during the 1950s, disliked local tomatoes so much they fought Canadian tariffs to import them from Italy.¹⁶⁴ *Festa Italiana* told visitors that Vancouver's Italian community was linked to an Old World past, but even more strongly connected to entrepreneurialism, craftsmanship and creativity.

Festa Italiana marked the most recent stage in the ongoing construction of Italian *communitas* and Italianness in Vancouver. It also came at a time when bonds built around Old World associations of family, fraternity and folklore were declining. Many of the member (especially regional) societies of the Italian Cultural Centre that fit this description had aging and dwindling memberships and were struggling to attract younger

¹⁶² C.D., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 18 December 2006.

¹⁶³ Other events included: short vignettes by the Comedie dell'Arte, literature readings by Italian writers, and the launch of Ray Culos' first volume of *Vancouver's Society of Italians*. C.D., interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, 18 December 2006.

¹⁶⁴ There were also photos and short descriptions of small independent proprietors on Main Street, the first local hub of Italian commercial activity. Ibid.

generations. For example, the men's and women's divisions of the FAMEE Furlane and Circolo Abruzzese, respectively, amalgamated during the 1990s in order to survive.¹⁶⁵ More compelling, in 1995 the FAMEE Furlane followed the example set by the Italian Cultural Centre eighteen years earlier and extended membership to Italians from outside their region and to non-Italians. About this time the Associazione Culturale Pugliese Della BC admitted both non-Pugliese and non-Italians into their association.¹⁶⁶ These were portentous acts. Ironically, the groups recognized that the future existence and expression of their respective regional *communitas* depended on the participation of those who had formerly fallen outside of it.

In conclusion, the postwar construction of Italian identity in Vancouver followed a complex course. Presentations of Italianness were intimately linked to the institutions that coordinated them. As the collaborative basis for Italian social bonds changed over time, so too changed the modes through which being Italian was expressed. The early seventies were a watershed period in this process. Before this time the Italian "community" was both spatially and occupationally fragmented. Largely because of these limitations, the city's Italian clubs and societies operated independently of one another. Each group observed the same Old World events of banquets and picnics, but recast them to express their own geographically-based sense of *communitas*. Most of the Italians at these events were semi-skilled emigrants, for whom life in Italy was an unpleasant struggle, and their kin. Together they celebrated Old World forms of being Italian with which they were familiar. On certain occasions, such as picnics, these forms cut across

¹⁶⁵ B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC; G.A., interviewed by author, 19 December 2007, Vancouver, BC.

¹⁶⁶ B.T., interviewed by author, 25 January 2007, Vancouver, BC; S.B., interviewed by author, 5 March 2007, Vancouver, BC. The one limitation to non-Pugliese and non-Italian members is that they could not become president of the society.

regional lines, but as a rule geographical and cultural distinctions were made between the group staging the event and “others”—whether they were Italians from other regions or non-Italians.

The entrance of the Canadian and, more significantly, Italian governments into the cultural life of Vancouver’s Italians disrupted this pattern. On a material level, financial incentives made possible the Italian Cultural Centre, the first space where Italians of all regions came together. Second, by forming the Italian Folk Society of BC, the Italian Consulate introduced a basis for collaboration attractive to the disconnected clubs and societies. The Consulate, together with a new generation of volunteers, articulated a form of *communitas* that brought together Italian institutions of all regional backgrounds. Each club and society continued to meet and celebrate privately, but they also came together at pan-Italian events sponsored by the Centre. These festivals defined local Italianness through a multicultural lens. The most important of these events—*Festa della Repubblica*, Italian Days and the anniversary banquet—were formative moments in the local Italian subculture. Through them participants were able to see themselves as a single *communitas*, diverse in dialect, tradition, regional descent, material culture and culinary practice, but bonded by national origin and a sense of national culture.

The role played by the Italian Foreign Office and the survival of multiple Italian identities under a national rubric highlight the unique historical development of Italian identities in Vancouver. The story of Italian identities in postwar Vancouver provides a point of reference from which to contrast the construction of Italian identities in another city—Trail, British Columbia—where Italians lived and worked together and the Government of Italy did not participate in festival events.

III

Trail

This chapter explores the historical development of Italian *communitas* in the city of Trail over the past century and how these bonds were expressed at festivals as markers of Italianness. Like their compatriots in Vancouver, most Italian migrants in Trail came from various parts of the Italian countryside. In Vancouver, Italian arrivals and their progeny established larger a number of pan-Italian, regional and *paesani* institutions. The Italian population in postwar Trail, by contrast, was much smaller and therefore unable to support the same range of official bonds. The Italians of Trail came together at five different clubs and societies. However, they also rubbed shoulders at home and work—Italian spaces that did not exist in Vancouver. The discussion that follows divides the historical development of Italian identity in postwar Trail into three periods. Institutionally speaking, from 1945 to the late sixties Italians worked and lived together but did not celebrate as a single group. Between the late sixties and 1982, Trail’s Italian “community” found in its recent past the values, symbols and experiences that characterized what it meant to be an Italian from Trail. This construction took on a strong citizenship component. The City of Trail provided the impetus for Italian clubs and societies to come together. In response, the Italians of Trail began to stake out a privileged space for themselves in city politics and culture. The next two decades (1982-2001) saw the maturation of this process. The Italians expressed their ethnic identity in local terms, adjusting Old World forms of Italianness to communicate new meanings of “being Italian” that also meant “being from Trail.” Contemporaneously, the City courted

the local Italian culture for its own festivals and recast its own civic culture through the experiences of its Italian minority. In sum, three themes carry through this chapter: first, the development of a local Italian culture; second, the conversation and cooperation between the Italian organizations and the City; and finally, as the City adopted Italianness as its signifying cultural badge, the renegotiation among Italians of Old World modes of Italianness and ethnic boundaries.¹⁶⁷

The First Half Century: 1896 - 1946

Trail is located along the British Columbia-Washington border, roughly halfway between Vancouver and Calgary. Wedged between the Monashee and Selkirk mountain ranges along the steep banks of the Columbia River, the settlement is at no point wider than three quarters of a mile. The original town site, a few hundred acres purchased by prospectors in 1890, served as the river landing for vessels carrying gold and copper ore from the adjacent Rossland mines. The Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company or CMS plant was established in 1896 by American Augustus Heinze, who in turn sold it to the Canadian Pacific Railway three years later.¹⁶⁸ After 1899 refined metals were transported along rail lines to eastern Canada and to the west coast terminal in Vancouver. Italian migrants were drawn to Trail by work at the CMSL smelter (later purchased by Teck Cominco), and to a lesser extent, the CPR railyards and mines.¹⁶⁹ By

¹⁶⁷ "City" here denotes both the political institution and the civic population.

¹⁶⁸ The CMSL plant was originally called the F. Augustus Heinz smelter. The new company was established in 1905. Rossland Mining Museum, "History," Available online: www.rosslandminingmuseum.ca

¹⁶⁹ For an in depth foray into the role of railroads in the economic development of Trail and Southeastern British Columbia, see Jeremy Mouat, "Nationalist Narratives and Regional Realities: The Political Economy of Railway Development in Southeastern British Columbia, 1895-1905," In *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies*, eds. John M. Findlay and Ken S. Coates (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

the 1920s all primary rail ties had been laid and the mines closed. The smelter thereafter played an even more critical role in the regional economy.

There has been a strong Italian presence in Trail since its establishment as a city. The 1911 Canada Census put the Italian population of Rossland and Trail at 550, all of whom had arrived during the previous fifteen years.¹⁷⁰ By 1931 this number reached 1560. In the 1951 Census, taken at the leading edge of the Second Wave of Italian immigration, 3687 persons in the Trail region—which contained roughly 15 000 people—identified themselves as “Italian.”¹⁷¹ These statistics provide two important distinctions between the Italian populations of Trail and Vancouver. First and most obvious, the Italian residents of Trail were significantly fewer in number, but greater in proportion. Second, the largest immigrant cohort in Trail arrived during the First Wave, whereas that in Vancouver arrived after the Second World War. The earlier and smaller Italian presence in Trail enabled a stronger sense of Italian *communitas* in Trail than Vancouver. In the latter, a sense of *communitas* developed almost exclusively at club festivities. In Trail, by contrast, Italians lived and worked together. During the first half of the century social bonds were forged in three spaces, two “outside” and one “inside” the festival space: the residential “Gulch,” the Consolidated Mining and Smelter Company, and the lodges, respectively.

¹⁷⁰ Isacco Georgetti, the founder of the Montana Hotel who arrived in 1895, is considered by many to be the first Italian in Trail. Interestingly, Isacco’s grandson, Ken, is the current president of the Canadian Labour Congress. 1911 statistic from *Canada Census* (1911), *Origins of the People by Sub-districts*, Vol. 2, Table 7. Most early migrants came to the South Kootenay Region through channels set up by padroni. Anthony Cordasco, the so-called “King of Italian labour,” was the sole agent who linked prospective workers with positions with the CPR in Western Canada. See Scardellato, *Beyond the Frozen Wastes*, 145-7; and Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁷¹ *Canada Census* (1931), *Population Classified according to Principle Origins for Municipalities*, Vol. 2, Table 33, Division 2, Sub-division B, pp. 482-493; and *Canada Census* (1951), *Population by Origins and Sex, for Counties and Census Divisions*, Vol. 1, Table 34, pp. 21-22.

Unlike the geographically dispersed and proportionally smaller Italian population of Vancouver, that of Trail was spatially concentrated and constituted a large part of the total civic number. As mentioned, migrant who arrived during the first half of the century found work with the rail company, in the mines and, most importantly, at the smelter. An Italian settlement called “the Gulch” developed on a steep mountain slope close to the mining and smelter operations. Originally dubbed the “Dublin Gulch,” this parcel of land on the west side of the Columbia River was a grant to the Columbia and Western Railway. A collection of ramshackle huts, it was a decrepit sight at the turn of the century. Over a period of ten years around the turn of the century, the CPR purchased the lots around the smelter and converted them into permanent residential dwellings. The first Italian migrants settled in this space for practical reasons. Most could not afford an automobile and so gravitated to the Gulch, from where they could walk to work.

The Gulch settlement divided the city of Trail not only along geographical lines—to the east and west of the Columbia River—but also along ethnic lines. The overwhelmingly working-class Italians lived on the west bank, across from the middle-class Anglo-Saxon population to the east. A local Italian community thrived on its side of the divide. Stonemasons carved steep staircases and stabilized their sloped properties with stone walls. Rossland Avenue, the main thoroughfare, at one point boasted over twenty Italian businesses and two Italian lodges: the Colombo and Italo-Canadese.¹⁷² Italian children attended the same elementary and secondary schools. A network of boarding-houses served new male migrant workers. Finally, practicing Roman Catholics sat together at St. Anthony’s Parish for mass. Socially, culturally and economically speaking, the Gulch supported a tight-knit and “self-sustaining” Italian community. The

¹⁷² “Trail is Proud of its Italian Roots,” *Vancouver Sun*, 8 January 2003.

winner of the first Trail “Queen Pageant” in 1951, an Italian, proclaimed these bonds in her statement, “I represented the Gulch.”¹⁷³ Clearly, she and her supporters perceived her role as spokesperson of a geographically-defined Italian *communitas*.

As the Gulch was to Italian residence, so the CMSC smelter was to Italian employment. The plant, and to a lesser extent the railways and mines, provided permanent work for the vast majority of prewar Italian migrants, let alone for the city of Trail itself. Italians worked together, ate together, and, through membership to Italian mutual aid societies, provided financial support for fellow workers injured on the job. In 1923 and 1924 alone three Italian immigrants died from workplace disasters.¹⁷⁴ Physical dangers did not pose the only risk to Italian workers. Buddy Devito, an Italian who later became mayor of Trail, recalled the discrimination endured by immigrant workers at the CMSC smelter:

The immigrants were put upon a lot in Trail. The Company (CM&S) was owned by the CPR, which was British capital, and practically all the staff – if not all the staff – were English or Scotch. The Scotch were more the tradesmen, and they were the foremen and shift bosses in the plants, and there was considerable chauvinism, racism, [sic] at that time... Most of us Italian kids had a strong anti-British attitude.¹⁷⁵

In his memoirs Al King, an English immigrant to Trail, supports De Vito’s assessment: “the workers who got the dirtiest, crappiest jobs were the Italians.”¹⁷⁶ Aware of their vulnerable status, Italians as a rule did not participate in union politics. For them, the

¹⁷³ “City’s Miss Trail Recalls Excitement,” *Trail Daily Times*, 21 April 2001, pg. 1. In 1951 the selection of a winner was determined by the greatest number of signatures of from supporters. That an Italian girl was able to rally much of her ethnic community behind her indicates the extent to which she was perceived as “representative of the group.”

¹⁷⁴ Elsie G. Turnbull, *Trail Between the Wars: The Story of a Smelter City* (Victoria, BC: Elsie Turnbull, 1980), 50.

¹⁷⁵ Court Palsson, “Buddy De Vito: An Interview,” *Trail Journal of Local History* 1 (Spring, 2001): 25-35.

¹⁷⁶ Al King, *Red Bait! Struggles of a Mine Mill Local* (Vancouver: King Bird Pub, 1998), 28.

risks associated with a solidarity movement were too great.¹⁷⁷ Ironically, they were treated with suspicion by company executives. Following Italy's declaration of war on the side of Hitler on 10 June 1940, the General Manager at Cominco called a meeting at the Colombo Lodge. He promised to "protect" Italian workers if they surrendered their hunting and sport rifles to their superiors. All complied the following morning.¹⁷⁸ As objects of workplace discrimination, suspicion and intimidation, Italian labourers bore a heavier social burden than their non-Italian counterparts. They had to prove themselves on two levels: as competent workers and as good, patriotic citizens. They were mistreated as a *group* and therefore turned to their own institutions for social and financial security, strengthening a sense of Italian *communitas*.¹⁷⁹

In Trail as in Vancouver, the Italian arrivals of the First Wave established clubs and societies. These institutions provided economic stability and helped mediate the cultural distance between themselves and the local Canadian culture. In contrast to Vancouver the Italians of Trail were relatively small in number—and therefore unable to support more regionally localized bonds—and predominantly First Wave. As a result they only formed pan-Italian institutions. The first of these was the Colombo Lodge. The Colombo Lodge, formed in 1905, became the oldest Italian institution in Canada after

¹⁷⁷ King recalls the only Italian "strawboss" manager, "Angelo," being fired for taking home a company lightbulb. He notes that such practice was common, which suggests that Angelo's ethnicity rather than his act were grounds for his dismissal. *Ibid.*, 12. In his M.A. Thesis on Mine Mill Union 480 David Michael Roth finds very few Italian surnames on union registers, this despite strong recruitment efforts. Roth, "A union on the hill: the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers and the organization of Trail smelter and chemical workers, 1938-1945" (Master's Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1991), 49. It is also possible that the lodges voiced complaints on behalf of Italian workers, and thus served as an unofficial channel of Italian labour advocacy.

¹⁷⁸ Turnbull, *Trail Between the Wars*, 84-5.

¹⁷⁹ A similar process took place in Minnesota's iron camps, where Italian workers began to identify themselves as an ethnic group in response to mistreatment at the hands of Anglo-Scandinavian foremen. Rudolph Vecoli, "Italians on Minnesota's Iron Range," in R. Vecoli, ed. *Italian Immigration in Rural and Small Town America* (New York: American Italian Historical Association, 1986), 179-198.

absorbing the now defunct Giordano Bruno Society of nearby Rossland, in 1929.¹⁸⁰ In 1934 disgruntled members broke ties to establish a second pan-Italian lodge, the S.M.S. Italo-Canadese, exposing a rift that would remain for decades.¹⁸¹ The lodges offered a number of services, including linguistic and logistical assistance with resumes and immigration documents, regular meals for CMSC workers, and funeral arrangements.¹⁸² The chief function of the lodges, however, was to compensate men injured working on the railways, in the mines and at the smelter. These services provided an ongoing and critical link between the ethnic institutions and the everyday life of their members.

Festival events at the lodges were crucial to the development of a broader Italian *communitas* in Trail because they reinforced a sense of shared experience and *communitas* already developing in the Gulch and at the smelter. On another level, festivals brought Italians together in ways not possible in residential and work spaces. One participant in this study recalled that before the early sixties “[Italian] people were very isolated and [for this reason] looked forward to special events.”¹⁸³ Here, Italians congregated on a larger scale—one that cut across gender and generational lines—and were able to visualize and express themselves *as* Italians. As one member of the Colombo Lodge enthusiastically expressed: “Number one: the Italians were altogether [at festivals]. Now I know all of the Italians in Trail.”¹⁸⁴ However, prior to the late 1960s one

¹⁸⁰ The fate of the Giordano Bruno seems to follow that of the town of Rossland itself, which fell into obscurity with the closing of its mines in the early 1900s. See Scardellato, “Beyond the Frozen Wastes,” 144.

¹⁸¹ All of the participants interviewed in this study did not know the cause of the dispute and relegated it to a clash of personalities that no longer carried significance.

¹⁸² S.R., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC; F.A, interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ I.G., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

could not have met all of the Italian population because each lodge staged its own events. Italians worked and lived together, but did not celebrate together.

The social networking at cultural events was also a response to language and gender barriers. For many Italians language was a significant obstacle to fuller participation in civic society. One participant explained that even though he was born in Canada, he didn't speak English very well at school because his Italian-born parents always spoke Italian at home.¹⁸⁵ Gender barriers were particularly marked for the Italian population of the prewar period because the ethnic subculture imposed its own social restrictions on Italian women. Old World customs, brought to Trail from the Italian countryside, limited the social activity of most women to the domestic sphere. One participant recalled:

The ladies were at home and therefore didn't have the opportunities their husbands had to learn the language...In those days Italian women didn't have many outside connections. Many of us were illiterate, even the president (of the ladies' auxiliary) at one time!¹⁸⁶

Donna Gabaccia notes that extra-familial female interaction in the Italian countryside was largely limited to the piazza, a central place where discussions and activities could take place under the watchful eye of the community, so as to ensure that women conducted themselves in a "culturally appropriate" fashion.¹⁸⁷ The ladies' auxiliaries at the lodges were logical New World extensions of this practice. Two groups were established in pre-war years: the Daughters of Colombo and the Sorelle Italo-Canadese in 1924 and 1936, respectively. Female social bonds were permissible because the hall was a safe and

¹⁸⁵ F.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

¹⁸⁶ L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

¹⁸⁷ Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street, Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 47-49.

monitored space. Old World restrictions on male-female interaction could thus be maintained and managed in this New World institution.

Festivals offered a rare opportunity for Italian women to socialize outside of the family sphere. Dances, in particular, were spaces where the two genders could mingle. The dance floor was a rigidly structured and well-supervised space. One lady interviewed for this study recalled that until the 1960s a “step” along both walls of the hall physically reinforced a “proper” distance between males and females. The boys sat at one end, and the girls, usually chaperoned by their mothers, peered over at them from the other side. Thus, an adventurous male had to cross three barriers in order to gain consent: the open dance floor, the guardian, and the female partner herself.¹⁸⁸ This scenario characterized a New World adaptation of an Old World Italian custom, in which the actions of adolescents—particularly females—remained under the surveillance of the extended kinship network.

The Colombo and Italo-Canadese lodges have since their beginnings held the same types of Old World celebrations: banquets (which often included dances) and picnics. The former also hosted its own beauty pageants, beginning in the mid-1930s. Its signature “Maple Leaf Band” annually represented the society in civic parades since the First World War.¹⁸⁹ Unfortunately, scant archival records and the passing of many lodge members make it difficult to iterate in detail what took place prior to the 1950s. Only one archival record survives—a program for the Columbus Day celebration of 1939 at the Colombo Lodge. The evening featured Italian dramas, Neapolitan music, a toast to the King, a chorus of “God Save the King,” and a rousing speech by the president about the

¹⁸⁸ P.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

¹⁸⁹ Turnbull, *Trail Between the Wars*, 28-9. The selection of a national symbol as the troupe’s moniker indicates that the performers wanted to be perceived as Italians that were “good Canadian citizens.”

role of Christopher Columbus in founding a “paradise of tolerance and brotherly love” in North America. Interestingly, Columbus was cast as the progenitor of an ‘American destiny,’ of whom they, as his ethnic descendants, were the living benefactors. The timing of this event—the onset of war between the Allies (which included Canada) and the Axis Powers (which included Italy), and, more importantly, after the smelter’s brazen request that local Italians surrender their sport rifles—indicates that lodge members sought to boldly express themselves as integral and law-abiding Canadians whose political loyalties rested with the British Empire, rather than their country of origin.

Each lodge constructed Italianness through its own set of traditions. The Colombo Lodge Constitution of 1905 is a revealing document, as it established the “official” festivities that continue to the present day. The first “constitutional event” is the Lodge Founder’s Day, which takes place each April; the second is the Columbus Day banquet, held each October. Eight or nine additional dinner meetings are spread throughout the year. Certain specific traditions developed at each of the Colombo Lodge events. The speaker at the Founders Banquet, for example, was always a member of the Lodge who had achieved a degree of success through promotion, education, sports, or entrepreneurial exploits. The Maple Leaf Band, essentially the Lodge’s band, was a regular fixture at banquets, funerals and parades. A brochure for the civic Silver City Days festival credits them being the oldest marching band in Canada and dates their establishment to 1916.¹⁹⁰ Beginning in the late forties, Colombo Lodge banquets also featured performances by its own ‘Musical and Drama Club,’ which folded in the mid-sixties and was reinvented as a

¹⁹⁰ “Bravo Trail! 39th Annual Great Italian Festival,” City of Trail, brochure, 2001. The group was formerly known as the Trail Italian band until 1917. The claim of thirty-nine years in the title is an exaggeration: the first official Italian-themed civic festival was in 1982. “Royal BC Museum’s ‘Festa Italiana.’”

male choir.¹⁹¹ No early historical records of the Italo-Canadese Lodge survive. Personal testimonies indicate that they held a harvest banquet in the fall, a summer picnic, a New Year's party, and numerous dances. As in Vancouver, lodge festivals were for members only. The two lodges celebrated independently of one another, not because of disparate regional or cultural modes of expressing Italianness, but due to ongoing personal tensions.¹⁹² Moreover, with the exception of the Maple Leaf Band, neither took part in civic celebrations. Italian *communitas* existed in various permutations at the smelter, the Gulch and the two lodges, but it had not yet been expressed in a public forum. Local performances of Italianness were almost exclusively private affairs until 1969.

The Early Postwar Period: 1945 - 1968

The "Second Wave" of Italian immigration to Canada that so dramatically altered the size and character of the Italian population of Vancouver was experienced very differently in Trail. Numerically, the influx was much smaller. Between 1951 and 1961, the Italian population of the Trail region increased from 3687 to 3778. More telling, however, the number of Italian-born during this period only grew from 1477 to 2262.¹⁹³ Trail was not the destination for Italian migrants it had been fifty years earlier. At the tail end of the Second Wave in 1971 the Italian population had fallen to 3495, likely due to the second and third generations migrating to larger urban centers such as Vancouver.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Anne Gagliani, "The Colombo Musical and Drama Club," unpublished account (2005), 1-2.

¹⁹² See footnote 181.

¹⁹³ The following figures are for "Division 2," which also included a couple hundred Italians from Castlegar, a city that is not formally considered part of the Trail Region. Statistics from, respectively, Canada Census (1951), Population by Origins and Sex, for Counties and Census Divisions, Vol. 1, Table 34, pp. 21-2; *Ibid.*, Population by Birthplace and Sex, for Counties and Census Divisions, Vol. 1, Table 47, pp. 23-4; and Canada Census (1961), Population by Birthplace and Sex, for Counties and Census Division, Series 1.2, Catalogue 92-547, Table 51, pp. 25-6.

¹⁹⁴ Canada Census (1971), Population by Specified Ethnic Groups by Census Sub-divisions, SP-4, Catalogue 92-774, Table 2, pp. 121-9. Although there are not statistics showing the extent of Italian

In contrast to Vancouver, the Second Wave of Italian migration to Trail did not bring a constellation of new clubs to the local cultural landscape. Notwithstanding a small but influential group of new arrivals, new expressions of Italianness were the result of changes at work within the Italian “community.” In general, Italians were becoming more established in Trail. At the smelter, the endemic discrimination and workplace hazards once endured by Italian workers were, for the most part, a thing of the past. Many Italians continued to work at Cominco, but modern operational techniques, protective gear and worker’s compensation made it a safer and more financially rewarding profession. Importantly, by the late fifties Italians even held managerial positions within the company.¹⁹⁵ Many also found worker solidarity in unions rather than at the lodges.¹⁹⁶ Despite the fact that these occupational improvements made mutual aid superfluous, the Italian institutions retained their memberships, but now functioned exclusively for social and cultural purposes.

The picnics held at the Colombo and Italo-Canadese lodges, respectively, communicated in similar ways what it meant to be Italian. The earliest sources for picnics are from the 1950s and are strictly oral accounts. Those who attended the celebrations since that time claim that the events changed little until the 1990s. Picnics were enormously popular occasions. Between two and three thousand people attended Colombo Lodge picnics during the sixties.¹⁹⁷ They were ideal occasions to recapture and reinvent Old World values of family, fraternity, folklore and fun. Interestingly, many

migration from Trail to Vancouver, there is evidence of a large contingent in the latter. Presently, hundreds of former Italian residents of Trail meet in North Vancouver each summer for a picnic.

¹⁹⁵ King, *Red Bait!*, 40.

¹⁹⁶ “Royal BC Museum’s ‘Festa Italiana.’” An interesting study would be what factors contributed to the rather sudden interest of Italians in worker solidarity after the Second World War.

¹⁹⁷ I.G., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

activities were identical to those in Vancouver. These included “climb the grease pool” (this event was discontinued in 1965 after contestants suffered minor injuries), *la morra*, *cucania*, bocce, tug-of-war, and watermelon eating contests.¹⁹⁸ Food was provided by volunteers. It was the responsibility of the women’s auxiliaries to prepare the food, which was then shared with everyone. Men, by contrast, managed the bar, a task that fell in line with the Old World custom of social drinking as a male domain.¹⁹⁹

Picnics were integral to the formation of pan-Italian *communitas* at the lodges. The tug-of-war contest at the Colombo Lodge, for example, was often a bout between Italian immigrants and Canadian-born Italians. By sharing the same “playing space,” cultural and generational differences were treated with amusement. Second, the picnics emphasized the compatibility of Italy’s regional cultures. A bulletin from a 1971 meeting joked that the Uprezzi (immigrants from the “region” of Upruzza) won bocce too much, but “need[ed] a Fruilano (someone from the northeast of Italy) to guide them.”²⁰⁰ Food was another important site of inter-regional negotiation and accommodation. The Italo-Canadese Lodge, for example, featured northern dishes such as polenta, gizzard stew, risotto and roast chicken, as well as the southern specialities of lasagna and spaghetti.²⁰¹ The culinary diversity communicated two messages: the cooks felt comfortable sharing their regional traditions with others; and second, lodge members perceived the cultural traditions of other members not as obstacles but as qualities to be celebrated.

As the Colombo and Italo-Canadese lodges continued to celebrate Old World forms of Italianness, they were joined by three new Italian clubs: the San Martino Club,

¹⁹⁸ For a more in depth description of these activities see chapter 2, pages 22-4.

¹⁹⁹ I.G., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁰⁰ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 0405-30a-2-11, Trail, BC.

²⁰¹ Cooks used to go to the farms and kill the chickens themselves in preparation for the picnic meal. P.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

Club Italico, and Grimaldi Club.²⁰² In 1942 a group of Colombo Lodge members, who were all from the town of San Martino al Tagliamento²⁰³ in the northeastern region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, decided to grant their regular house parties a ledger of officialdom.²⁰⁴ The San Martini have a long history in Trail. They were among the first to find employment at the mines, railways and smelter in the early 1900s.²⁰⁵ By 1947 there were approximately “one hundred people in Trail who were direct immigrants from San Martino.”²⁰⁶ Within four years the club had a membership of 400.²⁰⁷ Those eligible for membership in the San Martino Club had either lived in San Martino al Tagliamento or were an Italian who married someone from this town.

Having been in Trail for almost five decades, it is surprising that it took so long for this sizeable *paesani* or village-based group to form an institution. One clue can be gleaned from its function as a strictly social and cultural—as opposed to mutual aid—club. The club was the invention of members from the Colombo Lodge who came from this Italian town. Although institutionally independent, at no point did the new club operate without the assistance of the lodge. First and foremost, the San Martini did not

²⁰² It was not possible to schedule an interview with a member of the now defunct Grimaldi Club. It can only be stated that the club consisted of members from the southern Italian region of Calabria and was formed in the postwar period.

²⁰³ To be more specific, club members came from the three tiny villages of Arzenutto, Postoncicco and San Martino al Tagliamento, of which the latter is the official commune and contains the city hall. E. Truant, “Memoirs of San Martino, Italy, and the History of the San Martino Club in Trail, BC,” Unpublished article [1983?], 1. Truant based her findings on the minutes of the San Martino Club. Unfortunately, these have since disappeared.

²⁰⁴ Gabrielle Scardellato notes that there is a discrepancy within club minutes over its actual starting date. The first page of regulations states the official meetings will commence 1 May 1946, a date that should stand. Unfortunately, this date can be verified no further because the minutes of the San Martino Club are no longer accessible. See Gabrielle Scardellato, “Friulians in Trail, B.C.: Migration and Immigration in the Canadian Periphery,” In *An Italian Region in Canada: The Case of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1998), 112.

²⁰⁵ An old issue of the *Cominco* company magazine states that an inaugural group of thirteen fellow villagers arrived in 1905. *The Cominco Magazine*, “San Martino Club,” March 1951, 8-9.

²⁰⁶ Truant, *Memoirs of San Martino*, 13.

²⁰⁷ Scardellato, “An Italian Region in Canada,” 114.

have their own building. Since 1946 they held their meetings and banquets in the lodge's main hall.²⁰⁸ In addition, enlistment in this *peasani* group did not necessitate rescinding membership in the other. Members simultaneously participated in both, making use of the social connections and larger celebrations at the lodge and maintaining and reinventing their own town-based forms of Old World Italianness at club events. They identified with their town of origin in both material and celebratory ways. Materially, they sent remittance packages of money, coffee, clothing fabric and sugar to former townspersons stricken by poverty in the aftermath of the Second World War.²⁰⁹ Their festivities included the annual banquet in honour of St. Martin of Tours—patron saint of their town—picnics, and suppers. The latter moments were opportunities to enjoy the food and entertainment once observed in the Italian town of San Martino. Beginning in 1943 and continuing annually after 1947, the picnic was an attempt to recreate the annual Fiesta of the Watermelon and Pastry celebrated at the church of San Osvaldo in San Martino al Tagliamento. As in Italy, men played *bocce* and card games and the menu regularly included *bacala* (a salty fish and sauce), polenta, rabbit, *coteleti*, and of course, watermelon and pastry.²¹⁰ Banquets were also an opportunity for the women to wear former peasant attire. Group descent was made material through certain symbols, including a model of the town's bell tower, a butter churn, banner depicting rural Friuli

²⁰⁸ Three different dates can be cited as the founding of the San Martino Club. The movement for an institution began at a meeting at the Colombo Lodge in 1942. The first San Martino event—a picnic—took place in 1943. The Circle's constitution itself lists 1 May 1946 as the official starting date. See, respectively: Truant, *Memoirs of San Martino*, 13; Constitution of the Family Circle of the Citizens of S. Martino al Tagliamento (Trail, BC: 1946); and "The San Martino Club," *The Cominco Magazine* (March, 1951): 9.

²⁰⁹ Remittances were delivered through religious channels. Packages were sent to Fr. Don Antonio Contardo, priest of San Osvaldo parish in San Martino. Truant, *Memoirs of San Martino*, 9.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 and 17. *Coteleti* are an Italian version of cutlets.

scene, and a photo of San Martino riding his horse.²¹¹ Food and clothing were thus symbols through which the San Martini re-enacted and re-imagined their own sense of Italianness. However, the San Martini's sense of being Italian existed on multiple levels. Through dual membership and participation in both the Colombo Lodge and San Martino Club festivities, they constructed their local ethnic identity along both pan-Italian and *paesani* lines.

Club Italico, which began in 1954, emerged from a different set of historical circumstances. Its progenitors were not longstanding residents of Trail or members of one of the two established lodges, but rather a relatively small group of postwar arrivals. Like the San Martino Club, this group did not have a building of its own: it rented space at St. Anthony's Parish, and, after the mid-sixties, carried on its operations at the Italo-Canadese Lodge. They, like the San Martini, had an amicable relationship with another Italian institution. One of its founders, who came to Trail in the early fifties to work as a press operator at the smelter, explained what motivated the founders of the club:

We immigrated as youngsters. We had a different way of life from the old timers who came during the 1920s—different attitudes and values—and we organized according to that parameter. We were not accustomed to the Canadian way of life.²¹²

Critical insights into their sense of *communitas* can be gleaned from this statement. First, a distinction was made between the social and cultural way of life in Italy with which he and his colleagues were familiar and the older modes of Italianness practiced at lodge festivities. He and his colleagues perceived the former as a different “generation,” in terms of both age and time of arrival in Canada. Second, the lodges were indirectly assumed to be “Canadian”—unrecognizable or “alien” in comparison to the Italy they

²¹¹ Ibid., 16.

²¹² V.S., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

knew. On one level, the “Italy” from which the Second Wave migrants of Club Italico came was more individualistic. Some members had been actually been “well off” in Italy and therefore had not relied on extended kinship networks for survival.²¹³ Like the San Martini, Club Italico did not provide mutual aid. Its constituency was economically self-sufficient: their immediate needs were social and cultural. They coordinated picnics, banquets, soccer, bocce and bowling matches, film nights, and Italian-language theatre productions. Second, this group of immigrants had been brought up in the post-Mussolini education system that emphasized standard Italian. In contrast, Colombo Lodge at this time conducted all of its meetings in English.²¹⁴ The latter institution had been “Canadianized” to levels well beyond those of the postwar arrivals of Club Italico who spoke only Italian. For them, the use of language characterized the differences they perceived between themselves and an older generation of Italian immigrants in Trail.²¹⁵ Club Italico also identified with Italian cultural forms of another time and place. Its members grew up in Italy at a time when mass media exerted a strong influence on popular culture and had lived in centres large enough to receive these transmissions. In contrast to Old World practices of banquets and picnics at the lodges, this group hosted Italian film nights. Movie strips were shipped via Greyhound bus from Vancouver to Trail and screened at the local cinema. The events were open to the public; however, the audience was almost entirely Italian.²¹⁶ By sharing modern modes of Italianness with First Wave Italians and non-members alike, Club Italico placed themselves in a didactic and cultural ambassadorial role within the Italian “community.”

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ F.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2006, Trail, BC.

²¹⁵ The emphasis on pan-Italian fraternity is made clear in the title of the club’s soccer team during the 1950s and 1960s—Azzurri, the moniker of the national squad.

²¹⁶ V.S., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

Interestingly, Club Italico was a male homosocial institution from the beginning. During the 1960s women were invited to fill feminine roles in their plays,²¹⁷ but with the understanding that they were “honorary,” rather than bona fide, members. Despite greater familiarity with “modern” forms of Italian expression, the fact that pragmatic, rather than social, considerations guided inter-gender collaboration indicates that Club Italico held on to certain Old World customs—here, a social distance between Italian men and women. At the same time, the mixing of young and single Italian men and women (as opposed to the gendered seating arrangement at the Colombo Lodge dances) indicates that the Old Country social restrictions at the other clubs had become somewhat relaxed.

The Emergence of Trail Italianness: 1969 - 1982

In the late sixties Italians began to express a broader sense of shared *communitas*. From this moment to the year 1982, the clubs and lodges turned to festivals to negotiate and express a working consensus over what it meant to be Italian. This section follows a sequence of festivals through which this transformation took place—first, at specifically Italian events, and second, in a larger civic context. An interesting dialectic emerged during this period: local political forces increasingly courted Italianness as the badge of civic culture, and Italians carved out for themselves a position as special citizens of Trail. This process, however, was marked by its own tensions. As Italian *communitas* “expanded” and expressions of Italianness entered the public sphere, Italians were forced to evaluate *who* was Italian. While some perceived threats to their ethnic identity, others advocated for more liberal parameters.

One reason that Italians began to formally collaborate during the seventies was that a common sense of *communitas* had already been forged in the Gulch. The Gulch

²¹⁷ One such performance was “Farewell to Youth.”

was not the Italian quarter it had been in the past, but it still occupied a central space in local expressions of Italianness. By the 1970s the Italian “community” in Trail was no longer spatially defined. Many second-generation Italians had achieved significant upward mobility and moved to middle-class neighbourhoods. As a result, the once-thriving district of some twenty Italian businesses along Rossland Avenue fell into disrepair. By the end of the twentieth century only one store remained, the Star Grocery.²¹⁸ Interestingly, as Italian residents and businesses vacated the Gulch, the space began to take on more prominence in local celebrations of Italianness. It became a historical reference point for the Italian “community” that symbolized the local Italian experience in Trail. Every Italian person could in some way trace their own or their family’s experience to what a former mayor called “this special place, carved out of the mud, stone and the trees”²¹⁹ and to memories and stories of a former way of life.

Out of a desire to recall the “Italian Gulch” and to rekindle relationships, the Colombo Lodge coordinated the first of many gatherings for former Gulch residents in the seventies. In 1975 and 1980 the lodge’s anniversary banquets doubled as a Gulch reunion. The lodge sent over three hundred invitations to the other local Italian institutions and former residents of the mountainside enclave.²²⁰ The Italo-Canadese lodge and other clubs responded by contributing a float to the Colombo-led parade, a sign that the Gulch and the memories it evoked cut across institutional and generational (i.e. Club Italico) boundaries.²²¹ The Gulch was an effective symbol of nostalgia that brought

²¹⁸ “Trail is Proud of its Italian Roots,” *Vancouver Sun*, 8 January 2003, page unknown.

²¹⁹ A quote locals attribute to Tommy D’Aquino, former advisor to Prime Minister Trudeau.

²²⁰ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 0405-30a-2-30, Trail, BC.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 0504-24-6-1.

Italians together in unprecedented ways. Formerly a *communitas* defined by physical boundaries, it re-emerged as a powerful symbolic adhesive.

Much of the Gulch's symbolic power can be attributed to the quasi-egalitarian economy of status that once existed within its parameters. When the *Trail Daily Times* ran an article on Club Italico's wine-tasting contest in 1981, it claimed that the inspiration for the gathering was the "Italian dedication to wine and life in the Gulch in the early years, [a time when everyone] helped one another when wine ran out."²²² The competition provided a brief moment to recreate this former practice. The use of nicknames was another practice rooted in the quasi-egalitarian life of the Gulch. To former Gulch residents, one's title was secondary to this place from which he or she came. This "solidarity" was reinforced by the fact that all former residents came from the same socio-economic class of smelter workers. The commemorative newspaper of the 1994 Gulch reunion provided a list of some four hundred nicknames and challenged readers to identify their actual first names. The exercise included Italian Canadian mayors "Buddy" De Vito and "Sandy" Santori.²²³ Interestingly, no women made the inventory, thus suggesting that the alternative economy of status was limited to male residents. Nevertheless, the preponderance of nicknames served as a constant reminder to former residents of the Italian working-class space from which they came. It is also interesting to note that all of those invited to the 1994 reunion had lived in the Gulch prior to 1955. These parameters suggest a historically contingent relationship between being Italian and time of residence. In the minds of reunion organizers, the Gulch was the "Little Italy" of Trail until the mid-fifties.

²²² *Trail Daily Times*, 2 February 1981, pg. 2.

²²³ *Trail (BC) The Gulch Times* 1, no.1 (3 September 1994): 11.

Archival records of Colombo Lodge banquets show that the Gulch took on greater symbolic importance during the seventies. One way that the Colombo Lodge reinforced this perception was the tradition of inviting “one of our own”—an Italian from the Gulch who achieved great occupational success—to speak at the annual Christopher Columbus banquets. Speakers were chosen for two reasons. First, as financially and socially successful individuals, they were believed to embody the best qualities of the Italian “community.” The speaker in 1975, for example, was the General Manager of the Cominco smelter.²²⁴ Second, the honoured guest was part of an Italian experience rooted in time and space. At the podium these guests shared stories and values with which the audience could relate. Most often, the topic was “growing up in the Gulch.” Often, the space was described as the historical reference point of the local Italian *communitas*. The speaker in 1974 recalled the Gulch in Old World terms. He spoke of the primacy of family loyalties and mused that he now pays for Italian food in the city (Vancouver) that his mother routinely made at home.²²⁵ A year later the spokesperson addressed a number of members in the crowd by their nicknames and told the story of Christopher Columbus in the context of the local folk culture. He joked that if Columbus and his crew had encountered Trail instead of San Salvador “the ladies of the Colombo Lodge would have been here ahead of time and had the tables set for the greatest meal of their lives.” He added that had Columbus stayed, “he might have made a good hockey player.”²²⁶ The master of ceremonies surveyed the large crowd at the 1980 banquet and declared

²²⁴ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 975-15-2-1, Trail, BC.

²²⁵ He also boasted that “McDonald’s would never make it in Trail” because of the large Italian population’s appreciation for quality food. His prediction did not come true. A Wal-Mart was built in the late-1990s, which included a McDonald’s restaurant. *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 576-15-8-1, Trail, BC.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 975-15-2-1.

“Columbus would be proud.”²²⁷ Through short anecdotes, speakers connected in idyllic terms the local *communitas* with a cosmic historical narrative, and situated the latter in the context of the local Italian experience. Christopher Columbus, the progenitor of this narrative, was recast in local ethnic terms. Italianness was not rooted in places and memories from Italy, but rather in the New World. In Trail, the Gulch—or better, the memories attached to it—was as Italian as Italy itself, and perhaps more so, because it represented a tangible and local reference point.

The improvements in safety conditions and promotions achieved by Italian workers during the 1950s and 60s have been noted. After this time, however, the increasingly amicable relationship between Cominco and the Italian population was expressed at Colombo Lodge functions. A company representative sat at the head table of each constitutional banquet. Cominco also contributed a float to the lodge’s seventy-fifth anniversary parade in 1980. Most significant, in 1975 the general manager of Cominco, an Italian Canadian, was the guest speaker at the Columbus Day banquet.²²⁸ The regular presence of Cominco—and better, Italian officials from the company—at festivals signified not only the close relationship between the lodge and the company, but also that the Italians had “made it.” The smelter became a symbol of Italian prosperity in Trail.

The bulk of funding for new Italian festivals in Trail came from different political sources and at different times than in Vancouver. Festivals in the latter received support from the Italian Consulate, and to a lesser extent, the three levels of government in Canada. The Italian Consulate, however, played a minor role in the affairs of Trail’s Italian “community.” Not only was Trail separated from the Consulate by some seven

²²⁷ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 576-15-8-1, Trail, BC.

²²⁸ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 975-15-2-1, Trail, BC.

hundred kilometres, but the Consulate was preoccupied with the construction and later, the maintenance, of the Italian Cultural Centre in East Vancouver.²²⁹ Interestingly, although Vancouver's Italians did not receive assistance from federal multiculturalism programs during the 1970s, the Colombo Lodge in Trail received a \$5000 grant to build its own archive in 1976. The application form was completed with a keen understanding of how to procure federal funds within the current political climate. Under the category "scope," the answer provided was prescient: "local and national as [the archive] would satisfy the local cultural needs of our ethnic group and contribute to the Canadian culture on a national scale." Its benefit to the community was described as being "open to the public to view Italian history and culture."²³⁰ Thus, the lodge styled its project as a cultural exchange in which two parties—Italians and non-Italians—learned about the place of Italians (specifically members of the Colombo Lodge) in the history of the city, and, perhaps more ambitiously, the nation. By financing the Colombo Lodge archive, the federal government made this claim material.

In Trail the municipal government was the catalyst that brought Italians together for celebrations and expressions of Italianness into the public sphere. In the summer of 1969 it hosted the first "Fiesta Days" festival, a weekend-long civic celebration that included arcades, a fair midway, parade, "bed races" through downtown, and a spaghetti dinner at the Colombo Lodge.²³¹ Fiesta Days was a watershed moment for relations between Italians and the larger community and even those among Italians themselves.

²²⁹ The Consulate encountered a great deal of resistance with this project. A strong lobby, led by Justice Angelo Branca, engaged the new Italian Folk Society of B.C. in a battle for the hearts of the Italian "community." For an in depth look into this dispute, particularly as it manifested itself in the local Italian language newspapers, see Culos, *Vancouver's Society of Italians*, Vol. II, 34-42, 47-9, 90-4; and Bagnell, *Canadese: A Portrait of the Italian Canadians*, 131-140.

²³⁰ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 1172-21-2-7, Secretary of State, Multiculturalism Directorate, Cultural Grants Application Form, 1974, Trail, BC.

²³¹ T.N., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

For the first time, the Italian clubs and societies were invited to participate in a major civic event. The reason for this move is not clear, but it is likely that then mayor Buddy De Vito, an Italian Canadian, influenced the decision. The festival was also the first time that all of the lodges and clubs celebrated together. By sending out invitations to each group the city brought Italians together *as* Italians. However, the city set clear boundaries on the place of Italianness in the local civic culture. The moniker chosen for this event, “Fiesta,” suggests that although public spaces were now open to displays of Italianness, the city would not “go Italian” to celebrate itself. “Fiesta” is a Spanish word, akin to the Italian “festa,” meaning “festival.” Considering that the south Kootenay region contained few, if any, Spanish-speaking residents, the selection of a more “neutral” and foreign title appears to have barred any pretensions of an Italian festival. It is also possible that the City did not know the difference between the two terms. Nevertheless, in 1969 “Italian” and “Trail” were complementary but nonetheless separate distinctions.

Fiesta Days was a significant development for the Italian “community” of Trail for two reasons. First, the Italian clubs and societies responded enthusiastically because it represented to them an official acknowledgement of the unique role that they, as Italians, played in the local multicultural milieu. For this reason, the Italian clubs and lodges not only expressed forms of Italianness to non-members, but invited the larger community to participate in the exchange. In short, they understood that they had something valuable to share with non-Italians. The new list of “open” events included the Club Italico bocce tournament and dinners at the Italo-Canadese and Colombo lodges. The latter annually hosted a spaghetti dinner in its main hall, where visitors were entertained with Italian

songs by the male choir.²³² Beginning in 1976 dinner guests were whisked away to the new archival room. This museum communicated the contributions of the lodge to the local community through a cornucopia of trophies, photos of beauty queens, presidents and notable celebrities such as hockey players and public officials, memorabilia, and an antique lunch pale from the smelter.²³³ Following the initial call to donate objects to the project, the RCMP offered a fascist hat confiscated from a Mussolini sympathizer during the war period.²³⁴ The archives committee decided that, although striking and on some level a piece of local Italian history, the hat symbolized an image of local Italianness they did not wish to convey. Finally, a “wall of fame” boasted signatures from notable visitors including Prime Ministers Pierre Trudeau and Joe Clark. The presence of high profile names signified official sanction of the historical importance of this Italian institution and its members to the City of Trail and to the nation. In sum, Fiesta Days provided the impetus for Italians to share their culture with one another and with the larger community, and at the same time express on their terms how they wanted to be perceived by the larger community.

Second, Fiesta Days provided an opportunity for the development and expression of the multiple levels of Italian *communitas* that existed in Trail. Italians identified themselves on three levels: as members of a club, as Italians, and as part of the greater civic community. The parade was the most popular event because it provided the best opportunity for clubs to put their version of Italianness on display. The two lodges contributed floats each year. The Colombo Lodge was represented by the Maple Leaf

²³² V.S., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²³³ L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²³⁴ I.G., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

Band, and after 1971, the year's beauty queen and her entourage of princesses.²³⁵ The float from the San Martino Club expressed in material form the club's *paesani* or hometown culture. It featured a traditional *fogolar* stove used in their northeastern Italian town and a small replica of the bell tower or *campanile* of San Martino al Tagliamento. One year a man rode on a horse, dressed as Saint Martin, the patron saint of San Martino.²³⁶

Fiesta Days set a precedent for future cultural exchanges between Italians and non-Italians. The Italian institutions began to open their celebrations to a wider audience. In 1976 Club Italico held the first annual public wine-tasting contest and dinner. When describing the ethos behind this event one coordinator recalled:

Prior to the first [wine-tasting] event in 1976 there was very little interest among the local [non-Italian] population in drinking wine. We wanted to share this tradition with them. It's a sociable-type drink.²³⁷

His remark suggests that Club Italico interpreted the City of Trail's openness to its largest minority culture at Fiesta Days as having created a positive and hospitable social environment within which to share their culture. It should be stressed that, in comparison to Italian-only events such as the Gulch reunions and for the most part, the San Martino Cabaret, the wine-tasting contest did not constitute an Italian *communitas*. Instead, wine served as a cultural good to communicate Italianness to non-Italians. As coordinators, they not only shared this cultural marker but also made a claim as its ethnic bearer. The event was an instant success: three to four hundred bought tickets for the banquet and

²³⁵ L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²³⁶ Photo album of Anna Profili, member of San Martino Club, accessed 9 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²³⁷ V.S., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

some eighty contestants put forward their best product for the competition.²³⁸ To be sure, the wine-tasting contest was not the first “open” event initiated by the club: the 1950s and sixties saw weekly drama productions and Italian movies. These fixtures, however, were in the Italian language. The wine-tasting contest illustrated the extent to which the members of Club Italico, who initially formed to distinguish themselves from the ‘more Canadianized’ lodges, now identified themselves in local terms. First, the event was conducted in English, the second language of the club’s members. Second, it was predicated on past practice in the Gulch, where the members once settled and rubbed shoulders with more established Italians. The rules followed local Italian custom that developed in this space. All vintors had to be residents of Trail and the wine had to be fermented from grape juice. The open invitation and criteria for participation showed that only twenty years after arriving in Trail, the younger generation of Italian immigrants now perceived common ethnic bonds with their compatriots and a positive atmosphere of exchange with the larger community.

In the fall of 1969 the San Martino Club opened a new layer of Italianness to the larger community when it hosted its first five-course “Cabaret” dinner. Unlike their own Old World-style banquets and picnics, which continued as private affairs, this event included non-members—even non-Italians. Like their counterparts at the lodges and Club Italico, the San Martini believed they had a significant cultural tradition to share, the difference being that the San Martini expressed a *paesani* form of Italianness—the traditions recalled and recreated from their northeastern Italian town. Servers wore

²³⁸ Ibid. The pan-Italian-Canadian hybrid menu served at the Club Italico dinner, as described by the *Trail Daily Times*, suggests a heightened level of accommodation with Canadian culture. It included risotto and mushrooms, veal scallopini, mashed potatoes and carrots, sponge cake and strawberries. *Trail Daily Times*, 2 February 1981, pg. 2.

traditional peasant attire; a choir sang numbers in the Furlan dialect spoken in San Martino;²³⁹ and material reminders of the town such as a *fogolar* stove were prominently displayed.²⁴⁰

The Cabaret was intended to be the converse of Fiesta Days. Fiesta Days, by comparison, was open to the public and featured generic Italian fare—a spaghetti dinner at the Colombo Lodge. The Cabaret styled itself as the exclusive Italian event of the year. First, it sought to provide the most extensive and esoteric menu of all local banquets. The menu was altered every year, so as to add to the surprise and grandeur of the event.²⁴¹ Interestingly, the food served was not necessarily the northeastern Italian fare served at other San Martino functions. Rather, cooks regularly borrowed culinary traditions from other regions of Italy, an act that suggests that members had a layered sense of themselves as both Italians and San Martini. Exclusivity was also constructed through an invitation-only guest list. Every year notices were sent to forty-six recipients, who in turn were commissioned to select a table of ten. Attendees included club members, prominent civic officials, representatives from the other Italian institutions, and persons fortunate to have social connections with someone from the San Martino Club.²⁴² Understandably, a great deal of social prestige was attached to an invitation. Through its use of cuisine and a guest list, the San Martino Club was able to carve for itself a niche position as the vanguard of “cutting-edge” local Italianness.

²³⁹ Truant, *Memoirs of San Martino*, 14.

²⁴⁰ A *fogolar* oven is a pre-modern appliance indigenous to the northeastern region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia. Many immigrants from this region consider it a marker of their distinctiveness. The international federation of mutual aid societies from this region goes by this name.

²⁴¹ One year guests were treated to antipasto, stuffed pasta, two meat dishes, dessert, homemade cream, and after midnight, the northeastern *paesani* specialties of figodel, polenta and crostoli. Information derived from a menu. Photo album, Anna Profili, member of San Martino Club, Trail, BC.

²⁴² Anna Profili, “History of San Martino Club,” handwritten chronology, unpublished, (Trail, BC: 2007).

An interesting pattern grew out of the relationship between the city of Trail and the Italian population between the years 1969 and 1982. The lodges and clubs began to identify themselves with civic and not necessarily “Italian” causes. Festivals were used to contribute to the city in material ways and each Italian institution was generous in this regard. The proceeds from San Martino banquets, for example, which previously went to the home parish back in Italy, were redirected to local charities.²⁴³ Club Italico donated revenues from its wine-tasting contests to a local Catholic school, a retirement lodge, and the regional hospital.²⁴⁴ The honoured speaker at a Colombo Lodge banquet in 1973 spoke on the theme of the shared objectives of the lodge and the local Rotary Club. He emphasized the spirit of voluntarism: “Both are active and enthusiastic participants in the life of Trail. We both are dedicated to principles of fellowship, self-help and good citizenship.”²⁴⁵ A member of the Sisters of Columbus explained the new *modus vivendi* that emerged: “The club used to be a benevolent society that took care of its members. Now it serves to show benevolence to the community [of Trail].”²⁴⁶ Italianness had a new component: to be Italian was to be a model citizen of Trail. This new identity was implied in a speech at the 1975 Columbus Day banquet at the Colombo Lodge. The speaker, the general manager of Cominco, joked that if the explorer had arrived in Trail, his three ships would have eventually been converted by the local Italians into a museum, spaghetti factory and hospital, respectively. Put differently, the new buildings would pay tribute to the past, celebrate the present, and contribute to the health of the greater

²⁴³ Truant, *Memoirs of San Martino*, 14.

²⁴⁴ V.S., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁴⁵ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 777-15-11-1, Trail, BC.

²⁴⁶ L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

community.²⁴⁷ By the 1970s, the civic sphere was the philanthropic object of Italian charity.

During the seventies, as a broader sense of Italian *communitas* emerged at the new festivals and the line between Italianness and civic culture began to blur, new developments challenged who was Italian and what characteristics constituted Italianness. Moreover, a number of Italians feared that something critical was being lost in the process. We have seen that the Gulch had become an Italian space only in memory and that anti-Italian discrimination at the smelter was, on the whole, a thing of the past. Other changes also took place: the Second Wave of Italian immigration to Canada had come to a close; few Italians were settling in Trail; and many from the second and third generations were moving to larger cities.²⁴⁸ Following these changes, the lodges and clubs took on greater importance as Italian spaces where *communitas* was fostered and Italianness was negotiated.

The beauty pageant at the Colombo Lodge was at the centre of a conversation during the seventies about who was Italian. Through this gendered discourse, contestants, judges and lodge members debated first, the criteria for inclusion in the *communitas* and, second, what ethnic markers defined the group. The Italian Canadian beauty pageant is significant for two reasons. First, the practice is North American in origin. Recent research indicates that these events did take place in Italy until after the Second World War, and more importantly, following the influx of American film, consumer products and advertising and their later Italian equivalents.²⁴⁹ Interestingly, the Italian immigrant

²⁴⁷ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 975-15-2-1, Trail, BC.

²⁴⁸ See footnote 194.

²⁴⁹ See Stephen Gundle, "Feminine Beauty, National Identity and Political Conflict in Postwar Italy, 1945-1954," *Contemporary European History* 8, no. 3 (1999): 359-378.

population of Trail hosted pageants two decades prior to this time, thus suggesting that arrivals adopted this mode of celebrating and staging “femininity” from the host culture, but redesigned it as a forum to negotiate feminine markers of Italianness.²⁵⁰

The Colombo Lodge tried to distance it from negative connotations associated with a “beauty” pageant by naming it a “queen contest.” However, the event was consistent with a typical beauty pageant. The final and most important event of the competition, the Queen’s Ball, illustrates this collusion. Each contestant wore a casual and formal outfit of her choice, demonstrated a talent, and was subjected to a series of “spot questions.” A judge’s ballot from the early seventies shows the criteria used to evaluate the suitability of each candidate. Of a total eighty points, ten were allotted for each of “beauty of face, beauty of figure, charm (poise, etc.), personality, posture, dress (choice of), sincerity, and speaking ability.” A former judge added that an additional ten points were given for competency in Italian.²⁵¹ As in most beauty pageants, the judges were not looking for star candidates, but rather “well-rounded” individuals who scored the highest in all categories combined.²⁵²

Second, pre-existing social and culture practices made young Italian girls ideal vehicles through which meanings of Italianness could be negotiated. The Old World societies from which the Italians of Trail came were characterized by specific gender roles. The guest speaker at a Colombo Lodge banquet in 1974 clarified the Italian woman’s position in this arrangement:

²⁵⁰ This information is gathered from a list of “queens” mounted on a wall in the Colombo Lodge Archive Room.

²⁵¹ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, “Ballot for Colombo Lodge Queen Candidate” [1970?], Trail, BC; L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail,, BC.

²⁵² An observation also made in Robert H. Lavenda, “It’s Not a Beauty Pageant!” Hybrid Ideology in Minnesota Community Queen Pageants,” in Coleen Ballerino et al. eds. *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 34.

The [Italian] man is the figurehead, but not the absolute. A woman has a subtle but powerful way of influence. Her place may be the kitchen, but it is the position of power...the men rule lousily so that women usually run the men and keep the family together. The fact is that the woman is the predominant character of Italian life.²⁵³

This statement put into vivid terms how perceptions of place and responsibility were attached to an Italian woman: her place was the domestic sphere, but her duty was much more broadly defined as the upkeep and social well-being of the family unit, which happened to be the central institution of Old World life. Therefore, as contestants in a beauty contest, the young Italian women's bodies became, in the words of Robert H. Lavenda, "forums for public debate on who constituted a proper representative" of the group.²⁵⁴ The beauty pageant was an important event on the social calendar because through it the future "hinges" upon which the community rested—in both a biological and social engineering sense of the term—expressed on a public stage what attributes and qualities best represented Italian femininity. On a broader level, the selection process was a barometer of larger changes at work in the Colombo Lodge's perceptions of Italianness and how it defined Italian ethnicity. Given the magnitude of these discursive meanings, the Colombo Queen Pageant was a significant event on the "community" calendar.

Notwithstanding the subjective nature of selecting the "queen," the criteria for participation in the pageant was clear. The prerequisites for participation were clear: a contestant had to be a young woman between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, not married or engaged, and at least until the mid-seventies, "the daughter of a member of the Men's Colombo Lodge and in good standing."²⁵⁵ Thus, the candidate eligible to represent

²⁵³ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 576-15-8-1, Trail, BC.

²⁵⁴ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

²⁵⁵ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Archives Collection, 198-27-34-1, Trail, BC.

the “group” as beauty queen was thought to carry in her body youthfulness, which exempted her from the corruptions of society, but also signified her future potential as a mother. To borrow the words of gender historian Sarah Banet-Weiser, she was the ideal object of Italianness because she “weaved desirability with respectability and sexuality with morality.”²⁵⁶ The contest itself took place at five separate events over a three month period.²⁵⁷ During this time contestants were groomed by an older and prominent female member of the Sisters’ auxiliary who helped them write speeches, learn to speak with poise, and inculcated within them the ability to carry themselves in a manner fit for an Italian beauty queen. The *Trail Daily Times* carried personal biographies of each participant. Judges were privately selected from the community in order to add to the mystery of the selection process. The reigning queen became the ambassadress of the lodge during her tenure of reign: she sat in parades, conducted volunteer work, and at the end of her tenure, placed her crown on the head of the next recipient.²⁵⁸

The types of questions asked of the entrants at the Queen’s Ball indicate a strong interest in how the young women perceived themselves as Italian women:

1. In a relationship would you consider a domineering partner a sign of weakness?
2. What would you advise your teenage daughter in this day and age?
3. Is it important for a girl to have a college education?²⁵⁹

These three enquiries suggest a tension within the *communitas* between an Italian woman’s Old Country function as family custodian (as expressed by the speaker at the 1974 lodge banquet) and more modern possibilities. Contestants were prompted to

²⁵⁶ Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl*, 8.

²⁵⁷ These were: the Colombo Lodge installation banquet, a Ladies’ banquet, Men’s meeting, Ladies’ meeting, and finally, the Queen’s Ball. *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, “Ballot for Colombo Lodge Queen Candidate,” [1970?], Trail, BC.

²⁵⁸ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 476-27-2-1 and 198-27-34-1, “Rules for Colombo Queen Contest,” [1972?] Trail, BC; L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁵⁹ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, [1974 or 1975], Trail, BC.

challenge Old Country forms of Italianness. They had to address patriarchy in a critical light, provide moral answers to real issues facing adolescents, and consider the value of an education for an Italian woman. Only two decades earlier most of the Sisters of Colombo were illiterate and daughters were heavily guarded at lodge dances.²⁶⁰ Personal biographies in the *Trail Daily Times* also showed the interesting ways that the young women chose to present themselves. One girl identified herself as “a regular at Trail Smoke Eaters [hockey] games at the Cominco Arena,” and another wrote that she “especially enjoy[ed] cooking and plan[ned] to take up secretarial work and later take a trip to Italy.”²⁶¹ The first based her platform on volunteerism and civic pride. The other identified herself with the Old World roles of cooking and knowing her ‘roots,’ but also with the modern option of entering the work force, albeit in an occupation most often taken by women. The answers may have been a reflection less of how the young women saw themselves than of how they chose to present themselves. They selected responses they believed best advanced their chances of winning. They read the climate of what the lodge *communitas* considered to be Italian feminine ideals and concluded, in a reflexive manner, that it was a balance of Old World Italianness with modern modifications (a woman entering the workforce) and civic pride.

Although the list of questions did not directly address *who* was Italian at that time, this classification was a vital component of the beauty pageant. Ironically, the pageant was a celebration of Italian femininity, but men set the criteria for applicants. They stipulated that a candidate had to be the daughter of a member of the men’s lodge. The ethnic implications here are telling. Only a male of Italian descent could join the lodge;

²⁶⁰ L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁶¹ *Trail Daily Times*, newspaper excerpt labeled “1974” at *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 198-27-34-1, Trail, BC.

however, his wife did not necessarily have to be Italian. Prospective queens were thus “Italian” by virtue of patrimony. This prerequisite was not particularly draconian for its time. The Canada Census of 1971, for example, defined ethnicity through patrilineage. The men of the lodge were acting in accordance with contemporary political practice. Still, the criteria posed a paradox: a woman was “the predominant character of Italian life,” but only so if she had an Italian father and an Italian surname.²⁶² Her Italianness as a woman was contingent upon a biological link to an Italian man.

These criteria were challenged during the mid-seventies. As mentioned, the Colombo Lodge beauty pageant was coordinated by the men’s lodge. The judges were almost always men and, to protect their reputation among their peers, the results of the vote always remained confidential.²⁶³ Although pageant organizers went to great lengths to insure that contestants would be “judged impartially on her merits,”²⁶⁴ many fathers treated their daughters’ loss with suspicion. Some called into question the selection process, suggesting that the social connections of the winning girl’s father rather than her performance determined her fate. The uproar reached a fever pitch in 1973, after which young women were discouraged from participating in the pageant. Following its cancellation that year, one of the lodge executive addressed the membership at a dinner meeting:

Have you noticed something missed at the latest Colombo banquet? Something sparkling, shiny, colourful and bright?...the Colombo queen has only a few simple words to say but when she gets up to speak and stumbles over her few simple words and possibly chokes on a tear or two the audience loves her and shows her by giving her a great round of applause.²⁶⁵

²⁶² L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁶³ L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC. A motion was passed in 1979 to make public the names of judges. *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 198-27-34-1, Trail, BC.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Program for 1970 Pageant.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Out of desperation the organizers appealed to the ladies' auxiliary for assistance. The women, it was thought, could entice their daughters in spite of paternal resistance.

By extending female involvement to a once male-dominated event, the men set the stage for a major confrontation over who was Italian. In contrast to the Men's Lodge, the Sisters of Colombo based their membership on Italian maternal lineage. In 1975 a girl with an Italian mother and non-Italian father requested permission to run, touching off a dispute between the two groups. The former considered her an eligible "Italian" queen; the men, however, disagreed on the basis that her father wasn't Italian. Interestingly, in 1974 a contestant performed a Polish dance in the talent competition without eliciting a complaint over her ethnic authenticity. Her act, though "un-Italian," did not compromise her Italian ethnicity because her father was Italian.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the Sisters won the dispute and the contestant—who had a Scottish surname—went on to win the competition. Many half-Italian girls followed in her footsteps, and another took the crown at the end of the decade.²⁶⁷ A former volunteer from the men's lodge marvelled at the ability of the Italian mothers to carry out their objectives: "If the Sisters wanted something, they got it. The men just had to accept it."²⁶⁸ The admittance of "hybrid" Italians into Colombo beauty pageants made "official" in lodge discourse the new boundaries of who was Italian. Indeed, the inclusion of "half-Italian, half-non-Italian" candidates paralleled the new generation of Italian expressions in the civic sphere. The distinctions between the two were beginning to blur.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Information from Ibid., 476-27-2-1 and 198-27-34-1; L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁶⁸ F.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

The Sisters' success at redefining the criteria for Colombo queens was representative of larger changes in the roles of Italian women. During the seventies they exerted social and political influence well beyond the "traditional domestic sphere" of Old World life. These changes were visible at festivals. In 1976, one year after the pageant incident, a woman spoke at a Colombo banquet for the first time.²⁶⁹ Interestingly, the Colombo pageant—the medium through which the Sisters of Columbus inserted themselves into new social roles—was cancelled in 1985. After fifteen years of unresolved tension over the legitimacy of the selection process, few girls were interested and organizers were unwilling to continue promoting it. It was replaced with a scholarship program, which was awarded by the high school to the daughter of a member of the men's or women's societies with the highest grade-point average. What began as an effort by the Colombo men to preserve a cultural institution set in motion a process through which local Italian ethnic boundaries were renegotiated. In the post-pageant discourse of Italian femininity at the Lodge, a girl's education, rather than her "well-roundedness" was her greatest attribute as an Italian woman.

Painting the Town Red, White, and Green: 1982 - 2001

During the 1970s Italianness was negotiated and expressed in a number of spaces: within the clubs; among the clubs; at civic events such as at Fiesta Days; at the Club Italico's "open" wine-tasting contest; and most exclusively, at the San Martino Cabaret. In 1982, however, it took on a new quality: Italianness *became* Trail mainstream culture. Once again, the City of Trail was the catalyst. By the early eighties the city's annual hallmark celebration, Fiesta Days, had lost much of its earlier appeal. In 1980 the *Trail Daily Times* opined that the entertainment was more generic than an accurate reflection

²⁶⁹ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 975-15-2-1, Trail, BC.

of local culture. He wrote: “Let’s put more emphasis on the city and its people...to be less like a travelling sideshow with too many drunks.”²⁷⁰ A year later, in a complementary review of Club Italico’s wine-tasting contest, the paper mused about the “beer garden brawl” at the previous year’s Fiesta Days and recommended an Italian festival as the antidote. It suggested Club Italico’s annual feature as “the cornerstone of a festival that could embrace full civic participation.” The article concluded: “Trail needs the Italico Club, but does the Italico Club need Trail?”²⁷¹ In the fall of 1982, the City of Trail responded in the affirmative, but they took the *Daily Times*’ appeal a step further. The City Council officially declared the annual celebration itself, now renamed “Silver City Days,” an Italian event.²⁷² All surviving “non-Italian” events from Fiesta Days were subsumed under a new Italian banner.

Ironically, Italians were once excluded from the “official” narrative, but now took centre stage. This was a giant leap from how the local Italian population was treated during the early postwar period. In 1951, the year of the city’s golden jubilee, the commemorative history booklet published by civic funds made no mention of Italian contributions to the history of Trail.²⁷³ By 1982, however, the City recognized that Italianness was both viable and profitable. Trail’s Italian culture became the benchmark of local culture. A City tourist brochure from 1999 boasted, “The Italian heritage here is legendary.”²⁷⁴ The Trail centenary of 2001 quantified this boast in spatial terms. It included a tribute to the Gulch that featured an original orchestral composition called

²⁷⁰ Keith McQuiggan, “Time to Think about Changes,” *Trail Daily Times*, 13 May 1980, p. 11.

²⁷¹ *Trail Daily Times*, 2 February 1981. page unknown, in Photo Album, Anna Profili.

²⁷² *City of Trail*, Regular Council Minutes 1982-4, 22 November 1981, Motions and Recommendations no. 11.

²⁷³ *Trail, BC: A Half Century, 1901-1951* (Trail, BC: Trail Golden Jubilee Society, 1951).

²⁷⁴ Tourism brochure. Trail Chamber of Conference, (Trail, BC: 1999).

“Gulch Suite” and a competition for the world’s largest plate of spaghetti.²⁷⁵ In an enormous reversal, the City courted a formerly subaltern group and imagined itself through the experiences and culture of its Italian minority.

The lodges and clubs were no longer the sole disseminators of Italianness: by 1982 they shared this role with the City of Trail. For one weekend each year, the two were mutually indistinguishable: to be from Trail was to embody Italianness. In addition to activities in operation since 1969—dinners at the lodges, bocce tournaments and parades—the theme of “civic Italianness” was driven home with a new itinerary of events. These included a spaghetti-eating contest, bocce tournament, celebrity grape stomp, and, most notably, the “Italian Sidewalk Café.” For the latter event the hockey arena was transformed into a makeshift Italian piazza, featuring non-stop live music by the Colombo Lodge’s Maple Leaf Band, dancing, and a row of kiosks, each represented by one of the local Italian institutions. Some 1500 people filled the arena to enjoy the food and atmosphere.²⁷⁶ Interestingly, the San Martino Club chose to express their *paesani* roots by serving the northeastern Italian cuisine of rabbit, polenta and sausage.²⁷⁷ The two pan-Italian lodges served the more generic Italian ingredients of pizza and gelati more familiar to non-Italians.²⁷⁸ Regardless of menu selection, volunteers believed that they were communicating their Italianness through the act of food exchange. One

²⁷⁵ *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 100-16-24, Trail Centennial 2001, Trail, BC.

²⁷⁶ Kate Skye, “Sidewalk Café’s Food and Fun Pack in Crowds,” *Trail Daily Times*, 15 May 2001.

²⁷⁷ According to a former coordinator of the Italian Sidewalk Café, food responsibilities were divided as follows: San Martino Club: rabbit, polenta and sausage; Italo-Canadese Lodge: spaghetti and meatballs; Colombo Lodge: gelati; Grimaldi Club: panini sandwiches; and Club Italico: liquor. A.V., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

participant recalled: “You’d be surprised how much they enjoyed our food. They enjoyed it *more* than we do because we eat it all the time.”²⁷⁹

The switch to an “Italian theme” was a rousing success for the City. The level of civic participation was unprecedented. By 1985 *The Daily Times* reported “packed houses for Italian events.”²⁸⁰ Increased tourist revenues—particularly from an upsurge of American visitors—made it possible to lure big ticket attractions such as parachutists and boat races.²⁸¹ By far the most popular moment at the hockey rink was the grape stomp. Beginning in 1984 mayors and councillors from the towns of the Greater Trail region competed against one another for a trophy, awarded to the team that stomped and siphoned the largest quantity of grape juice. The hardware was displayed at the victors’ town hall for a year.²⁸² The pride attached to this title is evident from a letter written by local business to the mayor of Trail in 1985. The writer called for a “challenging and dynamic team of grape stompers to represent the true spirit of the City of Trail, in order to bring back the trophy to the City.”²⁸³ The vote was carried unanimously. An audience of three to five thousand people came from the surrounding area to cheer on their toga-wearing mayors and councillors as they marched into the arena in faux Roman chariots to the music of a pipe band and went on to stomp and siphon grape juice into buckets.²⁸⁴

The event carried important meanings for the Italians of Trail. Of course, the sight of local politicians stomping grapes in a hockey arena was anachronistic and humorous on many levels. Officials entered the floor with the pomp and ceremony suited for a king

²⁷⁹ Emphasis is mine. P.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁸⁰ *Trail Daily Times*, 8 May 1986, p.6.

²⁸¹ *Trail Daily Times*, “Silver City Keeps Improving,” 11 May 1987, p. 1.

²⁸² A.V. interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁸³ *City of Trail*, Regular Council Minutes, 22 April 1985, Trail, BC.

²⁸⁴ A.V., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

but then dressed down and performed the work of a slave in a wine vat. However, to host a grape stomp—a practice from Old World Italy—in a modern venue, and do so for entertainment purposes, was to reinvent an Old World form to suit the local context. For many Italians, it symbolized a legitimate cultural exchange whereby they shared meaningful forms of Italianness with non-Italians. One witness recalled: “I myself used to stomp grapes as a boy in Italy!”²⁸⁵ By “taking on Italianness,” elected leaders, as representatives of their political constituencies, tacitly validated Italian culture and, by extension, the local Italian population, on the highest stage. Such inclusion emboldened an understanding among Italians that, as Italians, they possessed a special proximity to Italianness. Courted by City event organizers and esteemed through high-profile exchanges, they felt validated in a civic community now defined by its Italian roots. Expressions of Italianness were *theirs* to share.

One unusual expression of Italianness in 1995 illustrated the positive relationship reached between the city and its Italian minority. Every year a parade took place during the Silver City Days festivities. Mayors from surrounding towns each contributed a float to the procession, which they decorated according to an “Italian” theme in anticipation of the grape-stomp competition. In 1995 the Mayor of Trail, A.S. Santori, an Italian Canadian, paraded through downtown dressed as a 1930s-era Italian mobster, a la Al Capone. He was surrounded by councilpersons wearing black suits and brimmed hats and carrying faux Uzi machine guns. The black-coloured float doubled as a “getaway car” and was doctored up to appear littered with bullet holes. The Mayor’s act shows that the popular and unfortunate association of Italians with organized crime and staccato

²⁸⁵ I.G., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

violence was not a legitimate concern.²⁸⁶ Instead, the stereotype was turned on its head in a ludic display. One Italian city councillor named Gord Gattafoni, however, objected to this lampooned portrayal of Italianness. He marched behind the float alone dressed as a Roman centurion.²⁸⁷ On the whole, however, this act symbolized the state of power relations and cultural understanding between Italians and non-Italians in Trail. The Mayor was able to play with a negative stereotype and turn it on its head. He took, with maximized effect, a mode of Italianness that had historically been attached to Italians *by* non-Italians and made it appear absurd. It was because the Italians of Trail enjoyed a good reputation as model citizens that one of them could feign the contrary in a public space. In addition, the act demonstrated that Italians in Trail carried enough political clout to address how they wished to be perceived by others.

We have seen how in the post-1982 period Trail's Italians regularly expressed and shared forms of Italianness with non-Italians. To finish here would be to miss the important point that while the city needed Italians to sustain its flagship festival, the Italian institutions also needed the city. Although the clubs and lodge enjoyed a privileged space in city culture, the Italian institutions—and by extension, the *communitas* formed at their own events—were threatened in several ways beginning in the mid-1970s. The first challenge was demographic. Membership at the lodges and clubs was aging and second and third generations were not replenishing their ranks of the

²⁸⁶ There is a wealth of scholarly work on the historical stereotypical association between Italians (especially southern Italians) and extra-legal activity. This connection was the basis for Canadian government officials' preference for Northern Italian immigrants in the 1920s. See Robert F. Harney, "Italophobia: An English-speaking Malady," In *From the Shores of Hardship: Italians in Canada* (Welland, ON: Soleil Publishing, 1993): 49-64. Perhaps more than another other channel, mass media has perpetuated the image of the Italian as *mafioso* in North America. For a useful analysis of Italian American portrayals in film see Carlos E. Cortes, "Italian-Americans in Film: From Immigrants to Icons," *MELUS* 14, nos. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter, 1987):107-126.

²⁸⁷ Recounted in T.N., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC; and F.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

deceased. The question of growing disinterest among offspring was first raised at the Colombo Lodge queen pageant of 1975.²⁸⁸ The judges identified the lack of young people at festivities as a threat to formal Italian bonds. An elderly member of the Italo-Canadese Lodge explained the issue behind this generation disjuncture: “We don’t have many young Italians anymore. Our (older Italians) social life is different: we like to be with people, not computers or television”²⁸⁹ For the older generation, the lodges and clubs were the sole source of social interaction and entertainment, whereas for the younger ones who had grown up with mass media, Italian social bonds were an option among others. One member of the Colombo Lodge recalled: “This [lodge] was the place to go if you were Italian... There was a time when the Lodge was the centre of all activity.”²⁹⁰

The two largest institutions—the Italo-Canadese and Colombo Lodges—responded differently to declining interest among younger Italians. At the former, dinner meetings were conducted in English rather than in Italian after 1990, so as to break down the linguistic barrier for younger Italians who lacked proficiency in the language. The measure was unsuccessful. Thirteen years later membership at the former dwindled to the point that the men’s and women’s cohort merged in order to survive. The children’s talent show held at the annual harvest banquet was also cancelled due to lack of interest.²⁹¹ The Colombo Lodge, by contrast, retained the same number of members over the past three decades; however, fewer attended events on a regular basis.²⁹² High enlistment numbers indicated that second and third generation members valued ties with

²⁸⁸ The question was: “How can the Colombo Lodge stimulate the young adults into participating more in Italian activities?” *Trail City Archives*, Colombo Lodge Collection, 198-27-34-1, Trail, BC.

²⁸⁹ P.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁹⁰ T.N., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁹¹ This took place in 2003. “History of the Italo-Canadese Lodge,” unpublished chronology, author unknown, [2007?], Trail, BC.

²⁹² F.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

the lodge *communitas*; however, inconsistent attendance at events shows that these bonds were no longer as central as they had been for the older cohort.²⁹³

Attendance at festivals, however, was more important than membership numbers. It was through them that *communitas* formed and Italianness was expressed and negotiated. On a practical level, festivals generated the revenue necessary to cover operating expenses for the club or lodge. Quite simply, banquets raised the most money, and more bodies were needed to fill empty seats. The Colombo Lodge came up with two solutions to the problem. First, a constitutional amendment was made in 1997 to open up membership to “half-Italians” whose mothers were Italian, the logic being that a larger pool of constituents would result in more participation at and revenues for cultural events. An organizer from the lodge admitted: “We just needed the money.”²⁹⁴ Admitted individuals however, were identified by their maternal surname alongside the non-Italian one, so as to make their Italianness apparent through lineage. Ironically, one of the lodge’s presidents during the 1970s had almost been fired for recommending extending membership to Italians through maternal lineage during the beauty pageant dispute.²⁹⁵ It is also significant that membership in Italian institutions in Trail was never opened up to non-Italians. This suggests that, even after Italianness entered the civic mainstream, the lodges and clubs held to the conviction that it was something embodied. Italians alone—those born in Italy and their descendants—bore the ethnic pedigree of the Italian *communitas*. Therefore, non-Italians could consume Italian culture but never *be* Italian. The second reform was that in 1995 annual banquets were opened up to non-members, a measure taken by the Italo-Canadese a decade earlier. Whereas the City of Trail once

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ P.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁹⁵ F.A., interviewed by author, 8 January 2007, Trail, BC.

courted the Italian population to rescue Silver City Days, the lodges now needed the people of the city to save their flagship Italian functions. Ironically, the survival of expressed Italianness now depended on the participation of non-Italians.

More recently, the older generations have renegotiated certain Old World forms of Italianness. The Colombo Lodge picnic, for example, took place for over forty years at a natural setting near Salmo, a forty minute drive from Trail, on grounds owned by the lodge. Certain Old World events that had been practiced for decades were called into question. The 1995 event, for example, was moved into town because members were unwilling to travel the longer distance. A second tradition, the piano-led sing-along, was abandoned because no one would volunteer to move the piano from a truck to the outdoor stage.²⁹⁶ The most striking change however, took place in food preparation. Since the first picnic in 1905, the women—most of whom were members of the Sisters of Columbus—each prepared a special Italian dish for the potluck dinner. The smorgasbord was especially significant and popular because Italians were able to share and sample delicacies from the various regions of Italy. This tradition came to an abrupt end in 1995 when some women objected to the burden of food preparation. As one participant remarked, “The women no longer wanted to cook all day.”²⁹⁷ Their lobby apparently enjoyed wide support, as henceforth the picnic menu consisted of barbequed steaks and potato salad. The irony of this solution is that it created more labour for the male volunteers who generally manned the grill because steaks had to be cooked individually

²⁹⁶ I.G., interviewed by author, 7 January 2007, Trail, BC.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

and “on the spot.” The new menu was too much of a compromise of Old Country practice for some. A few of the older couples continued to bring their own Italian lunches.²⁹⁸

The compromise in food preparation at Colombo Lodge picnics had broader implications for how members perceived themselves as Italians. First, a heightened value was placed on modern convenience. Older members were willing to break with a long tradition of celebrating at the Salmo grounds if it meant a shorter commute and thus, a more comfortable experience. Second, the Sisters of Colombo, by refusing to devote all of their time to preparing meals, saw their roles as Italian women much differently than in the past. In contrast to the epithet from the banquet speech of 1976, they no longer saw a ‘place in the kitchen’ as ‘a position of power,’ but rather exercised power to remove themselves from this role. During this period all banquets at the lodge began to be catered by a professional chef. The modern reality here is that the lodge now pays for a service once rendered by female volunteers.²⁹⁹ The wives, by minimizing the amount of “outside” preparation involved in participating in festivities, recognized new possibilities for themselves as Italian women.

The pilot project of *Festa Italiana*, the Royal B.C. Museum’s travelling exhibit during the summer of 1998, was a suitable conclusion to a century of local negotiation over what it meant to be Italian in Trail. Organizers chose to present the Italian “community” in what they saw as its pre-1960 state—the period when the Italian population was both culturally and geographically distinct from its neighbours. In this context, the Italian experience in Trail was expressed according to three themes: the smelter, the Gulch, and the Old World way of life. The exhibit went to great lengths to

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

make a visual link between the smelter and the working-class experience of the Italian population. There were numerous images of Italian labourers on the job and the smelter itself, an antique 1930s-era lunch pail, and a vanity from one of the boarding houses that had provided food and shelter for new immigrant workers. The Museum contributed a short excerpt on the role once played by the Colombo Lodge in providing mutual aid and advocacy for its working-class members.³⁰⁰

The second two themes—the Gulch and Old World way of life—were linked together. The Museum created a special panel titled “Life in the Gulch” that featured images of now defunct businesses on Rossland Avenue and a commentary on the spatial roots of the local “community.” It explained the Gulch in idyllic terms: “Here, more than anywhere else in the province one has the sense that something unique, that echoes the best of the villages of the ‘Old World,’ has been created, one family at a time.”³⁰¹ Contributions of the local Italians magnified this claim. These included: kitchen tools from an earlier era such as a copper polenta pot (c.1920s); pizzelle iron (c.1940s); an exhibit on the abandoned practice of the dowry; and live workshops on how to make traditional foods and folk handicrafts such as marble, polenta, pasta, and handmade bocce balls.³⁰² While these demonstrations took place, a large television played homemade videos of Colombo Lodge banquets, dances, and picnics from the 1950s.³⁰³ Large crowds gathered around to watch Old World-style celebrations and to identify friends and family.

Festa Italiana, by selecting pre-1960s forms of local Italianness, made clear the extent to which the Italian population had changed. First, organizers projected the strong

³⁰⁰ “Royal BC Museum’s ‘Festa Italiana.’”

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

sense of *communitas* they now enjoyed on an earlier period when ethnic bonds were not as pronounced. Indeed, a certain level of solidarity existed at the Gulch and smelter at this time, but tensions existed between the two lodges. These institutions did not come together until the first civic-sponsored Fiesta Days in 1969. Thus, the pretence of a single Italian narrative prior to this time disclosed the divisions that once existed. Also, *Festa Italiana* was held at the mall, rather than one of the lodges, an indication that organizers did not want to privilege any one institution. Second, Italian participants expressed their Italianness in ways out of sync with contemporary practice. The presence of traditional cuisine made by volunteers conflicted with the norms at picnics and banquets, where food was prepared “on the spot” and usually by paid chefs. In this sense, the event resembled the more “open” Silver City Days, where food was prepared in advance by volunteers.

Third, the emphasis on an earlier age minimized the amicable relationship between the city, the nation, and the Italian population that had developed since 1969. The only contributions to this theme were a picture of the 1931 Trail hockey team (which included a few local Italians) and a short display on Armand Gris, an Italian Canadian war hero.³⁰⁴ When confronted by a “mainstream” audience, festival organizers sought to be create an “authentic” Trail Italianness—in the livery of the pre-1960 experience—even though this image did not reflect current conditions. By emphasizing the “golden age” of the Italian experience in Trail, organizers omitted the much more prominent role that Italian institutions placed in civic life thereafter. It was a telling act. In the age of Trail Italianness—a time when the Italian population enjoyed and romanticized a good rapport with its non-Italian neighbours—Italians looked back to the shared ethnic historical experience that set them apart.

³⁰⁴ “Royal BC Museum’s ‘Festa Italiana.’”

IV

Conclusion

At the turn of the new millennium the Italian “communities” of Vancouver and Trail each sought to build a civic monument to represent their experiences on Canadian soil. In Vancouver, the “Italian Garden” officially opened on 23 September 2000 at the corner of Renfrew and Triumph streets as part of the civic reclamation of Hastings Park. The seven acre project was spearheaded by local Italian businessmen, artists and volunteers. Together they raised five hundred thousand dollars (of the total cost of four million dollars) through fundraising events and the sale of fifty personalized benches and a hundred trees.³⁰⁵ Aesthetically and symbolically, the new park space was a powerful expression of local Italian culture. Aesthetically, it was specifically designed for the wet and temperate climate of the Pacific Northwest. The garden boasted an array of indigenous flowers and a network of fountains, cisterns and aqueducts that channelled rain water over marble mosaics.³⁰⁶ Symbolically, it captured in stone and wood the most recent stage in the development of local Italianness seen at festivals. Certain aspects spoke to the humble roots and Old World cultural forms of those who left the Italian countryside. Three all-season bocce courts and a set of chess and checker tables provided a new space for the older Italian Canadian men to socialize. More prominent was a bronze statue called “The Immigrants” by Italian sculptor Sergio Comacchio. It depicted an Italian family upon arrival in Canada. The father carries a worn leather suitcase and

³⁰⁵ The City of Vancouver covered the other 3.5 million dollars. Steve Whysall, “Greening of the PNE: The Italian Garden, designed to be especially beautiful in the rain, in the latest phase as Hastings Park is reclaimed for green space,” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 September 2000, Sec. C1.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

the mother tenderly comforts their young child at this critical and dislocating moment. At the same time, a second component of local Italianness—high culture—was present. Christopher Phillips, landscape architect of the entire Hastings Park restoration explained that this theme set the project apart: “It’s important to understand that this is a contemporary Italian garden in the spirit of the more traditional Italian garden.”³⁰⁷ In this light, *Giardino Italiano* was a sophisticated urban space marked by the works of skilled artisans. Each fountain bore the face of a Roman weather god or goddess, a style inspired by the 16th Century Villa d’Este garden in the hills outside Rome. An “Opera Walk” of inlaid stones featured rows of sculpted figures of key characters from famous Italian operas. These features were fitting testimonies to the wealth and social prestige achieved by the local Italian “community.”

One year later in 2001, the City of Trail celebrated the centenary of its incorporation. In an effort to “come up with something very special” for the occasion, former mayor Dieter Bogs proposed a monument to honour Trail’s families.³⁰⁸ A four-person task force—three of whom were of Italian descent—collected donations (much of which came from the local Italian social institutions and businesses),³⁰⁹ secured political funding, and located the right contractor and artist to make the proposition a reality.³¹⁰ Co-chairperson Bruno LeRose estimated the total cost of the project at \$120 000, but assured that this amount would be split evenly between the Centennial Committee and donors—many of whom were Italian individuals, businesses and social institutions.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Lana Rodlie, “Statue reflects Trail families,” *Kimberley (BC) Daily Bulletin*, 15 May 2000, p. 5.

³⁰⁹ The Sisters of Colombo, for example, donated \$5000. L.T., interviewed by author, 10 January 2007, Trail, BC.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

Even though not explicitly “Italian,” the local Italian population would likely have recognized the project as reflective of how they identified themselves. The final product consisted of four bronzed figures. The father, clearly an employee at the local smelter, dons the blue-collar shirt of his profession with a carpenter’s pencil in its pocket. He holds his young daughter in his arms as she carries his vintage lunch bucket. Beside him is the mother figure, who wears a business suit. In front of her is their juvenile son, who wears a Smoke Eater’s sweater (the local minor hockey team) and carries a school textbook in one hand and a hockey stick in the other.³¹² Le Rose claimed that the monument “represents the value of hard work and togetherness. People came here to build a better life and this reflects the past, present, and confidently looks to the future.”³¹³ The provisions of the industrious parents are tied to their children’s health and potential, as symbolized by the textbook and hockey stick. The hard physical labour of the male figure of the past permits the next generation to achieve greater heights in education. The business suit on the female figure symbolizes the strides toward social and economic equality achieved by local women. That the young daughter carries her father’s lunch pail suggests mutual appreciation of one another’s contributions to the family economy. Most of all, the family statue is the civic community writ small. The bonds among the four members double as those among citizens. This interpretation was stated at the monument’s unveiling in working-class terms by Ken Georgetti, President of the Canadian Labour Congress and former resident of the Gulch:

When [the workers of the Cominco smelter] came off that hill, they toiled and sweated to build a city as well, to develop a community and spirit of support and a spirit of citizenship that I have not seen paralleled anywhere in this country.³¹⁴

³¹² This information is based on personal observation.

³¹³ Rodie, “Statue reflects Trail families,” 5

³¹⁴ Raymond Masleck, “Centennial statue unveiled,” *Trail Daily Times*, 15 June 2001, p.1.

The two civic monuments evoked the local meanings of Italianness negotiated at festivals since the Second World War. The Family Monument recalled key moments of Italian identity construction and expression in Trail. The statue of the female in a business suit and the boy in a hockey sweater, for example, recalled the Colombo Lodge Queen Pageants of the mid-1970s, when one young contestant pointed out her attendance at Smoke Eater's hockey games and another expressed a desire to take up secretarial work. By appealing to civic pride and the intention to work outside the home, both candidates claimed qualities for themselves they thought would enhance their chances of becoming the Italian queen. The male worker figure spoke of the close relationship among the smelter, the Italian lodges and the city expressed at Colombo Lodge banquets during the 1970s. The fact that his daughter carried a vintage-style lunch pail—similar in appearance to the one displayed at *Festa Italiana* in 1998, recalled memories of the pre-1955 Gulch, a time when Italians of all regional backgrounds worked and lived together in close proximity. It was in this Italian space—more than in Italy itself—that the Italians of Trail rooted their sense of place and Old World forms of Italianness.

On a broader level, the Trail Family Monument symbolized the common sense of identity that developed between the city and its Italian population, a process set in motion when the City invited the two lodges to participate in Fiesta Days in 1969. The transition to “Trail Italianness” created both opportunities and tensions within the Italian “community.” At Silver City Days the history of the city was recast through the local experiences of its Italian minority. By the mid-90s, negative Italian stereotypes were considered so ludicrous that the city's Italian Canadian mayor felt comfortable dressing up as a *Mafioso* for the annual parade. However, celebrating Italianness and *being* Italian

in Trail were not one in the same, a tension that became apparent at the 1976 Colombo Lodge beauty pageant, when the girl with a Scottish father sought permission to enter the contest.

The Italian Garden in Vancouver spoke to the complex history of Italian identities in postwar Vancouver. First, an Italian space for public use fit well into the context of post-1973 relations between Italians and non-Italians in Vancouver. Before this time, with the notable exceptions of the centennials of 1958 and 1967, the Italian institutions did not participate in civic projects. Interaction with the wider community commenced with the new Italian Cultural Centre in 1977, which opened up membership to non-Italians and made certain modes of Italian culture accessible to the public at events such as Italian Week. Second, the Garden brought to mind the awkward interplay between Old World and high culture forms of Italianness since the mid-1970s. The new bocce courts and game tables represented the persistence of the former. These activities had been regular features at club picnics and banquets for almost a hundred years. Their inclusion in the park was an effort to emphasize the moments that had brought Vancouver's Italians together. Comparatively, the skilled artisan work on the fountains and the "Opera Walk" brought to mind the modes of high culture introduced to Vancouver by the Italian government and a new generation of educated volunteers. They were also thematically linked to the Venice Lives celebration in 1978, the colossal performance of *La Scala* opera at Expo 86, and the exhibit of prominent Italian architects at *Festa Italiana* in 1998. The bronze statue of a poor peasant family marked the humble social and economic status of the semi-skilled Italian immigrant from the Italian countryside upon arrival in Vancouver. That one family represented a shared "Italian" migrant and settlement

experience illustrated how perceptions of ethnic identity had changed since the Canadian and Italian governments entered “community” affairs during the early 1970s. Before this time most Second Wave migrants to Vancouver identified themselves by region rather than nation and formed clubs and societies based on these affiliations. “The Immigrant” statue was not only significant because it ignored the fact that Italian regional identities still existed, but that it was now possible to claim on some level the existence of pan-Italian *communitas* in Vancouver. This ethos was fostered over a span of nearly thirty years at the annual events of Republic Day and Italian Week, celebrations that brought Italians together and redefined Vancouver’s as a *multicultural* Italian “community”—nationally and ethnically “Italian,” but regionally and culturally diverse.

In conclusion, this examination challenges the idea of immutable ethnic categories. The modes through which Italians in Vancouver and Trail expressed themselves at cultural events illustrated the multifarious character of Italian ethnicity. “Italian” was never a given in the either context. Migrants came to both cities from a country marked by regional disparities. These pioneers and their kin congregated into new types of *communitas* in response to new situations, such as the need for mutual aid, anti-Italian discrimination, government incentives, cultural dislocation, and in Trail, having to rub shoulders with Italians from other regions at work and in the place they called the Gulch.

Ethnicity was a local affair, but it was also situational and transitory. These relationships—and perceptions of them—changed as Italians moved to different urban environs, took on new occupations, and in the case of Vancouver, encountered Italians from other regions and classes at cultural functions. This thesis provides a model that can

be used to explore identity formations in other “ethnic groups” within the Canadian context. Italian Canadians are one of many sizeable ethnic populations that settled in Canada during the past century. Most of these were dispersed throughout the country, formed social institutions, and turned to cultural events to foster a sense of *communitas*. By investigating within these other ethnic groups the interaction of social bonds, festive expressions, political incentives and perceptions of “outsiders,” a more nuanced and complete understanding of the Canadian ethnic mosaic will emerge.

Appendix A

Personal Interviews

All personal interviews consisted of seven general questions. These were, in order of appearance:

1. Please explain your past participation in Italian festivals.
2. Why did you choose to get involved in the festival?
3. What did you do for a living during that time?
4. When did your Italian ancestors come to Canada? From what region of Italy did they come?
5. How and why were certain Italian (themes, performances, foods) selected?
6. Do you consider Italian festivals important? Why/why not?
7. In your opinion, what role have Italian festivals played served for the Italians of your city? In Canadian society?

In the event that the participant made a statement that was unclear to me, I asked s/he to clarify what was meant.

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