

Italians of Fort William's East End, 1907-1969 by Roy Piovesana

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Grant settlers in this region's distinct history had been lost to its new image, and Williams attempts here "to give them the voice and recognition they rarely have been

afforded" (176). She has succeeded!

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Italians of Fort William's East End, 1907-1969

by Roy Piovesana

Thunder Bay: Institute of Italian Studies – Lakehead University, 2011.
\$22.95, paperback. 174 pages. ISBN: 978-0-97380-421-8 (www.iislu.com)

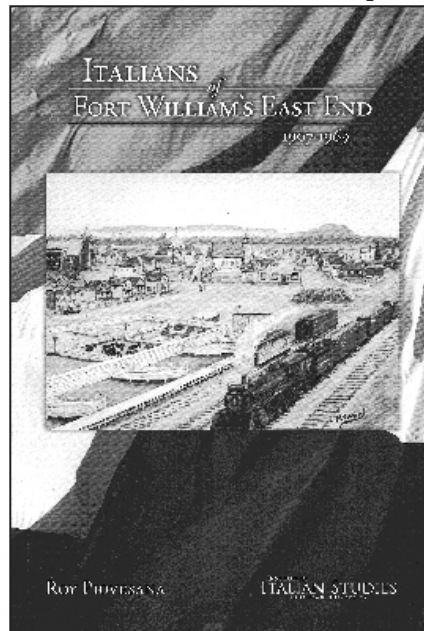
For anyone who has been to the City of Thunder Bay, Italian culture, language, and traditions are an integral aspect of the city's character. Those of Italian descent comprise over 16% of the total population, with the Italian language spoken as a first language (2.8%) more regularly than French (2011 Census). For over 100 years, the contributions of successive waves of migrants from various areas of what is now Italy have played a core role in the region's development and have left a mark on the political, economic, social, and cultural fabric of the city.

In *Italians of Fort William's East End, 1907-1969*, Roy Piovesana provides an important contribution to both regional and national literature exploring the history of Italian-Canadians. He uses the East End of what was then Fort William, now the south side of Thunder Bay, as a lens to undertake, in a classic sense, a social history exploring the "ordinary" lives of Italians who lived in

the area (5).

The East End was figuratively and literally on the other side of the Canadian Pacific Railway Tracks. While in the national narrative the East bound the country together in the decades following Confederation, at the Lakehead the East End symbolized an east-west barrier between the spaces that recently arrived immigrants inhabited and the neighbourhoods dominated by those of British descent and more established, largely Protestant, workers. The East End was a complex and multifaceted area with the largest Slovak community in pre-1914 Canada and five national parish churches (Italian, Polish, Slovak, Ukrainian Catholic, and Ukrainian Greek Orthodox) existed in very close proximity (2-3).

Piovesana's analysis is both inspired by and methodologically built upon that advocated by the late Michael Katz in his landmark study *The People of Hamilton West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (1975).



As in Katz's classic study, Piovesana's sources consist of manuscript censuses, assessment rolls, city directories, newspapers, sacramental registers, educational records, and fire insurance maps. *Italians of Fort William's East End* builds on the methods employed by Katz and, significantly, his observation that, "the task of counting and tracing thousands of individuals, or sorting masses of information about very large populations, is beyond the capacity and patience of even the most dedicated historian working by hand" (5). Piovesana's study utilizes computer software to analyze the data he has accumulated along with Internet resources produced over the past 35 years by genealogists and social historians.

The product is a book divided into three chapters exploring the East End as an "ethnic enclave," the nature and characteristics of the communities established, and the nature of schooling. The first chapter, "The Fort William Coal Docks: Image of an Ethnic Enclave," examines a district of the then City of Fort William that has been well trodden by historians. Piovesana, focusing less on the labour strife (though not neglecting it), explores how the image of the East End developed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In addition to providing a general history of the area, he examines the demographic, physical, and social issues present during the early twentieth century and the lack of understanding by city officials. Piovesana shows how the East End became viewed as an "enclave of foreigners living beyond the pale" (16) and evolved into possessing a "pejorative connotation" (16) that exists even to this day.

The second chapter, "Community of Immigrants," is grounded in the Italian proverb "*Tutto il mondo è paese*" [all the world is [a] village] (41). Piovesana explores the reasons why Italians who

migrated to the East End left their homelands, the nature and characteristics of migration and settlement, the type of work undertaken, and family and household structure and composition. These discussions are augmented by case studies of key events that affected the Italian community, as well as an in-depth look at the local religious life and a few prominent individuals in the community.

The final chapter, "Schools," is a fascinating examination of the schools in the East End and how they mirrored the neighbourhoods they served. As Piovesana's analysis of records from the Lakehead District School Board Archives and Thunder Bay Catholic School Board Archives reveals, teachers in both boards "embraced this cultural diversity and made it an integral part of the curriculum" (119). However, Piovesana argues that since Italians in the East End did not create their own language schools, this led to greater levels of assimilation; as the century progressed, increasing mobility resulted in fewer and fewer Italians living in the area.

Each chapter is accompanied by illustrations or photographs and many of the spatial arguments are amply supported through the inclusion of maps. In addition, a series of appendices is included that contains beautiful full-colour copies of original maps and fire insurance plans. These provide the reader with a spatial grounding of the neighbourhoods discussed as well as an appreciation of the complexity of the source material utilized.

While it is no longer home to large numbers of Italian immigrants, or the Ukrainians, Finns and Greeks that defined it for much of the twentieth century, the East End, as it is still called today, remains an identifiable working-class area of the city of Thunder Bay. Catholic and Orthodox churches still dominate the landscape

and, while the corner stores and boarding houses that typified the area for much of its history are gone, a community made up largely of recent immigrants beginning new lives in Canada and young families battling the economic and social insecurities found in this century still exists.

The sole drawback to *Italians of Fort William's East End, 1907-1969*, is the lack of contextualization of the findings within the larger body of literature on the Italian-Canadian experience. For example, a more detailed engagement with the work of Robert Harney, Bruno Ramirez, Franca Iacovetta, and John S. Zucchi would have provided

interesting comparative opportunities, particularly on how the experiences of immigrants can be shaped by local and/or regional circumstances. That said, *Italians of Fort William's East End, 1907-1969* makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Italian immigrant community in Thunder Bay during the twentieth century. One hopes that other historians will adopt Piovesana's approach and use it to explore the history of other immigrant communities in the region and beyond.

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The Peterborough Journal: Outstanding Moments and People

by Elwood H. Jones

Peterborough, Ontario: Trent Valley Archives, 2012. 184 pages. \$40.00 hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-98103-414-0. \$25.00 paperback. ISBN: 978-0-98103-413-3 (www.trentvalleyarchives.com)

Peterborough, Ontario, as anyone familiar with Upper Canadian history knows, was named in honour of Peter Robinson, the prominent political figure who oversaw the first major immigration to the area—even Wikipedia says so. Such is the myth, but not the truth. By the time of the 1826 Robinson-sponsored Irish Catholic settlement, the town was already officially Peterborough. A quibble? No. To ignore the chronology of the naming of the town is to diminish the significance of Zacheus Burnham, influential landowner and Surveyor General of Newcastle District. Burnham named the

town (and two others, Ashburnham and Keene) as “a reminder from his boyhood days in New Hampshire.” Peterborough was thus Peterborough “long before ... the

