# ITALIAN HERITAGE IN GUELPH & BEYOND

PRESERVING AND SHOWCASING INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES OF MIGRATION



# INTERVIEW AND UPLOAD PROCESS

- Participants volunteer to have their story recorded, are photographed and are encouraged to share any artifacts with the interviewer to illustrate their narrative. They include tools or sentimental items brought on the journey Italy to Canada, as well as photos and letters.
- Participants may share as much or as little as they wish. Every story is a unique treasure and has immeasurable value.
- Interviewers then transcribe the interview and write an abstract or overview of the interview.
- Transcription, abstract and accompanying photos are curated and uploaded to the Italian Heritage Website by the webmaster and thus contribute to an online exhibit.



## **The Guelph Italian Heritage Project**

Meet the Participants Register/Contribute an Item Donors Standardized Text The Italian Heritage Project Neatline







Meet the Participants

Artistic Representation

The Italian Heritage Project is an initiative in collaboration with the Italian Canadian Archives Project (ICAP) and the University of Guelph, that was born of a fortunate convergence of events. The principal aims of The Italian Heritage project are to collect and preserve the narratives and artifacts of Italian immigrants to Canada, and the Guelph-Wellington area specifically, while also instituting the participation of students at the University of Guelph and inviting the collaboration of members of the wider community.

The necessity of preserving the cultural heritage and artifacts of Italian-Canadian immigrants coincided with the acknowledged need of the language programs at the university of Guelph to institute an experiential learning component in the core language courses. Thus the impulse for increased community engagement and interest in preserving the Italian-Canadian experience resulted in the creation of the Italian Heritage

Dr. Sandra Parmegiani, Head of both the European Studies and of Italian Studies departments in the School of Languages and Literatures (SOLAL) at U of G, recognized the opportunity to address these separate and yet mutually supportive objectives. In collaboration with SOLAL, Parmegiani launched a community engaged core course for the Italian Minor students, utilizing a guided, independent study approach for the Italian Minor. Sharon Findlay, student, began working with the U of G Library to build the website as a place to collect, curate, and 'exhibit' the material assembled during the experiential learning course on a locally hosted version of OMEKA (a web based platform designed for academic standard collections and virtual exhibits).

The website does not substitute a physical archive but rather allows for the expansion of the digital aspect while growing and developing a material archive which will ultimately be housed in the local community. Naturally, the formation of the website supports knowledge mobilization while increasing the ease of use and accessibility to other virtual exhibits in museums, libraries, and academic settings. Although the Italian Heritage Project website is still in the developmental stages, it is rapidly expanding and improving as more material is submitted and curated. Our proposal is to make italianheritage.lib.uoguelph.ca collaborative virtual repository affiliated to ICAP and to the heritage work of individual communities.

On a human level, collecting the oral histories of often older contributors and glimpsing the reality of their lived experience is a deeply moving and validating exercise for both the student interviewer and the participants. Several students have been moved to research their own family histories, some tracing the stories of relatives who have passed, discovering fascinating details and even unraveling decades old mysteries about the lives of their own ancestors that otherwise might have been lost forever.





# **GUELPH ITALIAN** HERITAGE PROJECT AN **OMEKA BASED** WEBSITE

Omeka is a free, flexible, and open-source web-publishing platform for the display of library, museum, archives, and scholarly collections and exhibitions." www.omeka.org



## The Italian Heritage Project

#### Sharon Findlay

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Keywords: Italian Heritage Project; Italian Canadian Archives Project; ICAP; Italian-Canadian community; Italian-Canadian immigrants; Guelph, Ontario; Wellington County; University of Guelph.

In 1953, Livia Tonin (Rigure 1) left the small Italian town of Casacorba, in the Veneto region of Northern Italy, embarking on an 11-day sea voyage from Genoa to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and into an unknown future. She bid goodbye to her childhood home, a two-bedroom flat which housed 18 immediate and extended family members, along with their cow. After a long passage across the Atlantic Ocean, Livia arrived in Halifax and journeyed by train to Guelph, Ontario, where she was finally met by her fiancé, Ginn. Together they built a new life, one punctuated by trials, tribulations, and adventures.

Livia's account is one of several stories recently chibited by the *Italian Heritage Project*, an experiential learning initiative at the University of Guelph whose aim is to collect and curate personal narratives, oral histories, and physical artifacts contributed by Italian immigrants to Canada, particularly those within the Guelph-Wellington area. Developed in collaboration with the Italian Canadian Archives Project (ICAP) and aided by a grant from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the *Italian Heritage Project* consists of an experiential learning course connected to an online repository hosted by the University of Guelph's McLauchlin Library.

The project's genesis was in the fall semester of the 2015-2016 academic year, when an experiential learning and community engagement component was added to the core language curriculum at the School of Languages and Literatures, a department of the College of Arts. This addition coincided with a more general need to preserve Italian-Canadian cultural heritage. To this end, Dr. Sandra Parmegiani, Head of European Studies and Italian Studies at the department, began a community-engaged experiential learning course for students who had declared a minor in Italian Studies and who wished to preserve the stories of the local Italian-Canadian community. The author, one of Dr. Parmegiani's students, enrolled in a Digital Humanities Summer Workshop at the University of Guelph's McLaughlin Library and worked with the library's staff to build the website. Using a locally-hosted version of Omeka, an online platform for digital collections and exhibits, the Italian Heritage Project website displays material gathered and assembled in the experiential learning course. Students' participation and community members' collaboration form the pillars of the project.

Although the Italian Heritage Project is still in development, those involved intend to continue building the website as a collaborative, ICAP-affiliated repository in which the heritage work conducted in individual Italian-Canadian communities can be shared. Beyond the project's digital boundaries, students and community members are currently planning a physical archive which will eventually be housed in the Guleth-Wellinston community.

For many of the contributors and students, collecting or sharing these stories has been a deeply moving experience. Contributors' stories and artifacts afford an intimate glimpse into the lived experiences of Italian immigrants to Cuanda. Tradesmen and women brought their tools, their letters, and their jewely, mostly things of sentimental value. These objects now offer us a delightful insight into the lives of these individuals who redefined themselves and embraced new and complex composite identities.

Livia Tonin did not bring many belongings when she set out from Casacorba: a few clothes, some essentials, and a small alarm clock which today she keeps in a display cabinet in her living room. Recalling her journey, Livia recounted losing her engagement ring while she washed her hands midvoyage. The cause of much trepidation en route, the mishap later generated much laughter-and Gino, her then-fiancé and later husband, never replaced it! After settling down in her adoptive home of Canada, Livia never looked back; she did not mourn the loss of her childhood home. Canada became her home and she adopted it with joy and determination. Other participants shared some of the obstacles which they encountered in Canada and which made them question their resolve. One related the experience of giving birth in a hospital in which none of the doctors or nurses could communicate in her native Italian. Another contributor did not intend to leave Italy forever; despite having lived in Guelph for more than five decades, he is always planning his return.

Since its inception, several student researchers working on the *Inalian Heritage Project* have been moved to research their own family instories. As one student, Alaina Osborne, noted in her work on her family archive, "The photographs represent layers of historical, social and personal meaning that affect how I choose to articulate the narratives of my grandparents' lives [...] Because I am related to the subjects of my research, my maternal grandparents, I am innately emotionally tied to their individual stories. (Italian Heritage in the control of the proposal meaning that affects of their individual stories. (Italian Heritage in the control of the proposal meaning the control of the

Studies by Undergraduate Researchers at Guelph (SURG)

#### The Italian Heritage Project (Findlay)

Project 2016). Through the exploration of family documents, heirlooms, and artifacts, and by tracing the stories of relatives who have passed, students have pieced together fascinating details, even unraveling decades-old mysteries about the jives of their ancestors.

These stories, at once deeply personal and yet able to transcend cultural barriers, speak to fundamental human experience and help to constitute a shared Canadian history. By collecting, curating, and sharing these stories, the Halian Heritage Project engages in a selective and productive dialogue with history and with cultural heritage as a explores the intimate relationship between Canada and its migrant populations. Contributors' stories are eloquent testimonies of migration, a theme which is particularly resonant today. Yet

these stories risk disappearance as populations age and memories fade. The Italian Heritage Project hopes to afford the oral histories, memories, and lived experiences of the Italian-Canadian community of Guelph-Wellington (and beyond) a place where they can be collected, curated, and

#### References

Italian Heritage Project. 2016. The Italian Heritage Project [Internet]. Guelph (ON): University of Guelph; [cited 2017 August 12]. Available from: https://italianheritage.lib.uoguelph.ca/.



Figure 1: Livia Tonin, 1953. Kindly reproduced with permission from Livia Tonin and the Italian Heritage Project.

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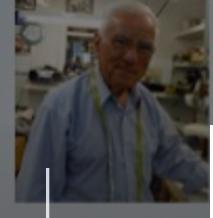
- to confront the theme of collective memory and cultural heritage.
- Exploring the role of Italian migrants in the development of Guelph and the intercultural dialogue that characterizes our community.

# Background

Dr. Sandra Parmegiani, Head of both the European Studies and of Italian Studies programs in the School of Languages and Literatures (SOLAL) at U of G. developed a community engaged core course for the Italian Minor students, utilizing a guided, independent study approach. Swaron Finding (student) worked with the U of G. Library to build a website as a place to collect. COMMUNITY asserts COMMUNITY course on local horsely worked with the Community of Community and without exhibite). How can we preserve and share the narratives and criticals of Italian Canadian immigrants to the Guerph-Wellington region?

# Methods

This pilot project began in 2016 with a small group of students. They identified Italian migrants in the Guelph-Wellington community, and conducted oral history interviews, studied family histories, and collected artifacts. A virtual exhibit and website have been created and are now being populated with photographs, interview transcripts, and overviews of each



# Key Themes From In

- The reshaping of identity and religionship with Canada.
- The selective workings of me be ween forgetting and rem
- The need to preserve mater the re; confronting their imm

# Conclusions

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Emigrated to Guelph from Rocca San Giovanni in 1967 at the age of 29

- A toilor by trade, he came to Canada in order to work and provide for his young family
  when finding a job in that's became increasingly difficult.
- He recounted a personal story of hard work and sacrifice; recalling a time when he worked two jobs before renting his first shop on MacDonnell Street
- He is proud of his success and the new life he and his family created in Guelph, but expressed feeling form at times, as well as a desire to return to Italy one day

ught with him on the journey

#### Introduction and Research Goals

The Malan Heritage Projects an initiative in calaboration with the Indian Canadian Archives Project (ICAP) and the University of Gwelein IU of QL The principal arms of this project are to calcular and preserve the normalives and artifacts of tellar immigrants to Gwelein-Wellington area. This project of see oncourages the porticipation of students of the University of Gwelein and whites the calaboration of members of the whites the calaboration of members of the

The goals of this project include:

- Developing an open project that will augment our knowledge of the Italian immigrant experience.
   Helping students and the general public to confront the theme of collective memory and cultural heritage.
- Exploring the role of Italian migrants in the development of Guelph and the intercultural dialogue that characterizes our community.

#### Background

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#### Method

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This is a long-term project that will continue to grow both online and physically. ICAP is the primary methodological authority, and the Italian Canadian Club will be an ongoing partner.

#### Limitations

The collection of material artifacts is a challenge; a physical repository (museum or archive) needs to be identified. "The photographs represent layers of historical, social and personal meaning that affect how I choose to articulate the narratives of my grandparents' lives."

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### THE ITALIAN HERITAGE PROJECT

Preserving the narratives of immigrants to the Guelph-Wellington region

#### Meet a Participant: Giovanni Giardino



- Owner of Blovanni's Custom Xolivon (pusible: Street in Downform Gueiph
   Emigrated to Gueiph from Rocco Stan Glovenni in 1967 of the open of 29
   A tallor by trade, he came to Canada in order to work and provide for his young family when finding a job in 1 haly became increasingly difficult.
   He recounted a personal story of hard work and accention; recalling a time when he wo
- He recommed a personal story of head work and sociation, rectaling a time when the worked
  here jobs before entinging his fair top, on MociDonnel Street
   He is proud of his success and the new life he and his family created in Guelph, but
  sepressed feeling from all firms, as well as a clearly to rehum to toldy one day
   40 years after entigrating, he still has took of the trodu he brought with him on the journey

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#### Key Themes From Interviews

- The reshaping of identity and the migrants relationship with Canada.
- The selective workings of memory, poised between forgetting and remembering.
  The need to preserve material heritage items; confronting their imminent loss.

#### Conclusions

- Collecting the oral histories of contributors, who are often older adults, and glimpaing into the reality of their lived experience is a deeply moving and validating exercise for both the student interviewers and the participants.
- participants.
- Several students have been moved to research their own family histories, some tracing the stories of relatives who have passed, discovering fascinating details and even unraveling decades old mysteries about the lives of their own ancestors.
- The Italian Heritage Project captures personal memories and experiences that otherwise would not be recorded and might be lost forever.

#### Researchers

Sandra Formegiani (sparmegii) suguelph.coj

The Italian Heritage Project





Cultural Heritage

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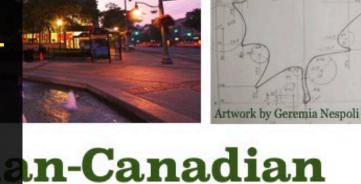
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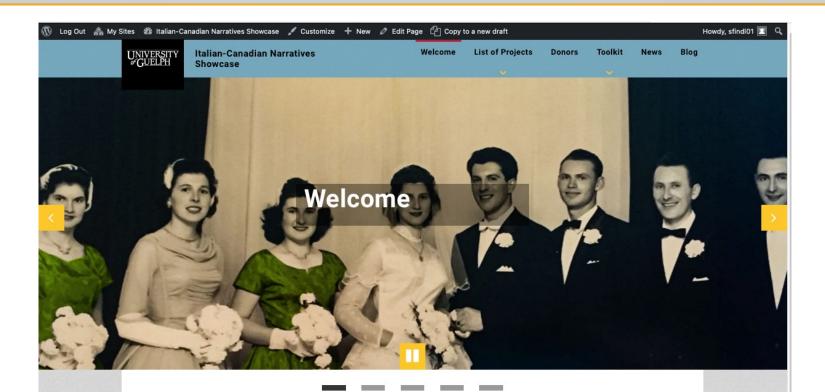


7th Annual Conference - Guelph, Ontario September 22-23

Our Heritage, Our Future

http://icap2017conference.com https://icap.ca

Friday Sept.22, Italian Canadian Club Saturday Sept. 23, Art Gallery of Guelph



Search ... Sear

## **Welcome to Italian-Canadian Narratives Showcase**

The Italian-Canadian Narratives Showcase (ICNS) is an initiative born in 2019 at the University of Guelph. Inspired by the work of ICAP (Italian-Canadian Archives Project), ICNS presents Italian-Canadian individual and collective histories and provides examples of different ways in which public and privately held materials —writings, photos, newspaper articles, documents, professional tools, everyday objects, etc. can be used to share the Italian-Canadian contribution to Canada's evolving narrative, past and present. Projects reflect Italian-Canadian experiences from across Canada and they are meant to spark ideas for how public and personal materials can be shared with Canadians and the world. ICNS is a platform for communities, academics and individuals to share their curated Italian-Canadian materials, to draw experiences between generations, to teach students and to alert researchers to the wealth of experiences that reside in Canada.















## Giving Birth: Italian-Canadian Migration and Motherhood



Image 1 Italian-Canadian Children in the Snow, Guelph, 1950s. Kindly reproduced with the permission of Iole Cazzola

## Sharon Findlay



GRAZIE MILLE!