

Interview with Carlo Fera
October 18, 1982
Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.
Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi
Transcribed: March 10, 2003

RM: Would you like to start with the Sons of Italy?

CF: It was started by a parish priest by the name of Reverend J.P. Martines who was parish priest of the Holy Rosary Church. He organized a social club, more or less a church club. He never thought it would spread to the lodge of the United States. We became the first lodge in Canada that belonged international. Our tribe is 365. In 1925 legislation was passed and we could not send our per capita tax from Canada to the United States. So then we applied ????. From that time on we have been known as the Sons of Italy Order of Ontario. Lodge No. 1. We were the first. We were also the first Canadian club to be chartered by the Ontario ??? of the federal government. (echo, and background noise) In 1932 we formed the Ladies Lodge. It's known as the ??? (in Italian). We built a new hall on the corner of Cat ??? and we were in that hall since 1960. That hall is now a Catholic school, St. Martines Catholic School. We built the new temple on Quinn Street and West. We had, up to the time of the war, the Sons of Italy had some 26 lodges. 2 of them being here in Sault Ste. Marie. The others mostly in the Toronto and Niagra area. We didn't have anything between here and Troy. Then in 1940 when Italy entered the war against the allies the order fell apart...the two lodges in Sault Ste. Marie. We had a very terrible time during the war, but we persisted and we worked and finally we got back on our feet and now we have 18 lodges.

RM: So these have all been revived since the war.

CF: 18 out of 25 have been revived.

RM: And they're scattered across...

CF: They're scattered across Ontario. We have lodges in Toronto and Niagra Falls, ???, ???, I just don't remember them all off hand.

RM: Is this considered the head quarters?

CF: The head quarters is in Toronto.

RM: Was Sault Ste. Marie ever the head quarters?

CF: Not the national quarters. We were the first, No. 1 so we came ??? of the shipping lodge of America. When we had enough lodges in Canada, I just can't tell you right off hand what year it happened, but I believe it was around 1926.

RM: So there's no legal connection between the US lodge...

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

CF: Oh yes. There were a few years...we were recognized by the ??? of America.
(blurred) Right here.

RM: So the connection was made...

CF: The connection was made again in 1955. I started working on it in 1937. I attended the congress in Chicago. But it didn't become a fact until 1955.

RM: What kind of...

****SKIP IN TAPE****

RM: What is the...I noticed there is a book on the history of the Sons of Italy called *Purple Astor*.

CF: I don't know. I've been trying to get that. Purple is the Sons of Italy color. But I can't tell you...I was asked that same question this morning.

RM: Because they also paint the white line down State Street in Chicago for Columbus Day.

CF: A white line?

RM: Like a traffic line...

CF: That's the Sons of Italy color. I think that's why it's in the title.

RM: On Saturday night they've started a lodge in Ishpeming. They're expecting some 500 people. That was in the last year or two years.

CF: Where is Ishpeming?

RM: Next to Marquette.

CF: Oh, Copper Country.

RM: Iron Country. Marquette County. There is a lot of response. A lot of people have joined. It's been quite successful.

CF: Outside of Detroit I don't think we have any lodges in Michigan.

RM: Saginaw. So that might be it, just three of them.

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

CF: As far as I know there's two of them in Detroit. There were for a number of years. I was Grand ??? during the war years 1940 to 1949. ??? up to 1961. I'm not active any more. I live on the other end of the city. I depend on buses for transportation. So I'm not active anymore. I'm 74.

RM: Is there anything else about the lodge that you want to get into?

CF: I don't know...if there's any questions you would like to ask in regards to the war years I might be able to help out.

RM: Were there any other lodges prior to 1915 for Italians in the Soo?

CF: No. I shouldn't say no so fast. I think the Marconi came around about the same time. But we were the first that was chartered. My club is strictly local. I don't know, at one time there was the Lions, the Marconi Society, the Italian Society in Sudbury, and the society in the Upper Peninsula.

RM: The Federation.

CF: But I don't think they've been active in the last couple years. I'm not sure.

RM: No, in fact in the beginning of September they disbanded and the Federation was...it had gone back to 1909 and there were a lot of lodges. They would all meet and have 3-day conventions. Then it got down to these various societies didn't have an active membership. People were joining the Sons of Italy instead of these other ones. They got down to about 7 members attending. At one time during the '50s and '60s there were the Canadian Soo was part of that.

CF: Yes. The Marconi was part of that. Every year...I thought maybe you were interested in the Sons of Italy. That's why I took this along here...This is an Italian paper that was printed in Montreal. This goes back to 1946.

RM: Was there ever an Italian paper in the Soo?

CF: No, not to my knowledge. We had the Sons of Italy of Ontario had a bulletin that came out of Toronto. Now it's the second year, but it's not in Italian. At one time it was, when we had the Reverend Salo who was taken...he was a Catholic preacher. We had more people that were Italian that had an education. Today most of us are Canadian born with Italian parents. The order today is not the order that I knew back in 1925 when I joined. All our meetings are in English. There's very little Italian. You can request that something be said in Italian, otherwise it's all in English. We get a paper from Connecticut, it's called the Italian News. There's a section there that's in Italian.

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

RM: That's the bulletin for the ??? (too much background noise) When did they stop using Italian as the language?

CF: In Ontario I think I can safely say that since 1960 most of the meetings gradually went from Italian to English.

RM: Are you getting young people to join?

CF: Yes. There's a handful of us that are over 50. Most of us are younger people.

RM: So it's not dying out.

CF: No, it's certainly not.

RM: Can I ask some questions about Italian immigration to the Soo? What was the reason for Italians coming to the Soo?

CF: Employment mostly. To get away from what they had in the Old Country. My Dad came in 1898. He went to the mines. Then he came here because of the canal and the steel plant. The railroad. This is what brought them.

RM: In the old days were they working on the railroad?

CF: Sure. From here into the north country. On the central and expansion into CPI. Then to get around Chapel in that area.

RM: Those were all Italians.

CF: Yes.

RM: Did they do any mining?

CF: About 150 miles north of here in Wawa. There was a big mine there. They get quite a bit of their ore

RM: Are there any Italians up there today?

CF: Oh yes, definitely.

RM: That would be another center of Italian...

CF: I don't know just how many, but there are Italian people up there.

RM: Were there any other mines around this area?

Interview with Carlo Fera
October 18, 1982
Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.
Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi
Transcribed: March 10, 2003

CF: Not in this area. In ??? which is maybe about 125 miles north and east of us here there's a mine and a number of others, gold mines.

RM: And they all came around the turn of the century then.

CF: All around the turn of the century.

RM: Here in Sault Ste. Marie they were working in steel.

CF: In the steel industry and the paper mill. The Algoma. They're employed...today there are maybe 500-600. In 1923 when I started in steel there were maybe 2200-2300. Today there are maybe 1200. Then we got the Wirehauser which is another mill and they employ another 500. But those are the two major industries.

RM: And Italians then worked...

CF: In every industry.

RM: How many, could you give me a rough figure or even a percentage of the number of Italians working at Algoma when you went to work there?

CF: I would say that there were maybe 20-25% of the employees were of Italian birth or origin.

RM: And today are there still a lot...

CF: Today there are 12,000 employees between here and the Algoma gold property.

RM: How about the paper mill. Did that have a large percentage of Italians?

CF: The paper mill had about the same figures. 25-30%.

RM: How many people worked there when it was booming?

CF: Never more than 1200.

RM: Did a lot of Italian businesses...

CF: When you went west of Gold Street it was considered Little Italy, but really if you went west of Huron Street there was a small community of Finnish people and the rest were all Italians. All the business places were Italian. You start from Huron Street and if you found an Italian business it was way back in the early '20s. People that had dry goods stores. There's one Ukrainian who had meat, but the rest were all Italian. The ???

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

was operated by the Barns Drug Company, but the rest of the stores were all Italian. James P. Hardwood was started by Spigoni. Today he's one of the biggest in the city. In fact they have 3 big stores.

RM: I noticed coming into town here that there's an Italian running for mayor.

CF: George ??? (too much background noise)

RM: When did the Italians start getting into politics?

CF: Into politics? City council, locally, back as far as 1928 or '29.

RM: So the immigrants than, or at least their children.

CF: Children mostly.

RM: Were there any immigrants?

CF: The only one I know he came over as a kid of 3 or 4 years old. He was there for a number of years right up til the time he passed away. I think he was elected in the early '30s and was there til 1958.

RM: He represented the Italians?

CF: He was known as the Italian ??? at that time. Today it's Mike Wislowski he's been there 20 years.

RM: So in recent years Italians have gotten in to...gotten more position on the city council.

CF: Well today there's Mike Wislowski and Mike Bolotzi and Frank Lanzer and Joe Partezzi. Half of the council is Italians. It is an Italian board, it always was.

RM: So things have changed.

CF: In the District Court 3 out of 4 and 1 out of 2 in the ??? (blurred) court.

RM: That's quite a record then. Was there ever, in the early days, did you grow up with a lot of prejudice?

CF: Yes. At one time if you went west of Huron Street they would have ??? (blurred) in your own hands. There was a lot of that. We thank the good Lord that there isn't prejudice today. There used to be, but there isn't hardly any today.

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

RM: Back in the '20s, was the Ku Klux Klan active in the Soo?

CF: We had an organization here of the Ku Klux Klan, but just how active I don't know. I do know of two instances of crosses. One was in the ??? area and the other was across from the Italian church. Other than that I don't know.

RM: There wasn't a lot of outbreaks of violence against Italians, just isolated instances.

CF: And whether or not it was against Italians I can't say.

RM: That could also be against Catholics. Immigrants and Catholics.

CF: At the west end was Little Italy. There were a lot of Italians with the exception of a few Polish and Ukraine families. And two or three Chilean?? families. (background noise) Then there was the Irish section and the Finnish section. There was a section where the Welshmen gathered. Today they're spread out all over the city. There isn't an ethnic section.

RM: Like the Italians have just gone wherever.

CF: Oh yes.

RM: When did that migration out of Little Italy begin?

CF: About 10 years ago. Maybe a little more. Since they put that small plaza in there.

RM: Did that break up the community?

CF: Oh yes. Today a very small percentage of the people here are Italian.

RM: So the ethnic Little Italy is no longer. Are there any stores left? Italian stores that might sell Italian food or sausage?

CF: No. Italian food on James Street, no. There's one store at the corner of Hutchin Street and Spring Street, they deal a little with Italian, but now there's chain stores specializing in that too. ??? (blurred)

RM: Is that on the west end?

CF: It's northwest of the city.

RM: Were there families living in the Canadian Soo that had relatives on the American side?

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

CF: Oh yes. There was Paris, that was one family I remember. That's the only family I can think of that had family on both sides. As far as Italian people going back and forth, there was another family Nacoza...but there was a lot of travel back and forth.

RM: Are there any Italian bakeries still in operation today?

CF: No. The last one was Hoover Bakery and they were an American outfit, or from Toronto, I'm not sure. But it's not open anymore. They still make Italian bread, for stores that have in-store bakeries.

RM: So it looks like a lot of the ethnic food and cooking has been picked up by the chain stores.

CF: There are very few small stores now that deal in ethnic foods.

RM: One thing that happened in the Upper Peninsula, given its peculiar economy with the mining, there were a lot of Italians, say prior to World War I working there. The subsequently because of labor trouble and closing of mines a lot of the population left. Did that happen in the Soo? Did Italians leave if there was a Depression or something, did families move to say Toronto? Did you have out-migration?

CF: We did, but not to a great extent.

RM: A few isolated cases.

CF: If things were bad here, they were much worse elsewhere. ??? than most town do. It was the steel industry.

RM: So you've never really lost 50% of your Italian families at one time.

CF: No. this town has grown from 18,000 back in the early '20s to 85,000 today.

RM: So it's just the opposite of the Upper Peninsula.

CF: The worst big Italian...businesses in this town was Italian people. I think the biggest J.P. Hardware, they're the biggest in this town.

RM: Back in the early days did the Italians here in the Soo ever have, in terms of the culture, did you have Italian bands?

CF: The last Italian professor I can remember...

SIDE II

\

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

CF: The last Italian band was a guy by the name of ??? he has a furniture store and appliance store on Third Street. He's the man. He was a neighbor of ours. He loved music. He loved it so much he would share it...

RM: Were there a lot of bands, or just one?

CF: No. There was just one. Bands. Orchestras, there were a number of different orchestras.

RM: Were there ever any Italian language radio shows originating from the Soo?

CF: We had the news in Italian. On occasion they still have it. But the earlier show I can't recall.

RM: But there would be a news program.

CF: Yes. We get a program from Toronto now. But those stations, have the Italian news.

RM: In Italian

CF: Yes.

RM: Does that come out...

CF: Local.

RM: So it doesn't come from Toronto.

CF: There was one from Toronto. I think it's about an hour or hour and a half. I don't know if they still have it or not.

RM: Did the Italians have, back in the '20s, did they have any dramatic groups that put on plays in Italian?

CF: Yes. The Marconi Society and the Fazoli Lodge had ??? (in Italian) and we put on Italian plays.

RM: Do you remember the plays you put on?

CF: I only remember one. It was Roca Monerosa. There was a number of them that I can't recall.

RM: These were plays, the scripts from Italy or were these locally?

Interview with Carlo Fera
October 18, 1982
Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.
Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi
Transcribed: March 10, 2003

CF: No, no, not local. They were scripts in Italian.

RM: Were any of these famous?

CF: Sure. Not the opera. Everything the group put on with the Sons of Italy, the scripts were brought in.

RM: Were these put on often?

CF: For a few years there were 2 or 3 a year.

RM: And these were well received.

CF: Oh yes, definitely.

RM: All the lodges came together to put on one play, or were they individual?

CF: No. Not all the lodges. The 2 Sons of Italy lodges, the Bavarian and the ??? The Marconi would put on their own.

RM: And they had 3 or 4 a year.

CF: Yes. There were 2 organizations, they have the ladies society and the men's society. The only difference is we operate on the chain system. They're international and we're strictly local.

RM: Where did most of the Italians come from that settled in the Canadian Soo?

CF: I think it's safe to say most of them came from Tuscany area. All parts of it.. Tuscany and south. Ginini, his parents came from the Tuscany area. He's the nephew of Judge Ginini. Barsanti had a restaurant here for years from the Tuscany area.

RM: How do you spell that name?

CF: B-A-R-S-A-N-T-I

RM: There was a Barsanti up in Calumet that had a big ice cream operation.

CF: There's also a Barsanti on the city council. Way back in the early...around 1918, '16, '17, and '18 Frank Capacel had a big ice cream shop. We called it Capi's. Barsanti's Ice Cream Parlor, Piner was also an Italian. All the ice cream parlors here at one time were Italian.

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

RM: When Italains came into Canada, was there something comparable to Ellis Island?

CF: No. Most of them came through New York. Then from there to Montreal.

RM: Is that how your family came?

CF: Yes.

RM: In the Upper Peninsula some of them came through Canada. They landed in Canada. They landed in Montreal and then took a train into Michigan.

CF: Some landed here and then took a train into the United States.

RM: Were there any special holidays that the Italians celebrated here? Feast days and secular holidays?

CF: ??? is a big day.

RM: That's in August.

CF: I can't think of any right off hand.

RM: St. Joseph?

CF: St. Joseph.

RM: St. Anthony, Augustine?

CF: St. Anthony. There's another one...??? Italio. I forget what it's called. They have statues on their shoulder and they parade around and there's a band.

RM: Does that still go on?

CF: It's been gone for years. I can remember very many years ago St. Rock. She was about 4 blocks from the Italian church and she had St. Rock's break and she carried it into church. She made a couple trips. After mass, everybody got bread.

RM: Was Columbus Day ever celebrated?

CF: That was a big day. The Sons of Italy would always have a big do.

RM: So you had a few of the Saint days and Columbus Day was the secular holiday.

Interview with Carlo Fera

October 18, 1982

Sault Ste, Marie, Ont.

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 10, 2003

CF: Both the Marconi and the Sons of Italy had their projects like queens??? for Columbus Day.

RM: For Columbus Day did they have a parade?

CF: Sure. Back in the old days the early '20s. Up until the late '20s. After that it died out. Occasionally they had Marion Day. It's a holy day.

RM: What date is that?

CF: I can't recall what day it is.

RM: Was there an Italian church here?

CF: Oh yes, the Holy Rosary Church. At that time it was called Holy Rosary Church. It's on Capsize Street.

RM: What's it called today?

CF: Today it's called Our Lady of Mt. Caramel. It's still there. Occasionally there is an Italian priest. Father Murphy looks after that now. On occasion Monsignor...once in a while there's a Father from Italy that's stationed in Brine River will come in. Just a couple weeks ago there was a priest from ??? Italy that celebrated mass there.

RM: Back in the old days they had services in Italian. Do they still do that today?

CF: Just...I don't go to that church. I understand Father Murphy does pretty good giving mass in Italian. The Italian people appreciate it unless it comes directly from him. The Italian people that come from Italy. They would rather have it in Italian.

RM: That is quite a bit of information on different things. Is there anything else you want to add?

CF: I don't think so. Unless there's anything else you would like to ask.