

Book Prospectus

From Sojourners to Citizens: Alberta's Italian History

Author: Adriana A. Davies

From Sojourners to Citizens: Alberta's Italian History is a unique and comprehensive history that documents the presence of Italians in Alberta in every era of immigration from the 1880s to the present. Individual and community stories are told and these have been drawn from a range of primary and secondary sources including oral histories, family and community histories, newspapers accounts and personal interviews with the author.

The book will be a valuable addition to existing literature on Western Canadian history and ethnocultural history. The book also deals with enemy alien designation and internment during the Second World War and their impact at the grassroots level.

In addition, because of the author's long involvement in the area of multicultural policy, new thinking is brought to bear on the impact of such policies on the process of assimilation and belonging. The book is timely because of its demonstration of an immigrant community's movement from marginalization to the mainstream. Finally, the examination of Italian organizations spanning a period of over 100 years provides insight into their function in enabling the community to become rooted.

Most of the Italian-Canadian immigration history literature is Ontario -focused. Where it deals with a particular theme, for example, enemy alien designation and internment, focus is on Ontario and Quebec, simply because of the size of the Italian communities in these two provinces. There is a distinct need for an ethnocultural community social history of the breadth and scope of Davies' book. The Alberta content is set in a national context of Italian immigration history.

Davies notes: "My aim in writing *Alberta's Italian History: From Sojourners to Citizens* has been to tell the stories of my own ethnocultural community in the context of the settlement and development of Alberta in the twentieth century. I have done this using both thematic and chronological approaches. The community's contributions in the building of railways, coal mining, agriculture and ranching, industry, culture and civic life are discussed as part of the narrative of province building. At the end of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, Italians were on the lowest rung of desirability with respect to official immigration policy. They were considered a visible minority.

An over-arching narrative has been developed that sets the context of immigration of Italians (and other ethnic groups) based on government policy beginning in the late 19th century. A timeline of Italian immigration to Alberta was developed and underpins all the content. The stories of individuals (male and female) are drawn from oral histories as well as family histories, memoirs and newspapers accounts. These enrich the narrative and particularize the settlement experience of Italians. Since most of the early immigrants worked as labourers in mines, railways and forestry camps, and many were union members, labour history approaches have also been used.

The majority of immigration from Italy, in the early part of the 20th century, was to small communities where railways were being built and resources exploited, thus early chapters focus on the resource hinterlands of the province. The period of agricultural colonies and homesteading focuses on rural communities while, the second major wave of Italian immigration, which occurred post-1949, was to cities, primarily Edmonton and Calgary. Italians are seen as part of the urbanization of Alberta and post-war industrial development. Finally, various government policies relating to immigration, enemy alien designation and internment, and, in the latter half of the 20th century on multiculturalism, have been examined with respect to their impact on the Italian community. The final chapter also explores “cultural politics” and notions of belonging.