

Emilio Marino (1879-1949)

When Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary on Sunday, 23 May 1915, the Italian government communicated with their consular agents around the world to issue an alert to all expatriate Italians between the ages of 20 and 39 to be ready to return to Italy for active military service.¹ These Consul Generals and their representatives performed a notable service to their country in the recruitment of Italians for war service. In 1911, approximately six million Italians lived abroad and, between 1914 and 1918, the Italian government paid for the return of approximately 304,000 reservists to honour their military responsibilities.² In a remarkable gesture of loyalty, other reservists returned to their homeland at their own expense during the first year of the war. It is estimated that the Italian government had a five per cent return rate of those called up for military service. This was almost equal to the number of Canadians (5.7 per cent) that rallied to the call of Great Britain.

Immediately after Italy's entry into World War I on the side of England and France, a cluster of Italian reservists living in Fort William's East End rallied around their Royal Italian Consular Agent, Emilio Marino. He became the intermediary between those eligible to enlist and the Italian government during the war. Born in San Mango Cilento, Province of Salerno, Italy on 9 February 1879, Marino emigrated first to Montevideo, Uruguay (1894) and then to Buenos Aires, Argentina (1896) where he attended a business college and developed skills as an accountant.³ In 1901 he returned to Italy for military service, was discharged from the army the following year and then travelled to New York City where he stayed for six months before coming to Fort William in the spring of 1904.⁴ Here, he launched his career as a businessman with the Ray Street and Company Bank and Insurance Agency and in that position built up a client base among the Italian immigrant population. When this business faltered, Marino set himself up as an independent insurance broker. Early indications were that he had found a new home in Fort William. His wife, Teresa di Bartolomeo, joined him in 1907⁵ and by the outbreak of war in 1914 they had two sons, Angelo, 5, and Francesco, 4.⁶ His popularity among Fort William's Italian commu-



Emilio Marino, 1918. *This portrait was taken by the City of Fort William on the occasion of Marino's election to city council in January 1918. He was elected again in 1922 and had the distinction of being the first Italian born to serve as an elected representative on Fort William City Council. Courtesy Thunder Bay Archives 4872.*

nity was recognized in the fall of 1912 when Marquis Carlo Durazzo, Italian Consul General of Canada in Montreal, announced his appointment as Italian Consular Agent for the Thunder Bay District.⁷ It was through Marino's office at 632 McTavish Street that approximately two hundred potential Italian reservists were able to receive and follow the directives of the Italian government relating to their participation in the war effort.⁸ Before this process started however, Marino publicly appealed to employers in the Thunder Bay District not to discriminate against the hiring of Italian immigrant labourers on the grounds that they would soon return to Italy to enlist in the Italian army.⁹ He argued that reservists might not leave Canada for months and in the interim they desperately needed the employment to support their families.

On the evening of 31 August 1915, "when the City was turned over to the Italians"¹⁰, a unity of mood was



Italian Section of the Canadian Legion (B.E.S.L.), Fort William, Ont., 15 June 1934. Emilio Marino was instrumental in the creation of the Italian Legion. Shown here are the charter members of the organization with Marino seated in the front row fourth from the left. Courtesy Archives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Thunder Bay.

present among the host society, Italian immigrants, and reservists as a parade of approximately five hundred proceeded from the corner of McTavish and Simpson Streets to the CPR station on Syndicate Avenue to send off the first contingent of 110 young men destined for the Italian front. A decade earlier, men such as these might have been viewed by the local citizenry as an unruly lot of undesirable aliens. Following the Italian declaration of war on Austria-Hungary, however, they were enthusiastically cheered on as heroes soon to fight for a common cause with England and France in the defeat of Germany. Through the cooperation of the Canadian and Italian governments, a train (*"il treno degli italiani"*) was made available in May 1915 to travel from Vancouver to Montreal to gather reservists and volunteers from across Canada for the Italian army.¹¹ When it reached Fort William, a reporter with the *Daily Times-Journal* described a scene that was perhaps familiar at each stop

along the way. "As the train began to move" wrote the reporter "bare heads were thrust out of windows, hats and flags of Italy and Britain were waved...Their cars were covered with inscriptions bearing the names of their towns and provinces...the name Fort William being united with those of Italy, and bearing mottoes of loyal allegiance to both the ruler of Italy and King George." A similar parade took place in Port Arthur on 18 October where approximately one hundred Italian reservists led by the 52nd Battalion Band paraded from the corner of Cumberland and Van Norman Streets to Arthur Street (Red River Road).¹² Marching with the reservists "in full regalia" were members of the Fort William Società Italiana Principe Di Piemonte. From Montreal, Italian reservists were taken to Trois Rivières, Quebec and from there they boarded vessels destined for Italy.¹³



Parade of Italian Legion members down Victoria Avenue, Fort William, April 1934. The occasion for this parade was the official opening of the Italian Legion Memorial Hall on McLaughlin Street in Fort William's East End. Leading the parade are Emilio Marino and Frank Charry (between the standard bearers) and Pietro Belluz, left in the front row. (Courtesy Institute of Italian Studies-Lakehead University)

Why would some Italian immigrants leave Canada and dutifully respond to the call to arms of their homeland in 1915? Family ties, provincial and regional loyalties, nostalgia, and patriotism were all motivating factors.¹⁴ Leone Zuliani (1879-1951), for example, was born in the northeastern Italian town of Spilimbergo in the province of Pordenone.¹⁵ He came to Canada in 1907 leaving his wife Amalia and infant daughter Maria behind in the Italian town of Fiume Veneto. While in Fort William's East End he worked as a trucker in the CPR freight sheds. Italy's entry into World War I not only provided him with an opportunity to serve his country but also to be reunited with his family after an eight year absence. At age 36, he returned to Italy and served in the Italian army as a sergeant-major until his discharge and returned to Fort William in June, 1920 leaving his

wife and family of four children behind.¹⁶ Zuliani's residence in Canada was still tentative as he resumed his employment at the freight sheds after the war, and, it was not until October, 1928 that his family left Fiume and joined him in Fort William.¹⁷ In the case of immigrants like Zuliani, the belief that Italy's participation in the Great War would result in a stronger and more prosperous nation might have fuelled a lingering hope of returning home some day.

For the majority of the 104,000 Italian reservists in North America, however, there was no such hope.¹⁸ Put simply, most Italians did not understand or agree with the war aims of their country as it moved from a position of neutrality in 1914 to an active participant on the side of England and France. Italy entered the war not for defen-

sive reasons but for territory (Trento and Trieste) and believed that somehow this military engagement would strengthen and unify the nation.¹⁹ Moreover, compared to western European, Canadian, and American soldiers in the infantry, pay rates for Italian infantrymen were deplorable.²⁰ Given the shameful treatment of Italian soldiers at the hands of senior officers, it is little wonder that most of the young men in Fort William's East End and elsewhere in North America ignored the call to arms from the homeland in 1915.

Although the majority of Italian immigrants living in Fort William's East End did not return to Italy to enlist in the Italian army, they supported humanitarian efforts to assist Italian casualties of war and refugees. Prior to Italy's entry into the war, nearly half a million Italians living and working in France, Austria-Hungary, and Germany left leaving all their possessions behind for fear of being caught in a war zone. Since they had no property or prospects of employment in Italy they became refugees in their own country.²¹ Once Italy entered the war, the Italian front snaked its way up from the Gulf of Venice just west of the Isonzo River through the Alps of north-eastern Italy down to Lake Garda and up again to the Swiss border.²² It was along this front that nearly 700,000 Italians were killed. As Italian Vice Consul for the Thunder Bay District, Marino led humanitarian efforts in Fort William's East End to assist Italian refugees and casualties of war. In October 1915, a "Patriotic Committee to assist the Italian Red Cross" was formed from leaders of the business and religious community of Fort William's East End.²³ Marino served as secretary/treasurer together with the Rev. Father Domenico Tomaselli, parish priest, St Joseph (Italian) Roman Catholic Church and the Rev. James M. Shaver, Superintendent of the Wesley Institute. Together, they assumed the responsibility of overseeing the fundraising campaign in support of the Italian Red Cross by appealing directly to Italian immigrants and by placing donation boxes in Italian-owned stores and the banks on Simpson Street. That Father Tomaselli and the Rev. Shaver would provide this leadership knowing that their own institutions were in desperate need of funds to provide social and religious services for those living in the East End demonstrated a remarkable spirit of charity. In the end, approximately \$7,000 was raised for the Italian Red Cross. Emilio Marino also chaired a committee to

assist Italian refugees in northern Italy. The *comitato pro-profughi italiani* (Italian Refugees Relief Association) was comprised of leading Italian businessmen such as Guido Dolcetti, Giuseppe Bottan, Pietro Belluz, and Domenico Grassi who approached what seems to have been every Italian immigrant living in the East End and had their names published in the *Daily Times Journal* towards the end of the war.²⁴ The committee raised in excess of two thousand dollars for this cause and remained active to the end of 1918.

As Italian Vice Consul for the Thunder Bay District during the war and President of the Società Italiana di Benevolenza Principe di Piemonte during the first half of 1918, Marino became the recognized leader of Fort William's Italian community. With a solid base of support in the East End, he sought election to Fort William City Council as a representative of Ward I and was the first in the city of Italian heritage to do so. His election to council by acclamation in January, 1918, however, did not reflect his popular support among voters.²⁵ The voter turnout was extremely low. Moreover, all positions in Ward I were acclaimed and several candidates in other wards, after having been acclaimed or elected, had to resign for failure to take out their qualification papers or to pay their property taxes.²⁶ On this council, Marino sat on the License, Police, and Relief Committee and the Property Committee. Apart from moving a motion to establish a by-law for the construction of a plank sidewalk on Christie Street, little was heard from Marino in council debates on the subject of improving living conditions for those he represented.²⁷ While on council, his responsibilities as Italian Vice Consul continued. In addition, a new post office branch was opened at his McTavish Street address which served as a great convenience to East End residents.²⁸ Immediately after the war, Marino wanted to continue to balance his vice consul, business, and aldermanic interests (even though the latter did not come with any financial remuneration) by seeking re-election to city council in 1919. Even though he presented himself as a "faithful, hardworking councilor" not only for Ward I but the entire city,²⁹ Marino was unsuccessful in securing a council seat. Unlike 1918, five individuals vied for the three Ward I council seats and Marino fell short of securing the third spot by nine votes.³⁰ This respectable showing, however, encouraged him to run again in 1922 when

he was successful together with William Kelso (butcher) and Gilbert Hartley (broom manufacturer) in securing a seat on council.³¹ He served on the fire, water, and light committee and moved significant resolutions encouraging the city to enter into an agreement with The Fort William Paper Company and to hold the line on telephone rates.³² This second term on Fort William City Council ended Marino's foray into local politics. During the balance of the 1920s, there was a keen competition for a seat on council from Ward I with Gilbert Hartley, the popular and hard working East End businessman and Albert Hugh Dennis, former Mayor of Fort William, and pro-labour political leader, successfully courting the support of voters. Although Marino continued to be the Italian vice consular agent for the District of Thunder Bay until his death in 1949 and was honoured with the title Cavalière d'Italia (cavalier of the Royal Crown of Italy) in 1924 by the Fascist government of Benito Mussolini, these honours may have gained him political capital with Italians residing in the East End but not so with other ethnocultural groups in Ward I generally. Or, he might have concluded that it was more important to direct all of his energies into his insurance business during the relatively prosperous 1920s which had moved from McTavish Street to the central business district on Simpson Street.³³ Whatever the reasons, he left the arena of local politics and continued his involvement in the development and support of local Italian organizations and institutions.

from Roy Piovesana, *Italians of Fort William's East End, 1907–1969*. Thunder Bay: Institute of Italian Studies—Lakehead University, 2011. pp. 56-63.

Notes

- 1 In Fort William, see *DTJ*, 1 June 1915, p. 1.
- 2 Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, pp. 208-209.
- 3 See F. Brent Scollie, *Thunder Bay Mayors & Councillors, 1873-1945*, pp. 200-201.
- 4 1911 Census of Canada. Fort William, S.D. 20, p.11.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 6 *DTBA*, St Peter (Slovak) Parish Baptismal Register, 1908-1914, p.
- 7 *DTJ*, 1 October 1912, p. 3.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 1 June 1915, 15 June 1915, p. 3; p. 1; 9 August 1915, p. 1; *PADN*, 14 June 1915, p. 6.
- 9 *PADN*, 14 June 1915, p. 3.
- 10 *DTJ*, 1 September 1915, p. 1.
- 11 Sturino, "Italians", *ECP*, p. 796.
- 12 *PADN*, 18 October 1915.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 14 June 1915.
- 14 Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, pp. 212-213.
- 15 *DTJ*, obituary, 26 March 1951, p. 3; 27 March 1951, p. 3.
- 16 List of Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States, list 20,
- 17 *LAC*, RG76, Immigration Records (1925-1935), 1928, p. 79.
- 18 R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Dictatorship, 1915-1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), pp. 70-71.
- 19 Mark Thompson, *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 5.
- 20 Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldier's Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p. 29. Italian infantrymen were paid 0.50 lire per day while privates in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces were paid \$1.00 per day plus a \$0.10 field allowance. The Italian counterpart in the U.S. army was paid seven times that of Italian infantrymen.
- 21 Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, pp. 210-211
- 22 See Peter N. Stearns, ed., *The Encyclopedia of World History* (New York, 2001), p. 657.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 7 October 1915, p. 1. Pietro Belluz (president), B. Gigliotti (2nd vice president), Emilio Marino (secretary/treasurer),
- 24 *Ibid.*, 20 April 1918, p. 12.
- 25 *TBA* 5401, Fort William Record of Elections, 7 January 1918. The election had a 10.9% voter turnout.
- 26 *TBA* 17, FW City Council Minutes, 14 January 1918, p.2.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 13 September 1918, p. 4.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 9 August 1918.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 2 January 1919.
- 30 *TBA* 5401, FW Record of Elections, 6 January 1919. Results for Ward I were: Hugh Albert Dennis (331), E.C. Smith (232), John Otway (164), Emilio Marino (155), and John J. Flanagan (133); See F. Brent Scollie, *Thunder Bay Mayors & Councillors, 1873-1945*, pp. 35-36.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3 January 1922.

³² TBA 21, FW City Council Minutes, 12 June 1922, p. 55; 11 July 1922, p. 62.

³³ 460, FW Assessment Roll, 1925, p. 37.