Documents for the History of Italians in Canada Donated to York University Archive

Olga Zorzi Pagliese e Gabriele Scardellato

TORONTO - Dr. Angela Principe, a retired part-time lecturer who taught at the University of Toronto and York University, is well known as an energetic political communicator and community organizer, and also as the author of important books and articles on the history of Italians in Canada. Some months ago Dr. Principe made history himself in the donation of his extensive newspaper and letter collection to the Clara Thomas Archives of York University.

During his decades-long research work, Dr. Principe gathered materials, many of which were entrusted to him for preservation by Italian-Canadian activists from the first half of the twentieth century like Attilio Bortotlli and Benny Bottos. In June 2014, with the assistance of Prof. Emeritus Germaine Warkentin (U of T) and John Warkentin (York University), the “Principle Collection”, as it is now called, consisting of more than 50 cartons of materials, was received by Michael Moir, head of the Archives and Special Collections at York University, where the previous documents are being organized and catalogued and will be professionally conserved. The significance of this act of generosity cannot be overstated. Researchers and students of the history of Italians in Canada will henceforth be able to consult rare Italian-language newspapers from the early twentieth century published in North America, in many cases titles and issues not available anywhere else. These include:

- La Tribuna canadese, Il Progresso italo-canadese, Il Messaggero italo-canadese and L’Emigrato.
- Among other important collections of Italian-Canadian materials to the Library, it should also be noted that the “Principle Collection” was facilitated by board members of the Italian-Canadian Archives Project (ICAP). Established in 2010 as the result of a working conference held at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, this network of scholars, archivists, and community organizers has sought to encourage and assist individuals, organizations, and institutions to suggest suitable places and institutions for the storing of their valuable documents, letters, and photos and, in appropriate circumstances, to suggest the appropriate endowments to support these projects.

It is important to note that the groundbreaking donation of the “Principle Collection” was facilitated by board members of the Italian-Canadian Archives Project (ICAP). Established in 2010 as the result of a working conference held at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, this network of scholars, archivists, and community organizers has sought to encourage and assist individuals, organizations, and institutions to suggest suitable places and institutions for the storing of their valuable documents, letters, and photos and, in appropriate circumstances, to suggest the appropriate endowments to support these projects. It should be noted that ICAP does not directly collect historical materials; rather, it serves as an advocate for Canadian archives and Italian-Canadian collections by connecting individuals, organizations, and experts.

It is hoped that ICAP will be able to facilitate the donation of other important collections of Italian-Canadian materials to the York University Archive and to other suitable repositories. It is even contemplated that an Italian-Canadian Resource Centre (possibly named through a private endowment) might also be established within the university archive.

All those seeking advice or interested in collaborating are invited to consult the ICAP website (www.icap.ca), to contact us, and, especially, to consider becoming members of this worthwhile enterprise.

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