

**Ramirez, Bruno. *Les premiers Italiens de Montréal : L'origine de la Petite Italie du Québec*. Montréal : Boréal Express, 1984. Pp. 136. Photographs. \$9.95**

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which have occurred on the prairies since 1945 ought to peruse it.

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Ramirez, Bruno. *Les premiers Italiens de Montréal: L'origine de la Petite Italie du Québec*. Montréal: Boréal Express, 1984. Pp. 136. Photographs. \$9.95.

From 1861, the year of Italy's unification, until the outbreak of World War I more than 14 million Italians left their towns and villages to seek better living conditions elsewhere, mainly in Latin and North America. A considerable number of these emigrants passed through Montreal, because of its geographical position, one of the main gathering centres of immigration into North America. Some of these immigrants decided to remain in Montreal, thus creating the first Italian "colony" in Canada. Professor Ramirez's book chronicles, in great detail, the history of this settlement, and explores the historical process in the course of which the "colony" acquired its own territory and its permanent identity, becoming in the years just preceding the war a "community" consisting of more than 4,000 persons.

The study is divided into two main sections: an historical part, in which the author follows the development and the vicissitudes of the "colony" and a part that reproduces a series of eight interviews with Italo-Canadians who lived through some of this historical process.

The first chapter, "Les précurseurs," traces the socio-economic history of the first Italians who settled in Montreal around 1860. The first records — in the nominal manuscript census of 1871 — show 55 people born in Italy, and living mostly on the east side of the city. The author establishes the fact that most of these early immigrants were single men, who could more easily become part of the Canadian labour force. A first and most important part of the process of blending into the local society was the establishment of a family, and therefore the choosing of a wife, and in the majority of cases a French Canadian one. The census shows that of the 55 Italians residing in Montreal, only six were labourers; the rest did some kind of independent work, mainly in marble working and trade.

The census of 1881 lists 131 Italians living in Montreal; of these, only 14 were also in the 1871 census. The majority of these immigrants lived in three eastern quarters of the city — but mostly in the French ones — and in a family. Only one third of the men were married to Italian women: the majority had French Canadian wives, a choice obviously dictated by linguistic, cultural and religious affinities. The census clearly shows the high mobility of the immigrants,

and the author tries to follow their movements through a few among them, especially the marble workers, who were in great demand in the developing urban centres, and the tradesmen, who had to adapt themselves to the needs of the market place. The available evidence also points to a marked increase of seasonal labourers, some commuting from Italy and many residing permanently in Montreal.

The second chapter, "Le période de transition," covers the years when, because of the building of the railway network and the development of the mining industry, Canada saw a large increase in the influx of immigrants. From 1880 to 1898 the average number of yearly immigrants from Italy was 361. In 1899 and 1900 the number exceeded 1,000, and it reached 3,497 in 1901 and 5,930 in 1905. The records indicate that in this period immigration from Italy was mainly seasonal. Focusing on the immigration from the southern Italian province of Molise, Professor Ramirez examines in depth the economic conditions that compelled so many *molisani*, most of them peasants, to leave their land to come to Montreal, and the role played by agents working for large companies — the Canadian Pacific Railway, shipping companies, etc. — in bringing over cheap labour. The author deals at length with the practice of the "agents" — usually prominent members of the colony as well as with the role played by the Italian authorities and with the Royal Commission appointed by the Federal Government to study this "scandalous" problem.

The available data shows that the Italian "colony" resided in a very narrow portion of the city: 80 per cent was concentrated within 14 streets; and 123 families of the 235 listed in a census conducted in 1905 by the priest of the parish of Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel lived virtually adjacent to each other. The data, the author remarks, ". . . permettent du moins de conclure que cet important noyan de familles immigrantes italiennes réside au coeur du tissu urbain montréalais, partageant avec le prolétariat urbain de la ville des conditions similaires de logement et d'hygiène" (p. 38).

Quite different were the living conditions of the seasonal workers, who were brought into Canada by the thousands when the need required cheap labour. Professor Ramirez identifies many of the unscrupulous agents who oversaw this trade, and follows the capillary network in which they operated, and which extended from rail, mine and shipping companies all the way to the smallest southern Italian villages where the labourers were recruited. The periodic influx of a large number of men created many practical and social problems. Those workers, who, at the end of the season, decided not to return to Italy, had to be housed. The logical choice was the centre of the town: an area showing all the signs of urban deterioration, and therefore easily transformed into vast and cheap dormitories by the agents, who could thus have complete control over this itinerant population. The living conditions of these quarters reflected the true condition of the migrant workers: overcrowded, and

hygienically sub-standard. These dormitory areas, consisting only of men, soon became the breeding-ground of violence and of many racial stereotypes about Italians: a violent race of inferior culture, incapable of conforming to the customs and imperatives of the host society (p. 44).

As the need for seasonal labour subsided, and many of the migrant workers took residence in Montreal and formed their own families, their needs also changed. These changes, which ultimately led to the rise of a spirit of community and to the establishment of new community structures — an Italian school, a church, “Italian” shops (especially grocery-shops, an important focal point of the Italian population) — within the newly chosen quarter of Mile-End, are documented in the third and last chapter of the volume, “L’implantation.” Near the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the author concludes, “. . . la transition du séjour à l’établissement . . . paraît avoir été complétée, aidée en cela par la brusque interruption du flux des Italiens due au conflit mondial. Mais cette zone de concentration à laquelle nous avons souvent fait référence dans cette étude arbore les signes distinctifs d’une petite Italie. C’est dans le quartier du Mile-End, en fait, que se trouve le plus fort regroupement d’Italiens, et c’est là que la tendance à devenir propriétaire est devenue très visible” (pp. 84-85).

The interviews which close the volume are deemed by the author as essential documents about the development of the community given the scarcity of surviving documents.

Professor Ramirez is careful to point out the provisional nature of his study. However, because of the solid theoretical structure of the investigation, and the clear and precise use of the available documentation, this volume deserves to be considered one of the best among the growing number of important studies focusing on Italian immigration in Canada, and as such it will appeal to social as well as to urban historians.

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Fry, Bruce W. *“An appearance of strength”: The Fortifications of Louisbourg*. 2 vols., Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1984. Vol. 1, pp. 214; Vol. 2, pp. 212. 256 black and white illustrations. \$23.00 a set.

*“Un air de fort”: Les fortifications de Louisbourg*. 2 vols., Ottawa: Parcs Canada, 1984. Vol. 1, pp. 221; Vol. 2, pp. 212. 256 illustrations noir et blanc. \$23.00 le jeu.

The restoration program at the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park has enabled readers to benefit from a fine by-product: a cogent, informative and eminently readable study by a senior Parks Canada archaeologist whose

Canadian career began at Louisbourg in 1963. It is noteworthy that the program, by making possible a very significant level of archaeological research at the site, has both facilitated and circumscribed Bruce Fry’s work: facilitated it because of what archaeology could do to complement the historical record, and circumscribed it because archaeological research was limited largely to those parts of the fortification destined for reconstruction.

The battered fortifications of Louisbourg were demolished in 1760 and the townsite virtually abandoned a few years later. The site is quite unusual because archaeologists have been able to research 18th-century remains unencumbered by 19th and 20th century urban accretion.

The documentary record of Louisbourg’s structures, both military and civil, is at once voluminous and fragmentary, and extremely detailed but often puzzling. It can be elucidated in part by reference to typical early-modern fortifications extant in Europe; and the author has made an extensive study of these. But there can be no substitute for careful archaeological research. Fry has demonstrated, in his chapters on the King’s and Dauphin Bastions and the King’s-Dauphin and Queen’s-King’s curtains, that astute analysis of both the documentary and archaeological evidence, against a background of thorough knowledge in the theory and practice of 18th-century European military architecture, can do much to unravel the mysteries and explain the vagaries of European fortification building at this isolated North American port. Urbanists will thus have an interest in carefully reading this book, not because it has much to say about urban planning, daily life, care of the sick, sanitation, law and order, fire prevention, recreation, religion or property — although there is useful incidental information on some of these — but because of the ways in which the author has interwoven various kinds of evidence for the purposes of reconstruction. One is reminded, for example, that stones which are merely “rubble” to the uninitiated may, to the archaeologist, be evidence for deducing the nature of long-demolished parapets; or that unexpected locations for artifacts such as pottery may be clues to some structural improvisation that is absent from the written record.

The text and the 256 illustrations are in separate volumes so that they can be read together — most convenient in a work to which illustrations are vital. Presumably because of cost, however, all the illustrations are in black and white, so that the colour-code used in plans by engineers to distinguish work proposed from work done, is lost to all but those who consult archival copies or obtain colour photographs.

The author places his subject against a background of European fortifications from the advent of gunpowder to the beginning of the 18th century, an analysis to which he devotes almost the first quarter of his text. A detailed study of those parts of Louisbourg’s fortifications intended for reconstruc-