

**PRESS RELEASE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**PRIME MINISTER'S APOLOGY FOR THE INTERNMENT OF ITALIAN CANADIANS DURING WWII:
THE IMPACT ON HAMILTONIANS**

INTERNMENT OF HAMILTON ITALIAN CANADIANS COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND:

On June 10, 1940, Italy declared war on Great Britain and its Allies. The Canadian Government, under the War Measures Act, ordered the detention and internment of a number of Canadians of Italian descent. Over 31,000 were declared enemy aliens and close to 600 were interned. 74 of the internees were from Hamilton.

APOLOGY:

On May 27, 2021 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will formally apologize on behalf of the Government of Canada. The apology is an acknowledgment of the wrongs that were done to the Italian community and honour the families of those who were interned and discriminated against as a result of this historic injustice.

IMPACT ON HAMILTONIANS:

The internment had a devastating impact on the internees, those declared enemy aliens, and their families. All of the internees and most of those declared enemy aliens as well as their spouses are now deceased. Many of their children have also passed away. Efforts have been made and are ongoing to record and preserve their stories. The attached detailed press release contains three local stories.

COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE TO BE UNVEILED:

On June 10, 2021, a Plaque will be unveiled at a virtual event, which will commemorate this dark period in our history. The plaque will be physically unveiled at Immigration Square (forecourt of LiUNA Station) in July, pandemic restrictions permitting. This is in partnership with the Sons and Daughters of Italy Trieste Lodge, LiUNA and the City of Hamilton.

DETAILED PRESS RELEASE:

Accompanying this document is a seven-page detailed press release.

CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – representatives of the Internment of Hamilton Italian Canadians Commemoration Committee:

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PRESS RELEASE

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BACKGROUND:

As the day dawned on Monday June 10, 1940, most Canadian citizens awoke and looked forward to the day ahead. Work, school, household duties awaited them. Many of them had come to Canada from Italy. Some were born here. That morning 600 of these Italian Canadians could not have imagined that many of them would not go to bed in their homes later that evening.

On that fateful day, Italy declared war on Great Britain and its Allies. Almost immediately, the Canadian Government, under the War Measures Act, ordered the detention and internment of a number of Canadian citizens of Italian descent on the basis that they were considered a threat to the security of our country.

In total over 31,000 Italian Canadians were identified as enemy aliens and close to 600 interned. Many of them were arrested in the early hours, most at their homes, some at their workplaces, and were taken to holding locations before transfer to internment camps. In Ontario the main camp was at Petawawa where many internees were to spend up to five years before being released and returned to their families. Others not interned were put under house arrest and required to report daily for similar periods of time.

Although the general allegation and excuse for their internment was that they were fascist supporters and perhaps spies, none of them were charged with any crimes, the allegations were never proven, nor were they afforded due process of law. They were simply taken away from their families and livelihoods for much of the duration of the War. This had a devastating impact on many of them, causing loss of jobs, closing of businesses, and disassociation with friends and family.

Hamilton was particularly impacted by the internment in that 74 of the 600 came from here.

APOLOGY:

After decades of discussion, debate and consideration, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, on behalf of the Government of Canada, will be issuing a formal apology in the House of Commons on Thursday May 27, 2021. On May 14 his office issued the following statement:

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced that on May 27, 2021, he will deliver a formal apology in the House of Commons for the internment of Italian Canadians during the Second World War.

After Italy declared war against Canada in 1940, the Government of Canada interned hundreds of people of Italian heritage. In addition, tens of thousands of Italian Canadians were declared “enemy aliens”, and faced pain, hardship, and discrimination. The government’s policy went against the fundamental values Canada was fighting for during the Second World War.

The Prime Minister shared the announcement during a virtual meeting with some of the family members of Italian Canadians who were interned during the war.

Quote

“For far too long, the Italian Canadian community has carried the weight of the unjust policy of internment during the Second World War. Later this month, I will deliver a formal apology to acknowledge the wrongs that were done to the Italian community in Canada during the Second World War, and honour the families of those who were interned and discriminated against as a result of this historical injustice. Canadians of Italian heritage have made, and continue to make, immense social, economic, and cultural contributions to our country. We cannot undo our past failures, but through this apology we hope to help bring closure to those who were harmed, and ensure the lessons we learned are never forgotten.”

The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

Source: <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2021/05/14/prime-minister-announces-apology-internment-italian-canadians-during>

IMPACT ON HAMILTONIANS:

The internment had a devastating impact on the internees, those declared enemy aliens, and their families. All of internees and their spouses, and most of those declared enemy aliens as well as their spouses are now deceased. Many of their children have also passed away. The survivors are now at very advanced ages. As such, an effort has been made, and is ongoing, to record and preserve their recollections of this dark period. The following are but a few of their stories. Three in particular. All from Hamilton.

Iolanda LoCicero Carroll (daughter of Vincenzo LoCicero)

“My name is Iolanda LoCicero Carroll. I am 85 years old. I was 4 years old at the time of my father’s incarceration.

When the RCMP first came to arrest my father, Vincenzo, my 13 year old brother Nicky had just drowned at Carroll's Point and my father had been searching for him in the brush along the shoreline. The coffin was in the living room, as was done in those days. The RCMP deferred the arrest and returned a few weeks later.

My mother was at the hospital visiting my sister who had just given birth when my father was taken away. My mother, Isabella, returned home to find him gone. The house had been searched and they had even gone through her daughter's drawers in the bedrooms.

The eldest daughters, Angeline, Carmeline and Tina, were married and in their own homes, but Joseph, Rose, Mary, Joanne, Isabelle and I were still with my mother on Sheaffe St. On Mary's 14th birthday, when it was legal for her to leave school, she went to work in a tailor's shop. Rose and Joe were also working. Their pay cheques were handed over to my mother. Relief payments were denied to families of "enemy aliens". Money was tight. Rose and Joe were given permission to marry and of course they took their pay cheques with them to support themselves. However, they helped my mother as best they could.

Boarders were taken in and the family all slept on the first floor in a make-shift arrangement. Isabelle remembers exactly where everyone slept.

The Italo Canadian community, as now, came together to help each other. Neighbours brought food and our whole family was often invited to my aunt's house around the corner for Sunday dinners. A neighbour across the street paid the mortgage on our house and he temporarily took over the ownership because it was feared that the house would be taken away. My father paid him back when he was released from the internment camp 3 years later.

Another family took my mother along with them to Petawawa a few times to see my father. The younger children wrote little notes in English which were included in my mother's letters to him.

Being the youngest, I was shielded from many things, but the impact the circle of care the community and my family provided for me then has become more apparent to me over the years. Poignantly so.

Eighty years later, I am indebted.

When my father finally returned to our home on Sheaffe Street, family and friends welcomed him. It was confusing for the younger children, having this relative stranger return to the intimacy of the family after three years.

The house was full of people and as each person greeted him, I was placed in my father's lap. I recall even now being somewhat fearful. Isabelle hid behind my mother.

In time, my father and I became reattached and his love for me and his care—even when I was married with my own family—was always strong. I think he must have been sad to have missed the important childhood years of the youngest, and seeing his older children marry and have his first grandchildren.

I am grateful that now, after 80 years, the emotional toll on the men and their families is finally being acknowledged.

I am grateful, also, that the children and grandchildren of these men have worked so hard to make it happen.”

Vincenza Travale (daughter of Giovanni Travale)

“My Father, Giovanni Travale 's story began in 1901 when he was born in Racalmuto, Sicily. In 1924 he came to Canada alone and by 1940 he was a Canadian citizen, married to my Mother Carmela and was the Father of two children, my brother Charles who was eleven years old and myself who was two years old at the time. He was the owner of a small shoe repair business and was a very hard working and law-abiding citizen.

If my Father were here today with us, he would want to tell you how difficult it was to be torn away from his family and his work, both of which were so important to him. They were his life. He would also tell you how painful it was to have your freedom taken away by the country that you loved. He would want you to know that if he had been given a choice in 1940 between loyalty to Canada or loyalty to Italy, he definitely would have chosen Canada without any question. He would also tell you how he suffered knowing that he was leaving behind his pregnant wife who would have to be responsible for his family and his business.

If my Father were here today, he most certainly would tell you what happened the day he returned from his internment to his home filled with rejoicing family and friends. When he entered the house, he saw a family friend holding an infant and said to her "I didn't know that you had a baby while I was away" She replied "I didn't. You did " and she placed his baby son (my brother Jack) in his arms for the first time. What a sad and difficult experience that must have been for both my Mother and Father - that he was not there for Jack's birth.

After Petawawa, my Father put the interment behind him. He continued to be a devoted and hardworking family man and a good and loyal citizen of Canada. He was not bitter or angry with the Canadian government and I am so proud of him for that. He always said that Canada was the best country in the world because Canada gave him a

great life. He maintained that until the day he died in 1985. He was forever grateful and always wanted us to be grateful too.

An incident that my Father would want you to know about occurred the day following his pickup by the RCMP: My Mother went down to the Barton Street Jail where he had been taken the previous day to enquire about his whereabouts and the reason for his arrest. An RCMP officer politely told her "Madame, in time of war, we act first and ask questions later ". That certainly provided a context for the situation. However, my Father would probably say that when the questions were asked and the answers never provided any evidence for any charges or convictions - not a one - that the Canadian Government should have apologized for the internment. It should have happened in the late 1940 's for sure.

My Father would also want you to know that the pain, insult and hurt of the interment was inflicted not only on the internees and their families but on the entire Italo Canadian Community. It is striking that many of the people currently working on telling the story of the internees and wanting recognition for them (e.g. the group in Hamilton preparing a commemorative plaque) are not family members or were even born when this all happened. The pain has passed down through several generations.

Finally, my Father would tell you that this apology is long overdue -more than 80 years overdue. There have been many promises that it would be forthcoming but that never happened. He would be so pleased that that the story of the wrong done to him and so many others is being told and officially acknowledged."

For more detail on Mr. Travale please visit:

https://www.immigrantstory.ca/stories/Giovanni_Travale/Giovanni_Travale.html

Nicholas Zaffiro (son of Francesco Zaffiro)

"I am the 91 year old son of Francesco Zaffiro who came to Canada in 1923. He died in 1996. My sisters are Lil, Antoinette and Frances. My mother was Maria Madalena Licata. I share this in their memory and honour.

When I remember, it is like it was yesterday...

I am 10 years old. After school I go to my father's shoe repair shop to check in, as I do every day before going to play until dinner time.

Today June 10, 1940 he is not there and the shop is locked tight. The excited kids on the street tell me the police came and arrested my father, because he is a spy.

Shocked and confused, I realize I have to be the one to tell my mother and 3 sisters what I barely comprehend myself. I walk home.

My eldest sister is 13 years old and very intelligent. But she sadly does what she must to sustain us, and leaves school in grade 8, to join my mother working in a sewing shop. She never returns to school.

I get a part time job at a fish and chip shop and bring home a little money and left over food to help my struggling and now increasingly isolated family.

My youngest sister is 3 years old. When my father comes home years later, she is afraid of this bearded stranger she has no memory of. My middle sister runs to hide under the bed.

His business is lost. Everything is different. But there is joy at reunification.

My father was a proud Italian, but more importantly, a loyal Canadian. But the offence was that he was never given the opportunity to defend himself nor due process at any point during or after his ordeal.

Francesco Zaffiro was a believer in education. I was his only child to be able to go to university, and it took all of my family's sacrifice to make it happen. My father's greatest pride was that I and all of his 7 grandchildren were university educated.

When telling them of the Internment, he always said that 'The Sons are not to Blame for the Sins of the Father'. He was a wise man. He modeled perseverance and character throughout adversity.

My family welcomes the important and long-awaited apology that will acknowledge this offense, and bring healing and peace.

Equally important is the opportunity to ensure that this is a known and remembered part of our shared history, so that all Canadians can understand and learn the lessons of past decisions, to continue to make better ones in the future."

For more information on the internees, where they lived, what they did, and other personal information (you can filter for Hamilton internees) please visit:

<http://www.italiancanadianww2.ca/tour/internees>

For more information on the internment in general please visit:

<http://www.italiancanadianww2.ca/villa/home>.

COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE TO BE UNVEILED:

On June 10, 2021, the 81st anniversary of the internment's beginning, a Commemorative Plaque, in partnership with the Sons and Daughters of Italy Trieste Lodge, LIUNA and the City of Hamilton, will be unveiled in a virtual ceremony. Details to follow. In July of this year, it will be installed in Immigration Square (the forecourt of LIUNA Station). Its purpose is to tell the story of the Internment so as to educate our community on the subject and at the same time honour the 74 Hamilton Internees and their families along with all who were placed under house arrest. The plaque was to have been unveiled for the 80th Anniversary in 2020 but was postponed due to the pandemic.

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