Little Italies
Reading

• Mike Buzelli’s 2001 article on Italians on St Clair
Little Italies

- There have been several Little Italies in Toronto
  - St John’s Ward (Toronto New City Hall)
  - Little Italy Grace & College (1920s-1960s)
  - Corso Italia (St Clair & Dufferin) 1950s-1980s
  - Woodbridge 1980s- present
Little Italies

• Toronto’s dominant Anglos were hostile toward Italian immigrants before the 1940s
• Little Italy: an inner city Italian enclave,
  – defensive, cheap
  – In multi-ethnic space the Anglo middle class didn’t want to occupy
  – Italians connect with other immigrant out-groups
Corso Italia

- Italian settlement on St Clair Toronto’s first Italian suburb
- Italian fruit & vegetable growers move in first, followed by others via the Dovercourt streetcar line from Little Italy
- Boosted by Italian immigration during the 1950s-1960s construction boom
St Clair

- Area is a self-built suburb
- Working families build their own homes on small lots in 1900s-1920s
  - On unserviced land
- Streetcar comes through in the 1910s
- Most of the settlement 1900-1920 is working-class British
Earlscourt

• One of the unserviced self-built suburbs
• Early C20th:
  – Major wave of British & Irish immigrants to Toronto
  – The immigrants settled in self-built shack suburbs:
    • Earlscourt, East York, East Toronto, Runnymede, Junction, Weston, Mimico, New Toronto
  – Established British institutions
    • Churches, sports, political culture
Figure 1. Dufferin and St Clair, 1911. The two-part commercial building in Toronto’s neo-Georgian style. Reproduced with the permission of the City of Toronto Archives, SC 231, item 2116.
Commercial Landscape of St Clair Ave W

- 1912: 52 stores
- 1923: 235 stores
- 1994: 238 stores
- Most of the development follows the street car line, 1912.
  - Red-brick low-rise commercial, ‘Georgian’ detailing
  - Commercial below, residential above
British Institutions

• Attachment to the Crown:
  – Heavy enlistment in WW1
  – Prospect Cemetery becomes a war cemetery

• Politics
  – British style socialist politics dominates the political traditions of the area to 1980s
  – Bob Rae’s old riding
The Anglican Church

• St Mark’s Anglican founds St Chad’s and Calvary churches, late 1900s

• St Chad’s (founded 1909):
  – Was “the old church in the new land”
  – Had several church cricket teams
  – British immigrants & their descendants dominate the congregation down to the 1970s
St. Chad's Church in its first construction phase during the Fall of 1909.
1928 Church Banquet
1967 Christmas Pageant
Christmas Pageant 2003
Anniversary Service 2003
Ethnic Change

• ‘British’ & Jewish pre-1950
• Italians arrive 1950s-1960s
  – Corso Italia
  – 1982 World Cup Celebrations
STEIN
SPORTSWEAR
635
Streetscape

• Commercial St Clair:
  – Red brick early C20th split-commercial until 1960s

• When Italians become important in business (from 1970):
  – Stucco, arches, columns, bright colours, sidewalk cafes appear
Ethnic Change

• Pre 1950:
  – British & Irish, Jewish

• 1950s-1990s
  – Italian, (plus Hungarian, Russian, Caribbean)
  – St Anthony of Padua festival

• Later
  – Portuguese, Hispanic, (plus Kurdish, Tibetan ..)
  – Salsa on St Clair
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St Anthony of Padua, 2005
Força Portugal
French Toast
• Clip
• Clip
Little Italies

• Toronto creates Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) from 1970 each of which needs a name
  – “Little Italy” goes on the signs in a no-longer Italian neighbourhood in 1985
  – Gets an ethnic street festival: Taste of Little Italy
Little Italies

- Dufferin & St Clair becomes Corso Italia in 1983
  - Gets signs, **ethnic festival**
- Italian presence in decline
  - Lots of other ethnicities present now
  - But it is still the place to gather for Soccer celebrations
Woodbidge

• Sufficiently Italian to generate its own dialect of Canadian English
  – The Woodbridge dialect
• Toronto’s first purpose-built Italian suburb
  – Woodbridge people still go to St Clair to celebrate soccer.
  – Woodbridge celebrates, but not as loudly
Ethnicity

• What is ‘ethnic’?
Ethnic Landscape

• What are its characteristics?
Neighbourhood

• What do we mean?
Little Italies

• A succession of ‘ethnic’ landscapes in Toronto

• Changes in the status, situation of the Italians
  – Once were an out-group, have become mainstream, even cool

• ‘Ethnic’ becomes an asset?