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THE COMMENT

# Tribute to Italians in Canada: Her Royal Highness

Joe Volpe July 8, 2024



TORONTO – By Legislation -

Month in Ontario. The preamble to the Italian Heritage Month Act 2010, SO 2010, c 17, represents, historically, a validation for such an initiative.

It reads, in part, *“Ontario is home to more than 1,350,000 Italian Canadians. Since the 1880s, the Italian Canadian community has **made and continues to make significant contributions** to the growth and prosperity of the Province of Ontario.”*

Further, it adds that the purpose of the legislation is to “recognize[s] the important contributions immigrants have made in building Ontario’s communities and the economic, political, social and cultural achievements of Italian Canadians throughout the province”.

Those contributions are too easily and frequently forgotten. The Act reminds us that, “Italian Heritage Month is an opportunity to **remember, celebrate and educate** future generations about Ontario’s rich history.” And the role that our community has played in it.

The examples – dating more than 100 years, in art and architecture – impacting Canada abound, in Toronto and other places in Ontario, which should swell the community with pride and inspire its creativity. The Consul General for Ontario, Manitoba and Nunavut, **Luca Zelioli**, has made that part of the Consulate’s – and that of the Italian Institute for Culture, guided by **Veronica Manson**) – part of strategy of his mandate.

His leadership in this regard recognizes what the Consulate can/does do to stimulate the underutilized potential of the community. Witness the recent seminar on and display of the mosaics built into the ceiling of the Royal Ontario Museum by Italian artisans from Northern Italy, as well as the gusto with which Dott. Zelioli has promoted and sponsored art exhibits and displays of ‘Made in Italy’ manifestations like the Frecce Tricolori.

Suffice it to say that he takes the second paragraph above to heart. The most recent examples of his “sponsorship” prompted a noted Toronto-based, Italian Canadian architect, Rocco Maragna, B. ARCH, M. ARCH, OAA, MRAIC, to propose a series on “Italianate” architecture and Italian artisanship in the development of Toronto [over the last 150 years]. The Corriere has immediately accepted the challenge to receive, review and publish the work that may emerge.

In the meantime, as an illustration of what he and the rest of our readership can do, The Corriere is publishing (see our websites for full copies of the correspondence) the exchange of letters between him and Buckingham Palace, in 1997, on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the

Matthew (in the pic below, j  
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The Queen was scheduled to come to Canada to celebrate the re-enactment of the landing at Bonavista, "new founde land", 1497. On April 23, 1997, Mr. Maragna wrote to the Chief of protocol,

Robert Fellows, politely asking for his name of origin, Giovanni, saying, *"Your suggestion has been carefully noted"*.

Subsequently, on June 24, before the Premier and other dignitaries present for the celebratory Anniversary of Giovanni Caboto's [discovery] of Canada, she said " I am delighted to be here to mark the anniversary of an historic event, the completion of the voyage of Giovanni Caboto, as he was in his native Italy, to Canada. [...] Let us salute that brave sailor, and pray that we may, God willing, inherit some of his marvellous vision and courage."

Two days later, Mr Maragna once again wrote to Robert Fellows, this time to express gratitude and pride in being able to raise his glass to toast Her Highness at a dinner, on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Imagine then receiving a letter on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June from the same Mr Fellows acknowledging with thanks his intervention. All this via traditional written post mail.

Rocco Maragna

Toronto, Ontario

April 23, 1997

The Right Honourable  
Sir Robert Fellowes, KCB, KCVO  
Buckingham Palace  
London, England  
SW1A 1AA

Your Honour:

I understand that her Majesty will be visiting Canada to participate in the celebrations marking 500th anniversary of the discovery of this great country.

As a proud Canadian of Italian heritage I am extremely happy of Her Majesty's participation. In view of this, I wish to make a request to Her Majesty: in her speeches would it be possible to restore to the explorer his name of origin, Giovanni Caboto?

Canada is a country that prides itself in its multi-cultural well being. It is a country that believes in tolerance and mutual respect. Her Majesty's recognition of Giovanni Caboto's origins would in my opinion, elevate her in the hearts of all her subjects. I am grateful for your consideration and look forward to Her Majesty's arrival in June.

Yours sincerely,



Rocco Maragna, B. ARCH, M. ARCH  
OAA, MRAIC

RM:bt





BUCKINGHAM PALACE

28th April, 1997.

*Dear Mr Maragna.*

Thank you for your letter of 23rd April. Your suggestion has been carefully noted.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Robert Fellowes*

(ROBERT FELLOWES)

Mr. Rocco Maragna.

THE QUEEN'S ADDRESS AT THE RE-ENACTMENT OF THE  
ARRIVAL OF THE MATTHEW AT BONAVISTA ON TUESDAY  
24TH JUNE

Minister, Premier Tobin,

I am delighted to be here to mark the anniversary of an historic event, the completion of the voyage of Giovanni Caboto, as he was in his native Italy, to Canada. Prince Philip took similar pleasure in seeing the Matthew of today sail from Bristol earlier this year.

In 1497, when vast regions of the world were still uncharted, John Cabot crossed the Atlantic Ocean from England hoping to find the Western passage to Asia. Instead, he sighted this very coastline, a "new founde land" forming part of a country now known as Canada.

So Newfoundland became the link between the old and the new worlds. It represents the geographical and intellectual beginning of modern North America. That extraordinary voyage of discovery was the beginning of the affectionate relationship that has existed between Great Britain and Newfoundland and Labrador ever since.

Cependant, Terre-Neuve fait aujourd'hui partie du Canada, au-dessus duquel l'unifolié flotte si fièrement, établissant ainsi l'identité, unique d'un pays respecté aux quatre coins du globe.

The world has, of course, been transformed since Cabot landed here. It was a Canadian, Marshall McLuhan, who coined the phrase "global village", as he sought to capture the impact of technology and communications on our lives and culture, and in the development of which Canada and Canadians have played so conspicuous a part.

Many great achievements begin with a dream. As Rick Hansen said ten years ago when he completed his world tour, “You see, dreams do still come true”. John Cabot’s dreams came true. In the shape of Newfoundland and Labrador, and of Canada, the dreams of countless thousands of Canadians are still coming true. I know that the determination and tenacity, especially typical of Newfoundland and Labrador, will combine with the vision which inspires to ensure that the challenge of the next century can be met and triumphantly overcome.

As we look back on all that Cabot lived for, and on what the land he found has given us, let us salute that brave sailor, and pray that we may, God willing, inherit some of his marvellous vision and courage. Canada’s next 500 years will be then as glorious as its past.



June 26, 1997

The Right Honourable  
Sir Robert Fellowes, KCB, KCVO  
Buckingham Palace  
London, England  
SW1A 1AA

Your Honour:

June 24th will not only be remembered as the 500 anniversary of the arrival of the Matthew on the Eastern shores of our country, but it will also commemorate for many Canadians of Italian descent, the day Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II publicly called that famous sailor by his Italian name: Giovanni Caboto.

By doing this Her Majesty has shown immense sensitivity towards many Canadians and recognized the contribution made by everyone in building this great country of ours, and in return she has gained their admiration including mine. On June 28th, at the dinner hosted by the Prime Minister, I will gladly toast to Her Majesty's good health and a happy and unburdened longevity.

Since you were so kind to reply to my letter of April 23, 1997 I wish to make one final request pertaining to this matter. I will be forever grateful if I could have a copy of Her Majesty's famous speech.

Yours Sincerely,

Rocco Maragna



Toronto, Ontario  
CANADA

at Toronto.  
28th June, 1997.

*Dear Rocco,*

Thank you for your letter of 26th June, which I have shown to The Queen. Her Majesty was very pleased to read of the pleasure her words brought to you at Bonavista at the re-enactment of the arrival of "The Matthew", and is sure that all those present will long remember that memorable day. I am pleased to enclose a copy of Her Majesty's speech, and hope that you will enjoy reading it from time to time.

Thank you so much for taking the trouble to write to me, and may you enjoy this evening's dinner too.

*Yours sincerely,  
Robert Fellowes*

(ROBERT FELLOWES)

Mr. Rocco Maragna.

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