



From Little Britain to Little Italy: an urban ethnic landscape study in Toronto

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Before World War II, most of Toronto's residents were of British descent, and this was reflected in the urban landscape. On St Clair Avenue West, bordering British working class neighbourhoods, a Georgian style predominated and the area was known as Little Britain. After the war, heavy Italian immigration diversified the city and St Clair. Immigrants settled around St Clair where the identity of Little Britain gave way to Little Italy. This study documents and interprets landscape change on St Clair since the war. Photographs show that St Clair retail façades experienced early and sustained change up to the 1990s with new materials and uses of space. Informant interviews with Italian-origin proprietors yielded insights into the identity and meaning of their own renovations and landscape change generally. The changing landscape, like the social process of ethnicity, involved both pride and tensions. Proprietors believed their own 'Italian-style' renovations had necessarily improved upon St Clair's original appearance, and that St Clair now suffers because of recent storefront changes brought on by new immigrant settlers. Together, the visible changes and their meaning to occupants of the landscape suggest how places like St Clair can contribute to our understanding of both landscape and ethnicity.

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Introduction

Before World War II, Montreal was the urban economic centre of Canada and it experienced waves of immigration and city-building.^[1] Less prosperous Toronto grew, sometimes robustly, though it remained mostly British-Canadian until after the war when the city became the hub of Canadian immigration. Initiating the ethnic diversification of Toronto was a large influx of Italian immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, and the urban landscape bears evidence of this demographic change.^[2] In the city's domestic landscape, the archvilla's archways and wrought iron railings still mark the occupants' Italian origin.^[3]

This study examines the change brought to St Clair Avenue West, a retail strip at the centre of Italian immigrant settlement after 1945. St Clair occupies an important position in the immigration history of Toronto. The adjacent EarlsCourt neighbourhood built up and occupied by British working class immigrants before the war was known as Little Britain. After 1945, a rapid and complete demographic transition around St Clair meant that Little Britain would become a Little Italy, or Corso Italia in the lexicon of the city's Business Improvement Area office. For example, by 1961, over 30 000 Italian immigrants had settled in nearby neighbourhoods and with further settlement and family growth, the number of Italian-Canadians continued to swell up

to the 1980s.^[4] Popular indicators of this identity included local visits by Italian presidents while in Toronto in 1967 and 1986, and as part of Toronto's sesquicentennial celebration in 1984, Queen Elizabeth was given a walking tour of the area. This demographic transition was also recognized outside of Toronto, indeed beyond Canadian borders. After Italy's victory in an international soccer tournament of 1982, as many as 200 000 Italian-Canadians celebrated on St Clair. Shortly after, Italian investors opened the Banca Commerciale Italiana of Canada on St Clair. At the height of the Cold War, a visiting Soviet official quipped that he had not pointed his nuclear missiles toward Toronto because he had nothing against 'the Italians'.^[5]

The St Clair streetscape contains physical evidence of ethnic diversification and its attendant social pride and tensions in Toronto. This study employs a variety of sources, including documentary photographs, property assessment records and informant interviews, to show that St Clair's original construction represented the identity of Toronto's predominantly British-origin population before World War II. With the influx of Italian immigrants after the war, St Clair became a more diverse landscape. It acquired new architectural expressions, such as façade materials, styles, and uses of space and these were based in the ethnic identity of the new group. Informant interviews demonstrate that St Clair's landscape change reflects the social distance of local groups.

Perspectives on urban ethnic landscapes

Since the early 1980s, geographers have devoted extensive attention to studying the urban landscape, but ethnic spaces in the city have received little treatment. There are several reasons for this neglect. An assimilationist understanding of ethnicity persists among some landscape scholars. From this perspective, ethnicity is not understood as a social process of inclusion and exclusion; instead, immigrant groups become indistinct soon after settlement. Ethnic markers in the landscape are regarded as 'trivial', 'exotic tidbits', even epiphenomena of 'pseudo-ethnicity' in the urban fabric of assimilation.^[6] As one commentator of the American city has argued, "pseudo-ethnic" styles are the "visual fakery" of ethnic identities.^[7] Ethnicity, however, is much more nuanced than straight-line assimilation.

The related influences of capital and modern city-building in shaping the construction and identity of urban space have been studied extensively, especially from the Marxist perspective of historical materialism.^[8] Historical materialists typically assume that the landscape is an outgrowth of the appropriative logic of capital, subject to the manipulation of marketing and sales techniques.^[9] Because this perspective neglects other influences such as ethnicity, urban ethnic landscapes are not considered important subjects of study. The historical materialist would argue that only "earlier and less commercial cultures may sustain more stable symbolic codes." Taking this argument to its extreme, the point is that the landscape contains short-lived, market-oriented meanings feeding the "apparent fullness" of "visual experience".^[10]

Geographers have sought to explain the pervasiveness of modern city-building, but they sometimes assume that this process negates the ability of social groups to construct and identify with space.^[11] Even scholars who argue for giving greater attention to the 'ethnocultural landscape' have warned that "a larger drama facing every city is a commercial force that undermines all cultural landscapes. Symbolic meanings are eroded as steeples are overtopped by office buildings, and as high-rise apartments are designed without ethnicity, post-offices without nationality, corporate logos without language".^[12] These research approaches downplay the importance of ethnicity in the urban landscape;

yet studies of ethnicity have shown that it comprises a salient part of the lives of urban dwellers. The assimilationist stance which argued that immigrants began assimilating even before contact with their country of adoption, was rebutted by the 'transplanted' perspective: immigrants are thought to bring and maintain their identities intact.^[13] The theoretical extremes of uprooted versus transplanted ethnic identity were established by the 1960s, but their dualism has been reworked to the argument that immigrants may become ethnic and subsequent generations may even revive ethnicity long after settlement. An ethnic group may form through a process of in- and out-group identification based on identity markers and social processes. For example, immigrants may share a common origin, language and religion, and these may be reinforced by residential segregation or labour market niches. The identification of immigrants according to a set of characteristics, along with their labour market niche, may lead to the formation of an ethnic group, a process some argue is creating perhaps the most important social distinction in North America.^[14]

Given that ethnicity is a complex web of social relations, the question becomes: can ethnic groups create and identify with urban social space in the city, even a space that appears to be dominated by modern city-building or capital? Chicago's immigrant experience during the 'new deal' provides some insights. Despite the onslaught of mass culture influences, which contemporaries felt would erase ethnic identity, immigrants actually engaged these influences to reinforce their identities.^[15] This suggests that urban space may form part of the process of ethnic identification, perhaps as radios and gramophones did for Chicago's ethnics, to reinforce ethnic identity rather than to detract from it. Peter Jackson, however, warns that "theorists cannot afford the luxury of assuming that they know how consumers read the landscape."^[16] Immigrant and ethnic groups may even find identity and meaning in urban space that is visually unmarked. Upton writes: "Large urban ethnic groups evidently built little that was distinctive . . . [but] . . . we cannot be too confident in making such assertions, however. The absence of urban ethnic architectures may be more apparent than real."^[17]

Case studies provide clues about the ways ethnicity relates to urban space. Lai's multi-city research on North America's Chinatowns provides descriptive accounts of the architectural features that people of Chinese origin built into urban space.^[18] Similarly, Holdsworth's work on Toronto's Portuguese immigrant community describes how the domestic landscape of inner Toronto has been altered with paint, statuary and other expressive features of ethnic origin; yet some members of the community have altered their home spaces in different ways, and others have left their domestic space unmarked. Kobayashi found a similar pattern for Vancouver's pre-war Japanese and Chinese immigrants: in-group variation in the immigrants' regional origins heavily influenced the ethnic imprint on the urban landscape.^[19] Ethnic groups, therefore, can have marked if variable impacts on the urban landscape. Olson and Kobayashi have argued that an emerging ethnocultural mosaic, a demographic diversity, is becoming more apparent in the Canadian city.^[20] They draw upon studies of immigrant settlement and adjustment to relate the ethnic imprint in the landscape to the wider social process of ethnicity. This case study of St Clair contributes to a growing body of literature on urban ethnic landscapes.

The development of St Clair

Before World War II, Toronto had a compact built-up area. Growth approximated the ebb and flow of the economy; after growing quickly in the first two decades of this

century, Toronto experienced little expansion during the ‘roaring twenties’ when infilling absorbed most urban construction. St Clair had been subdivided by 1898, but up to 1912, only 52 buildings lined the streetfront. Public Works photographs show that most structures were houses and sheds, much like surrounding neighbourhoods. Houses were built before street cars reached the Earls court neighbourhood near St Clair, but commercial structures awaited the construction of a commuter rail line. By 1915, just after the streetcar line opened, streetfront commercial buildings occupied more than half of St Clair, and infilling continued up to 1923. Toronto’s insurance atlas for 1923 showed 235 streetfront buildings in the study area, and most remained among the 238 buildings shown in the 1994 City of Toronto property data map. With the construction of a commuter rail line, St Clair was transformed from a concession road into a commercial strip, and its overall form persists up to the present.^[21]

Most of the St Clair strip was built as the ‘two-part commercial block’.^[22] This block, usually two to four storeys in height, is characterized by a horizontal division between two distinct zones in building appearance and use. The lower zone is intended for public use, usually retailing, and the upper floor is for private use, usually residential. Other building types always have been present along St Clair, such as the one-part block used for banking or the enframed wall for retailing. Even today, many institutional, residential and religious buildings diversify the streetscape, but as with many retail strips throughout North America before World War II, the two-part block dominated St Clair’s overall form.

The Georgian style typified St Clair when it was first built up. Toronto’s Georgian style is “an Anglo-Dutch simplification of Italian Renaissance and Baroque architecture.”^[23] It is distinguished by a combination of features, which, applied to retail architecture, include: a Dutch arch; plain or dentilled cornices, with a corbel table beneath it; sash windows with six, nine or 12 panes; curved window heads; stone sills and lintels—often protruding; decorative quoins; a formal entrance bay or vestibule; and a parlour floor. This stylistic trend spanned the period 1800–1940 with only a 20-year lapse beginning around 1876. This Georgian style was compatible with the two-part block, and the connection to Britain made this form and style popular (Figure 1). Describing Toronto’s Georgian style, McHugh wrote that “this small-scale classicism was the young colony’s first real architectural expression.”^[24]

Because the buildings along St Clair were still new during the 1920s, they would have to wait until after 1945 for serious renovation and maintenance work. The Great Depression and World War II meant that the buildings would age in their original form. This is confirmed by the Toronto Real Estate Board multiple listing service records, a comprehensive set of documents that contain photographs of properties sold in the city beginning in 1953. Little Britain’s style remained intact into the 1960s when Italian immigrants began to settle the area in large numbers, and own and occupy St Clair properties.

Italians in Toronto

The influx of Italians marked social and demographic change to the city as well as the St Clair landscape (Table 1). As of 1941, Toronto was still over three-quarters British origin, but after 1951, when immigration restrictions were lifted, Italian immigrants came in large numbers.^[25] Between 1951 and 1981, Toronto’s population doubled while the number of Italians in the city increased tenfold. By the 1970s, about one of every ten Torontonians was of Italian origin whereas the British-origin population had fallen



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.

TABLE 1 *Ethnic composition of Toronto residents, 1901–1991 (per cent)*

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	Metro 1951	Metro 1961	Metro 1971	Metro 1981	Metro 1991
British	91.7	86.5	85.3	80.9	78.4	68.9	51.8	45.8	72.7	59.2	53.3	46.0	25.5
Jewish	1.5	4.9	6.6	7.2	7.3	6.0	1.7	3.5	5.3	3.3	5.1	4.9	3.9
Italian	0.5	1.2	1.6	2.1	2.1	2.7	11.6	12.6	2.5	8.3	12.0	11.7	10.6
French	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.7	2.3	3.2	4.1	3.7	2.9	3.4	3.4	2.5	1.8
German	2.9	2.6	0.9	1.5	1.3	1.7	4.6	3.3	1.7	4.4	4.1	2.6	2.3
Ukrainian	—	—	0.2	0.7	1.6	3.5	3.9	3.2	2.6	2.7	2.5	1.9	1.5
Polish	0.1	0.2	0.5	1.3	1.7	3.1	4.0	3.1	2.4	3.4	2.1	1.9	2.5
Hungarian	—	0.1	—	0.2	0.3	0.5	1.6	1.1	—	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.8
Dutch	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.8	1.1	1.5	1.2	0.8	1.1
Chinese	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	1.0	2.5	—	0.5	1.2	3.9	7.9
Japanese	—	0.0	0.4	0.4	—	0.7	0.7	0.5	—	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
African	—	0.1	0.2	—	—	—	0.5	0.7	—	0.3	0.6	2.9	—
Native people	—	—	—	—	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4	—	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.2
Other	—	2.4	1.9	3.2	3.6	8.2	13.3	18.8	8.8	11.3	12.7	19.0	41.3

Sources: Lemon, J. 1985. *Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History*; Kalbach, W. 1980. *Historical and Generational Perspectives of Ethnic Residential Segregation in Toronto, Canada: 1851–1971*. Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for Urban And Community Studies; Census of Canada, 1991.

to just over half. In 1991, the more than 300 000 Italian-origin residents in the census metropolitan area represented eight per cent of the region's population. Beginning in the late 1960s, new immigrants picked up the slack in Italian immigration, turning

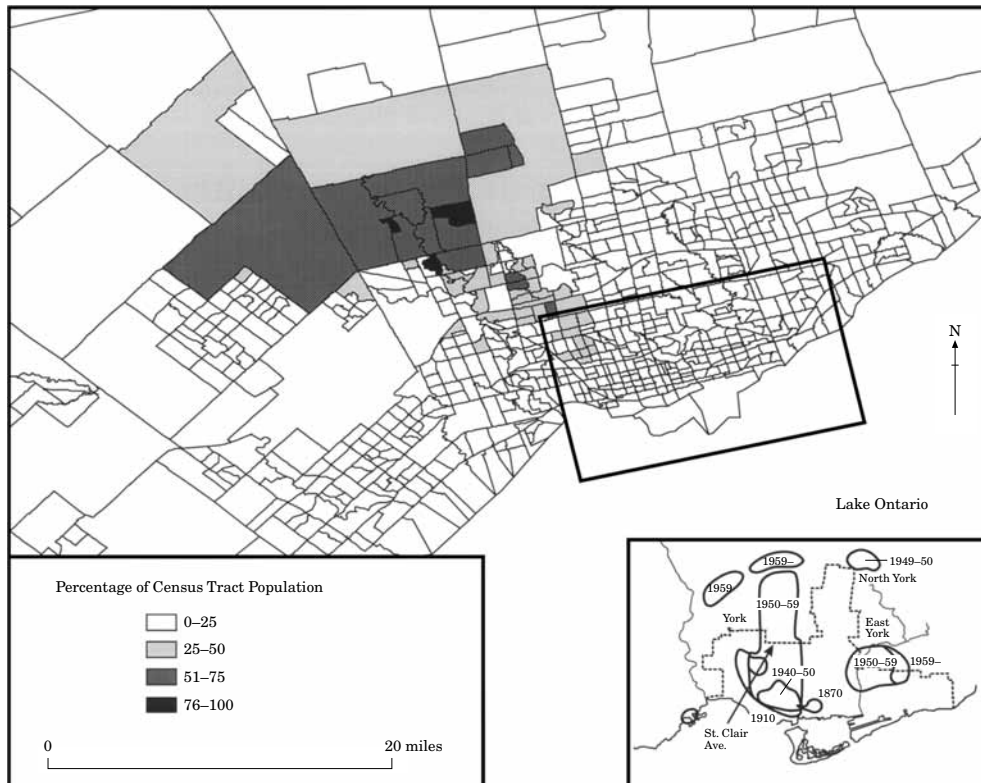


Figure 2. Distribution of Italian ethnic origin population, Toronto census metropolitan area, 1991. Source: L. Driedger, *The Ethnic Factor: Sociology of Canadian Cities* (Oxford 1991).

Toronto into a mostly non-British-origin city by the 1990s. Projections based on the 1996 census indicate that visible minorities alone will make up more than half of Toronto's population by the year 2000.^[26]

Italian-Canadian settlement in the city has always taken on a distinctly clustered and segregated pattern. The movement of Italians has followed a northwest sectoral pattern, leading to St Clair and beyond (Map 1). Since the 1970s, their index of residential segregation has persisted at around sixty, among the highest of Toronto's ethnic groups. Only two groups, the Jewish community, which has always been more segregated, and the recent Portuguese-Canadian community, have had higher segregation indices (in the 1970s).^[27] This residential segregation of Italian-Canadians remains a marked feature of Toronto's residential structure up to the 1990s, even after second and third generation Italian-Canadians have re-segregated well beyond metropolitan boundary.

This residential geography reflects the social distance established in the early years between Italians and the wider Toronto society. Pre-war Italophobia resurfaced with greater potency, sparked by the realization that Italian immigrants outnumbered their British counterparts in 1958.^[28] Italian-Canadians were not subject to official or systematic discrimination; though, an anti-Italian prejudice did permeate Toronto life in the 1950s and 1960s. The uneasiness caused by economic recession in the late 1950s added to fears of Italian immigration; as often happens in tough economic times, nativism ensued.^[29] Questions about the racial integrity of Canada were coupled with doubts about the 'usefulness' of unskilled labourers from southern Italy. "Canada's

postwar rebuilding and expansion of infrastructure was coming to an end. . . . The fact was that the Canadian economy no longer needed the strong backs of Italian labourers."^[30] Italophobia continued into the 1960s and it combined with the introduction of an immigration 'points system' based on education and training: "the poorer, labouring classes of Italy were politely but firmly told that they were no longer of sufficient 'quality' for Canada."^[31] Iacovetta captures this sentiment:

By the mid-1960s the Italian 'invasion' of early postwar Toronto was nearly complete and several images of the Italian had become etched on the minds of the city's Anglo-Celtic residents. . . . There were positive images, though they were often expressed with a patronizing tone, but more often than not in this period of heavy immigration the Italians emerged as a target of scorn. . . . The immigrants' propensity for clustering in distinct neighbourhoods, the darker skin colouring of many of the newcomers, particularly those who hailed from Italy's Deep South, and their concentration among the city's working class made the Italians all the more visible to nativists.^[32]

Social distance from the rest of Toronto was also marked from within the ethnic group. Italians, like other immigrants, developed a distinct identity by turning to those things that they could control in order to cope with change, namely their families, households, neighbourhoods and communities.^[33] A number of markers set Italians apart in Toronto: a family-centred ethos, class-based militancy, a folk-based Catholicism and a penchant for neighbourhood clustering and homeownership.^[34]

The experience of Italian immigration and social distance in Toronto provides a context for understanding St Clair's landscape change. An ethnic 'imprint' in the city is determined by a number of factors: the rate and scale of immigration, social mobility, segregation and the physical environment.^[35] Rapid immigration and segregation, when coupled with high social mobility, would likely produce some spatial indicators of identity, especially if immigrants are building anew, but the group must have strong internal affiliation.^[36] In the case of Toronto's Italian-Canadians, the rate of in-migration and social distance, coupled with the ageing buildings along St Clair, meant that the conditions were met for creating the imprint of Little Italy.

From Little Britain to Little Italy

As with the city, St Clair's ethnic composition changed rapidly due to Italian immigration. Table 2 shows that St Clair shops were mostly British- and Jewish-owned in 1951, whereas Italians made up only about 10 per cent of all proprietors. By 1981, however, this had reversed, with two-thirds of the strip falling under Italian ownership. At that time, British and Jewish merchants together accounted for less than six per cent of St Clair properties.

By 1950, most buildings were 30 to 50 years old and Italian-Canadians started to rapidly take ownership of businesses along St Clair and to make renovations of facades. Numerous changes were made and they differed from the strip's original style. Georgian features have been adapted, covered up, or removed altogether; yet many Georgian features also remain along with immigrant modifications to give St Clair a heterogeneous appearance. Its primary identities today are Georgian and Italian-Canadian, though the residential migration of Italians north of the city and arrival of new immigrant groups has begun a new round of landscape change.

St Clair's Italian-Canadian shopkeepers and proprietors could choose from a large set of Italian immigrant traditions of vernacular architecture.^[37] The most common features in this larger set include: arches, balconies, balustrades, columns, gardens,

TABLE 2 *Ethnic changeover in ownership of St Clair businesses, 1951–1991*

	Number per year						Total number of shops
	British	Italian	Portuguese	Jewish*	Other	N/A**	
1951	105	29	0	80	11	22	247
1961	72	63	0	71	13	38	257
1971	27	139	0	25	14	48	253
1981	11	167	1	19	11	44	253
1991	6	158	3	8	18	56	249

	Percentage distribution						Total
	British	Italian	Portuguese	Jewish*	Other	N/A**	
1951	42.5	11.7	0.0	32.4	4.5	8.9	100
1961	28.0	24.5	0.0	27.6	5.1	14.8	100
1971	10.7	54.9	0.0	9.9	5.5	19.0	100
1981	4.3	66.0	0.4	7.5	4.3	17.4	100
1991	2.4	63.5	1.2	3.2	7.2	22.5	100

Source: Surnames obtained in the Ontario Property Assessment Records for the City of Toronto.

* Names Checked in *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and Their History* by Benzion Kaganoff and *Jewish Family Names and Their Origins: An Etymological Dictionary* by H. and E. Guggenheimer (1992).

** These represent cases where a surname is not given; a provincial business registration number might be listed as the owner. In other cases, the assessment listing was missing altogether.

cantinas, and statuary for domestic architecture, as well as wrought iron, stucco, tile and marble that are used in both domestic and commercial buildings. The collection of photographs of the Toronto Real Estate Board's Multiple Listing Service reveal that St Clair's Italian shopkeepers and proprietors have chiefly used stucco, tile, and marble to change the streetscape.^[38] In a series of informant interviews, St Clair merchants identified these features as prominent along St Clair throughout the post-war period.^[39] Merchants such as Joe Calamia and Maria Rotella claimed that stucco has made the streetscape look more Italian.^[40] The original red brick of St Clair, one couple explained, represents the area's previous English composition and stands in direct contrast to the Italian use of stucco, tile and marble/granite.^[41] Previously, the strip had mostly red brick, whereas today it has a more grey and white appearance.

Adaptations to the organization and use of space on St Clair are less conspicuous. Storefront public space and access have been adapted for less formal, more casual use. The opening cafe window positioned at the centre of the storefront's plate-glass window has become a common feature along the strip. This type of window allows patrons to enjoy coffee and ice cream along the sidewalk. Figure 3 shows the central cafe window, as well as another adaptation—the outdoor eating area. Its introduction and use throughout the strip brought people onto the sidewalk to eat and drink in the summer months, something not previously experienced on St Clair and probably nowhere else in the city.^[42] Some changes have been less obvious. Along with the central cafe window and the name 'L'Espresso Bar', Figure 4 shows a façade with a side-hall entrance. In 1963, the owner, Mr Ferrantone, removed the central vestibule that once existed in this property. When asked why he made that change, he replied that he wanted to evoke the ambience of an open-air café for patrons. The harsh Canadian winter, he reasoned,



Figure 3. The central café window with outdoor patio. Author's photograph, autumn 1996.



Figure 4. Removal of central vestibule and the installation of a plate-glass window with a café window. Author's photograph, autumn 1996.



Figure 5. A typical block face on St Clair Avenue, displaying a hybrid mix of Georgian and Italian-Canadian architectural features. Author's photograph, autumn 1996.

necessitated the 'opening up' of interior space. A large plate-glass window replaced the vestibule, a classic Georgian feature that formally divides public and private space; this made a less bounded storefront. The cafe window was added ten years later.

Stucco, tile and marble have become common, space has been adapted, and Georgian features sometimes totally replaced, but to what degree has St Clair become an Italian-Canadian urban ethnic landscape? Retail façades contain part of the answer; yet the examples reveal that façade changes occurred on properties that took on new functions, such as a café or restaurant. This suggests that business change contributed to landscape change along St Clair; however, the composition of St Clair's business types remained stable from 1951 to 1991. Chain stores, clothing shops, and jewellery stores retained their share of the business composition of the retail strip; together, they comprised about half of all business types from 1951 through 1991.^[43] The number of cafes and billiard halls, grocery/bakery stores, and restaurants increased, largely filling the gap left by the decline of furniture/appliance stores and specialty shops; still, their presence only grew from 16 to 24 per cent of business types from 1951 to 1991. Ethnic succession, not a change in retail types, contributed to landscape change. But did the overall visual appearance of Little Italy change dramatically? Figure 5 shows a floral shop clad in stucco and arches at the corner of a block face that is dominated by Georgian elements: stone window lintels and sills and decorative quoin work. This juxtaposition of ethnically affiliated features, common throughout St Clair, speaks to the hybrid identity of the area. The degree of change varies from one block to the next and St Clair has been significantly transformed from its original form and style.

Interviews with the Italian-Canadian merchants of St Clair reveal that their motivations for the renovations extended beyond simply creating Italian-like façades. In response to questions on the Italianness of St Clair's appearance, the Di Matteos asked

their own question: “what’s Italian?” In reference to the earliest renovations on St Clair, however, they immediately answered their question by stating that “nobody knew what Italian was.”^[44] Because Italians wanted to renovate St Clair shops in styles that differed from the original landscape and the styles appeared to be Italian, they claimed that Italianness was defined in space. Stucco and the arch were used as expressions of Italian identity in Toronto’s residential landscape.^[45] Of the 15 informants, 11 reported that they purposely used certain elements to evoke an Italian appearance in their storefronts. Some, such as Palma Nazzicone,^[46] said they used certain elements to renovate in an ‘Italian way’, whereas others said they had given it little thought; in retrospect, however, they felt that their stylistic choices must have been ethnically based. For Robert Gileppo, a shoe store owner who used columns and a door pediment to evoke classical Italian elements, changes to the streetscape stood in direct contrast to the area’s original ‘British’ appearance.

The Italian-Canadian merchants also undertook the renovations as a cooperative exercise. That approach is a defining characteristic of vernacular traditions; digging, painting, and adding stucco, mosaic tile, and wrought iron for the archvilla were never completed alone.^[47] Similarly, along St Clair, renovations involved relatives, co-regionalists, and friends. The involvement of the informants in renovation ranged from aiding in the design process to actually doing the work themselves. The Di Matteo’s believed the strip became more Italian because “our minds”, the husband said, “are always Italian.” “We like to do things ourselves,” Paul Spagnuolo said, when he discussed his shoe store renovations.^[48] Because renovations were abundant by the 1970s and informants intended their work to evoke Italianness, cooperation had become a means of redefining the ethnic identity of St Clair shops.

The merchants took a functional approach to their renovations. Cantinas and vegetable gardens are common appendages of the archvilla.^[49] For St Clair proprietors, functionalism took the form of keeping the area clean, orderly and appealing—all flowing, they reported, from their pride and ability to do so. Maria Rotella and Joe Calamia, for example, both told me that they chose granite and marble because it was more durable than brick.^[50] Another informant, equally pragmatic, described how easily granite can be cleaned, thus keeping his storefront presentable.^[51] According to informants, this was the way that the strip was “maintained”, “upgraded”, “modernized”, “given life” and “cleaned up”. Eight of the 15 informants who viewed their renovations as Italian thought that this style necessarily improved the area. These informants were making an implied distinction between their reconstruction of St Clair storefronts and their original form. Some informants brought this distinction into sharp focus. One claimed that St Clair looked ‘pretty rough’ when Italians started coming in large numbers. To Nicola Bavaro, a fruit vendor operating on St Clair since 1956, the strip looked like “an old city”; thus confirming that the strip had changed little since its original construction.^[52] Yet, the merchants now claim that recent immigrants who do not conform are threatening their Italian-style improvements of St Clair. Only two merchants expressed sympathy for St Clair’s recent immigrants. Maria De Leo and Antonio Ferrantone said that the experiences of recent black, Somali and Chinese shopkeepers of St Clair are no different than Toronto’s Italian immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s.^[53] Both informants drew on their early experience in the city to express their understanding.^[54]

The physical changes made to St Clair storefronts and the meaning of those changes to proprietors demonstrate that the streetscape has become an ever-more complex ethnic landscape. The demographic transition from merchants of British working class and Jewish backgrounds to Italian-Canadians brought new façade treatments, uses of

space and meanings to the commercial strip. Landscape change, therefore, captures St Clair's and Toronto's demographic diversification with its attendant pride and tensions.

Beyond Little Italy

St Clair, like Toronto, entered the post-war period representing the identity of the people who built it. Through ethnic succession, its previous popular identity as Little Britain gave way to Little Italy, and the architectural expression of many of its storefronts acquired an Italian character as defined by the merchants. New materials, features and uses of space, as well as the meaning of landscape change, were part of ethnic identity, and they were integral to the transformation of an existing ethnic landscape and the creation of a new one.

St Clair's Italian-Canadian merchants chose a subset of the Italian immigrant traditions of vernacular architecture, and they reorganized the use of space to allow for less formal, more casual use. The streetscape became a hybrid form that reflected both the previous Georgian style, and the efforts of the merchants to make their storefronts fit their definition of Italian style. Besides expressing their identity through their renovations, the merchants viewed the cooperative approach they took to the renovations as also expressing their identity as Italian-Canadians. And this identity was reinforced through their functional approach to the renovations; those changes, which they viewed as improving the street, distinguished them from the previous occupants. Yet, these Italian-Canadian merchants, in turn, reacted negatively to the new immigrants to the area who instituted their own changes to the stores. In this context, this study of St Clair provides insights about multiculturalism—an ideological and political discourse, as well as the social relations stemming from demographic diversity. In Canada, for example, the evolution of Multiculturalism policy has only recently come to reflect the fact that Canada is not a 'peaceable kingdom'.^[55] The results of this case study shed light on how social groups encounter one another and how the landscape comes to reflect and play a part in that process.

The St Clair case suggests that multiculturalism is reflected and reproduced in the urban landscape. Georgian and Italian-Canadian styles dominated Little Italy's heterogeneous physical appearance. In this sense, it might be a streetscape of ethnogenesis—a term used by scholars of immigration history to refer to the mediation between pure assimilation and pluralism.^[56] The creation of Little Italy on St Clair was based partly on physical changes that expressed the identity of Italian-Canadians, as it was also based on wider social relations; these social relations are reflected in the landscape. This kind of social-spatial definition has been termed territorial history, which is meant to express the point that urban landscapes may take on definitions of both pride and tensions that may grow out of and re-create social relations over time.^[57] From this perspective, it is understandable that merchants would champion their own aesthetic choices over others'. Italian-Canadians were treated as Toronto's scapegoats in the early years, and they viewed St Clair's original style as belonging to that wider society. Yet these merchants, in turn, treated recent immigrants as scapegoats. Those immigrants' landscape changes were thought to worsen St Clair's Italian appeal, and the arrival of the immigrants, along with their use of space, was used to explain business downturn in the area. In this case, ethnogenesis and territorial history may be regarded as intermediate concepts in understanding how Little Italy fits into the larger urban fabric of multiculturalism.

The ethnic imprint on urban space and its identification by urban residents vary

between and within groups. All Chinatowns do not look alike and all Portuguese-Canadian homes in Toronto do not display iconographies of identity and religion. The ethnocultural landscape in each case reflects the occupants' experience with the production and association of urban space. As Kobayashi reminds us, "human beings share not only systems of production, values, ideas and political apparatuses, they share ground, as common ground, upon which their coming together and moving apart, and the conditions under which they do so, constitute the history of common life."^[58]

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Notes

- [1] S. Olson and A. Kobayashi, The emerging ethnocultural mosaic, in L. Bourne and D. Ley (Eds), *The Changing Social Geography of Canadian Cities* (Montreal 1993) 138–152.
- [2] I use the term landscape to refer to the physical structures of the city as well as their identity and meaning to urban residents. The latter perspective is commonly associated with the notion of place in social and humanist geography, though the marriage of social and cultural geography has brought the concepts of landscape and place closer together. For a recent overview of this approach to landscape, see P. Groth, Frameworks for cultural landscape study, in P. Groth and T. Bressi (Eds), *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven 1997) 1–24.
- [3] A. Cameron, The contemporary Italian house in Toronto, *Italian Canadiana* 4 (1988) 84–93; L. Del Guidice, The "archvilla": an Italian Canadian architectural archetype, in Idem, (Ed.), *Studies in Italian American Folklore* (Logan 1993) 53–105.
- [4] Italian refers to foreign-born immigrants. Italian-Canadians becomes a more appropriate term to refer to the community over time, since many immigrants would have become 'new Canadians', but more importantly because subsequent generations come to outnumber the immigrants. I use Italian-Canadian throughout the remainder of the paper, except where I refer to immigrants in the early years.
- [5] Hundreds welcome Italian president, *Toronto Star*, 13 June 1986; Toronto's Little Italy salutes the Queen, *Toronto Star*, 1 October 1984.
- [6] W. Zelinsky, Seeing beyond the dominant culture, *Places* 7 (1991) 32–35. This perspective is based on Zelinsky's concept of First Effective Settlement discussed in *The Cultural Geography of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1974) in which he argues (pp. 13–4) "the first group to effect viable, self-perpetuating society are of crucial significance for the later social and cultural geography of the area no matter how tiny the initial band of settlers may have been." The same, if more subtle, perspective is found in P. Lewis, Common houses, cultural spoor, in K. Foote, P. Hugill, K. Mathewson and J. Smith (Eds), *Re-reading Cultural Geography* (Austin 1996) and Allen Noble (Ed.), Migration to North America: before, during and after the nineteenth century and The immigrant experience in the nineteenth century and afterwards, both in *To Build in a New Land: Ethnic Landscapes in North America* (Baltimore 1992) 3–25; 399–406.
- [7] Zelinsky, Seeing beyond, 34.

- [8] P. Hugill and K. Foote, Re-reading cultural geography, in K. Foote, P. Hugill, K. Mathewson and J. Smith (Eds), *op. cit.*, 9–23.
- [9] P. Jackson, Towards a cultural politics of consumption, in J. Bird *et al.* (Eds), *Mapping the Futures: Local Knowledge, Global Change* (London 1993) 207–228.
- [10] D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (Eds), Introduction: iconography and landscape, in *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge 1988) 1–10; J. Smith, The lies that blinds, in D. Ley and J. Duncan (Eds), *Place/Culture/Representation* (London 1993) 78–92.
- [11] A classic statement of this perspective is in E. Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape* (Baltimore 1987). The same argument is presented in his *Rational Landscapes and Humanistic Geography* (London 1981) and his *Place and Placelessness* (London 1976).
- [12] S. Olson and A. Kobayashi, *op. cit.*, 152–153. See also M. Conzen (Ed.), Ethnicity on the land, in *The Making of the American Landscape* (Boston 1990) 221–248.
- [13] O. Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston 1951); R. Vecoli, Contadini in Chicago: a critique of the uprooted, *Journal of American History*, **12** (1964) 404–417.
- [14] N. Glazier and P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, Mass. 1963); A. Kobayashi, Multiculturalism: representing a Canadian institution, in J. Duncan and D. Ley, *op. cit.*, 205–231.
- [15] L. Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York 1990).
- [16] Jackson, *op. cit.*, 223. See also D. Ley and D. Olds, Landscape as spectacle: world's fairs and the culture of heroic consumption, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **6** (1988) 191–212.
- [17] D. Upton, *America's Architectural Roots* (Washington 1986) **14**.
- [18] D. C. Lai, The visual character of Chinatowns, *Places* **7** (1991) 29–31.
- [19] A. Kobayashi, Regional and demographic aspects of Japanese migration to Canada, *Canadian Geographer* **32** (1988) 356–360; *idem*, Emigration to Canada and development of the residential landscape in a Japanese village: the paradox of the sojourner, *Canadian Ethnic Studies* **16** (1984) 111–131.
- [20] Olson and Kobayashi, *op. cit.*
- [21] R. Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy* (Baltimore 1996); L. Pursley, *The Toronto Trolley Car Story, 1921–1961* (Toronto 1961). *Goat's Fire Insurance Atlas*, 1913.
- [22] R. Longstreth, *Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Washington 1987); *idem*, *Compositional Types in American Commercial Architecture* in C. Wells, *op. cit.* Although a comparable Canadian study does not exist, Longstreth's work can be applied to the Canadian city and to St Clair.
- [23] P. McHugh, *Toronto Architecture: A City Guide* (Toronto 1985) 14–15.
- [24] McHugh, *op. cit.*, 14. See also E. Arthur, *Toronto: No Mean City* (Toronto 1994).
- [25] F. Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal 1993); F. Sturino, Post-World War Two Canadian immigration policy towards Italians, *Polyphony* **7** (1985) 67–72.
- [26] Minorities set to be majority, *Toronto Star*, 7 June 1998, A1.
- [27] W. Kalbach, Ethnic residential segregation and its significance for the individual in an urban setting, in R. Breton, W. Isajiw, W. Kalbach, and J. Reitz (Eds), *Ethnic Identity and Equality: Varieties of Experience in a Canadian City* (Toronto 1990) 92–134; T. Balakrishnan, Changing patterns of ethnic residential segregation in metropolitan areas of Canada, *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* **19** (1982) 92–110; W. Davies and R. Murdie, Measuring the social ecology of cities, in L. Bourne and D. Ley, *op. cit.*, 52–75.
- [28] R. Harney, Italophobia: an English-speaking malady?, *Polyphony* **7** (1985) 67–72; Sturino, *op. cit.*
- [29] Sturino, *op. cit.*; J. Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism* (New Brunswick 1963).
- [30] Sturino, *op. cit.*
- [31] Sturino, *op. cit.*
- [32] Iacovetta, *op. cit.*, 103–104.
- [33] J. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington 1985)
- [34] L. Del Guidice, *op. cit.*; F. Iacovetta, *op. cit.*; F. Sturino, The social mobility of Italian-Canadians: “outside and “inside” concepts of mobility, *Polyphony* **7** (1985) 123–127.
- [35] Conzen, *op. cit.*
- [36] A. Pred, Business thoroughfares as expressions of urban negro culture, *Economic Geography* **39** (1963) 217–233.

- [37] Del Guidice, *op. cit.*; A. Cameron, *op. cit.*; D. Gale, The impact of Canadian Italians on retail functions and facades in Vancouver, 1921–1961, in J. Vincent Minghi (Ed.), *Peoples of the Living Land: Geography of Cultural Diversity in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1972); D. Noyes, *Uses of Tradition: Arts of Italian Americans in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia 1989).
- [38] The photos from this source were comprehensive. Nearly every property was in the Toronto Real Estate Board's record at different times. The records show that stucco, tile, and marble were the most prevalent changes made to the streetscape.
- [39] In all, 15 interviews were conducted in the autumn of 1996. Informants were identified from provincial property assessment data and selected based on their length of ownership/rental in the area and the condition that they had renovated their own property. Interviews covered the topics of change in the neighbourhood and community, informants own renovations, and the future of the area.
- [40] Interviewed on 15 October and 21 October 1996 respectively. Pseudonyms are used except where informants allowed me to report their real names.
- [41] Interviewed on 6 November 1996.
- [42] R. Harney, Toronto's Little Italy 1885–1945, and If one were to write a history of postwar Toronto Italia, both in P. Ancitil and B. Ramirez (Eds), *If One Were to Write a History . . . Selected Writings by Robert F. Harney* (Toronto 1991) 37–62; 63–89.
- [43] Based on a classification by business type of Ontario Property Assessment Records for the City of Toronto.
- [44] Interviewed 29 October 1996.
- [45] Cameron, *op. cit.* and Del Guidice, *op. cit.*, have argued that the archvilla represents boundaries of interethnic tensions. Inside the Italian community, the arch has symbolized ownership and ethnic pride; it is 'a genuine art of artisans, an art of the people'. But the arch was also an external source of tension for the wider Toronto society for whom the element was decidedly foreign. Because inter-ethnic boundaries are in constant flux, the arch becomes an unstable boundary.
- [46] Interviewed 30 October 1996.
- [47] For a definition of vernacular traditions, see H. Glassie, Folk art, in R. Dorson (Ed), *Folklore and Folklife* (Chicago 1972); DelGuidice, *op. cit.*
- [48] Interviewed on 12 November 1996.
- [49] Del Guidice, *op. cit.*, 60.
- [50] Interviewed on 21 October and 15 October 1996 respectively.
- [51] Interviewed on 9 October 1996.
- [52] Interviewed on 15 October 1996.
- [53] Interviewed on 18 October and 16 October 1996 respectively.
- [54] Although I do not have direct information on opinions of Italians from their predecessors, mainly British and Jewish businessmen, the story probably varies little given the wider context of social relations in the city. Consider the comments of St Clair resident of the 1950s, Harry Rasky: "Much later, after the Jews had departed, the store was obliterated when the Italians moved in and the Mafia apparently wiped out some inconvenient resident"; excerpt taken from W. Kilbourn (Ed), *Toronto Remembered: A Celebration of the City* (Toronto 1984) 216.
- [55] A. Kobayashi, Multiculturalism; Harney, R. The immigrant city, in P. Ancitil and B. Ramirez, *op. cit.*, 173–182.
- [56] Harney, The immigrant city.
- [57] D. Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass. 1995).
- [58] Kobayashi, Multiculturalism, 209.