

HISTORY OF THE CLUB

In 1915, St. Elizabeth Roman Catholic Church was founded on Craig Street in Copper Cliff. Not only was the priest Italian but indeed the language of communication was Italian. In 1921, the Methodist Mission in Copper Cliff started offering its services to the Italian community. Even though they were Roman Catholics the Italian community encouraged its children to attend the Methodist Mission since the Catholic Church offered no children's activities. Attendance declined, St. Stanislaus became the church that took care of the Italian community and eventually St. Elizabeth's became vacant.

Venusta Boccini from Windsor, who was visiting friends in Copper Cliff, suggested that the women should organize an association for themselves as a means to meet outside the home, exchange ideas and organize events. Women from the Copper Cliff Italian community went door to door to drum up support and collect the 25 cent membership fee. These women included Valentina "Val" (Silvestri) Piccini and Matilda "Tillie" Ceppetelli. In September of 1934 the Societa Italiana di Copper Cliff-Sezione Femminile was formed with 79 founding members.

Once the money was collected Nazzareno Taus was asked if the ladies could hold their meeting at the Co-operative Hall in the Taus building on Domenico Street, he agreed and it was during that same meeting that the first executive was elected.

Landa (Silvestri) Morelli and Luigia Bargnesi were then made responsible for the task of approaching Bishop Scollard at the Arch-Diocese and requesting the use of the St. Elizabeth Church building on Craig Street as the future site of the Club. Permission was granted and it was then the task of the women to transform the church into a Club. The walls and floors were stripped and repaired just in time for the first social event of the Societa which was a New Year's Eve dance organized on December 31, 1934 to ring in the new year.

In 1935 the Socita proper (with a male only membership) was organized under the direction of Adolfo Pianosi. Emilio Tessaro was elected president, Gino Taus as secretary of the Societa Italiana di Copper Cliff with a founding male membership of 105.

The priority of the association was immigrant aid, but it also aimed to provide entertainment for its members. On Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons Bill Silvestri manned the projector that showed movie favourites. Plays, that were directed by Dora Volpini, were mostly performed on the Club's stage, however one of the productions "The Last Mile" was brought into town and performed at the Grand Theatre. Sunday night dances continued to be a favourite with people of all ages.

In the 1930s Copper Cliff organized large celebrations for Victoria Day which included a parade and baseball games in the afternoon. The Italian association sponsored floats in those parades in 1935, 1937 and 1940.

In 1935 the Club organized the building of the Queen Mary ocean liner float. It was built over a large truck and was forty-eight feet long and eight feet wide. It boasted two masts, a smoke stack, a bell and a whistle. The captain of the ship wore a white uniform and the crew consisted of eighteen men who also dressed in white with one letter on the front of their shirt that when they all stood together spelled out SOCIETA

ITALIANA. Twelve young ladies wore long white gowns with a green, white and red sash that each spelled the name of a Canadian province or territory. In 1937 the association organized the building of another large float, this time a Zeppelin. In 1940 a dragon was chosen by the association as their float theme.

When the second World war broke out the club was closed. No meetings of any kind took place, but a group of women did use the facility twice a week to sew for the Canadian Red Cross. The club also conducted fundraising events for the war effort.

In 1949 the Club's executive decided they needed a larger space to meet the demands of the growing community and it was time to renovate the building. The building was torn down to its basement foundation in 1949 and reopened in September of the following year. The construction involved fifteen thousand hours of labour donated by the 227 male members of the club, along with 85% of the finances being raised through members of the association. The main focus of the Club continued to be a meeting place for its members, but the upper hall (Main Ballroom) was added which today continues to be rented out for Banquets, Weddings, Anniversaries, Family Reunions and so on.

In 1997 the women and men's organizations were amalgamated to form the current mix of men, women, young and old that is represented on our Board of Directors today.