



Meghan Buckle, a Grade 7 student at St. Hubert Separate School, holds up a project about her great-grandfather, Maggiarino Marco Pellarin, at her home Wednesday. The history project documents the internment of Italian-Canadians, including Pellarin, during the Second World War. Buckle's work has earned her a spot at the National Historica Fair in Lethbridge, Alta., next month. denis dubois, the nugget

Canada's time of shame; Family inspired student's project on internment of Italian-Canadians

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Local News - Meghan Buckle is an example of the old adage you can't know where you're going until you know where you've been.

The Grade 7 St. Hubert Separate School student is heading to a National Historica Fair in Lethbridge, Alta., next month after exploring a dark chapter in her family's past as part of a school project documenting the internment of Italian-Canadians during the Second World War.

Titled Canada's Unknown Prisoners of War, Buckle's project, which focuses on her great-grandfather, Maggiarino Marco Pellarin, earned her an invitation to the fair, which will bring together 165 students from across Canada for a week of learning and visits to historic and cultural sites.

"I was surprised because there were a lot of really good projects," said Buckle, who was told by

organizers of North Bay's regional Historica Fair in May that her project stood out because it was personal and didn't shy away from a shameful episode in Canadian history.

Buckle said all her great-grandfather would have wanted was an apology.

Two prime ministers, Brian Mulroney in 1990 and Paul Martin in 2005, acknowledged the injustices suffered by 650 Italian-Canadians labelled as enemy aliens and imprisoned at Camp Petawawa. But there has never been an official apology or financial compensation.

"I don't think he would have cared about compensation . . . but an apology letter would have been nice," Buckle said, noting her great-grandfather was accused of having ties to Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party because he was president of an Italian social club in Kirkland Lake.

The social club was created a month before Mussolini formed an alliance with Nazi Germany.

Buckle's great-grandfather spent nine months at the internment camp as a result of the country's wartime measures. He was forced to leave his wife and child, who were provided \$15 each month from the government - half of his monthly income as a miner.

Buckle's project includes old family photos and an original letter from her great-grandfather to her great-grandmother written while he was at the camp. A portrait of her great-grandfather drawn by a fellow prisoner serves as centrepiece.

Buckle admits she knew little about the internment of Italian-Canadians before working on the project. And she said she only chose the topic after recalling a conversation her mother once had about it with her grandmother.

The project, however, turned out to be a learning experience for the entire family.

Buckle's mother, Laura, helped out with information provided by her mother and grandmother, both who live in Timmins. And her cousins chipped in by bringing back photos and other documents after a visit to that community.

Buckle's mother said she knows more now about her grandfather's experiences at the camp after his death than she did when he was alive.

"He didn't really talk about it much . . . I think it made him sad . . . that Canada would treat him that way," she said.

Although he spent much less time at the camp than many others, Buckle's great-grandfather had a difficult time following his release due to the stigma attached with his imprisonment. He was unable to get back his mining job in Kirkland Lake and ended up working as a caretaker in Toronto for a wealthy Italian he met at the camp. The man was interned because he had given Mussolini a race horse prior to the war.

Her great-grandfather eventually opened his own business in Quebec. Buckle said many people are aware of Japanese internment camps during the Second World War, but she has encountered few people who realized Italian-Canadians suffered the same treatment.

The 13th annual National Historica Fair, part of a national educational initiative of the Historica Foundation of Canada, runs from July 9 to 16.

Delegates were selected from among more than 275,000 students in more than 1,000 communities who participated in regional and local Historica Fairs in May. Buckle is one of 19 students from Ontario to attend the fair.