

## Emilio Picariello

Bottles were both the making and the death of Emilio Picariello.

Emperor Pic, the Bottle King, recognized the value of empty bottles, and took them as payment for cones in his Blairmore, Alberta ice-cream parlour. By 1917 he had gathered 27,000 bottles, making him the major source for brewers and distillers in British Columbia.

After Prohibition became law in 1916, Picariello became a successful bootlegger. He bought the Alberta Hotel in Blairmore and sold temperance drinks, but in the basement, he stored crates of illegal whisky that he transported from B.C.

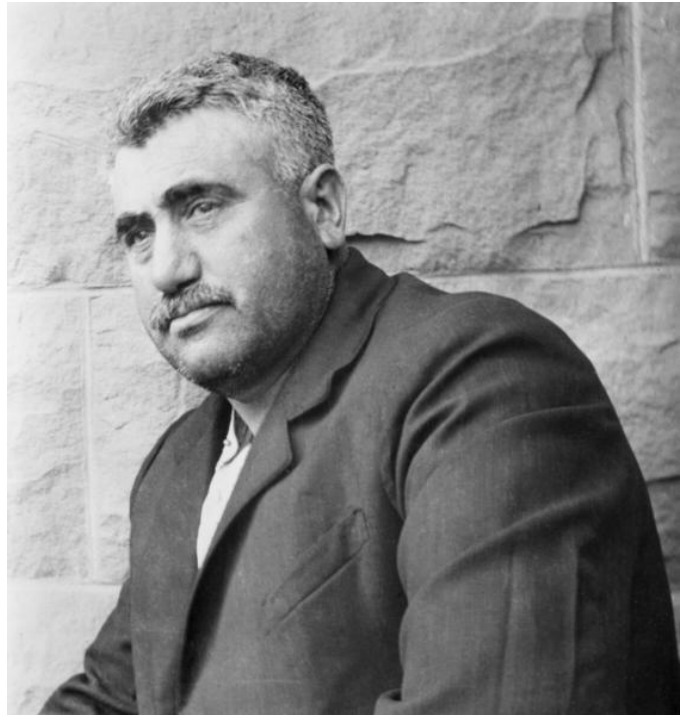
An ambitious man, Picariello came to the Crowsnest Pass because of its strong Italian community. When he was accused of the murder of Constable Steve Lawson, Picariello was a pillar of the community. But Lawson's death aroused fierce anti-Italian feeling, and Picariello and Filumena Losandro were duly tried, found guilty and hanged at Fort Saskatchewan.

Picariello's final letter to his wife says, "I go to the scaffold tomorrow morning as an innocent man and I am prepared to meet my Maker."

### Prohibition

In 1916, when Prohibition was passed to curtail "the demon rum," Alberta went dry and interprovincial transportation of liquor was forbidden.

Because the Crowsnest Pass was solidly against prohibition, policing this unpopular act was difficult. In truth, the anti-liquor laws had loopholes the size of the McLaughlin-Buicks that Emilio



Emilio Picariello, "Emperor Pic", Blairmore, Alberta  
*Glenbow Archives NA-3282-1*

Picariello drove. Liquor could be purchased for medicinal, scientific or sacred purposes, which made doctors, scientists, and ministers potential suppliers. Bootlegging was a profitable business.

The Alberta Provincial Police were specifically charged with controlling bootlegging, and Constable Steve Lawson's encounter with Emilio Picariello stemmed from that charge.

Prohibition claimed three victims with the death of Lawson, and the subsequent hanging of Picariello and Losandro. Ironically, when Picariello's safe was opened, it contained notes from various officials and policemen in the Crowsnest Pass, ordering liquor for weddings, reunions, and funerals.

## The Crime

The Alberta Provincial Police (APP) wanted to stop Emilio Picariello's illegal bootlegging activities.

One evening in September of 1922, they served Picariello with a search warrant just as a convoy was arriving in Blairmore with a load of liquor from British Columbia. Pic sounded his horn as a warning, and his son Steve sped away with the load. APP Officer Lawson set up a roadblock down the road. When he saw the car coming, he fired on it, striking Steve Picariello in the hand. Picariello got away, but when Emperor Pic heard that his son had been shot, he was furious.

Accompanied by Filumena Losandro, Emperor Pic drove to confront Lawson. An argument ensued, Lawson tried to overpower Pic, shots rang out and Lawson fell dead.

Picariello and Losandro fled but were quickly captured. Picariello may have been a successful businessman and an alderman, but overnight he became an undesirable Italian bootlegger who had shot a policeman. No one knows who fired the shots, but Lawson's death meant that someone had to pay, and Picariello and Losandro were duly tried, found guilty of murder, and hanged at Fort Saskatchewan.

Born: 1875 or 1879 – Died: May 2, 1923

## Additional Resources

- **Digital Museums Canada | Community Stories**  
<https://www.communitystories.ca/v2/fernie-community-communaute-fernie/story/italians-bootlegging-emilio-picariello/>

- **Tourism Fernie**  
<https://tourismfernie.com/history/emilio-picariello>

## Our Collections

### **Glenbow Museum**

<https://www.glenbow.org>

### **Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives**

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

### **Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection**

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>