

Italian immigrants cornerstone of parish



Bishop Scalabrini blesses the cornerstone on Sept. 15, 1901, at St. Mary of Mount Carmel Church.

Beginning with this issue of “More Good News” and continuing for the next several issues, we will highlight the history of our parish leading to its 125th anniversary.

We mark a significant milestone in 2021 — the 125th year of the birth of our parish.

Although the first Mass celebrated in our building was in 1896, we can trace our lineage as far back as 1865. In that year, Michael Kernan returned to his hometown of Utica from the Civil War with his new wife, Cecelia Rapetti Kernan, the daughter of an Italian broker living in New York City. She took it upon herself to help the new Italian families of the city of Utica become part of the St. John’s Church on John Street.

Over the succeeding years, the West Shore Railroad (1883), the Utica brickyards and later the textile mills attracted hundreds of Italian immigrants to become the workforce in the town’s booming economy.

By 1887, the Italian-American community had its own priest, Father Antonio Castelli, who was an as-



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sistant to Monsignor James M. Lynch of St. John’s. It was Father Castelli who inspired the Italians of St. John’s to build their own church. To that end, Monsignor Lynch donated an old school building on Catherine Street. Father Castelli turned it into a temporary house of worship and meeting place.

Having this great gift from Monsignor Lynch and having pride of ownership instilled in the Italian community a greater desire to build a real church. It was decided that the new building would be dedicated to the Madonna, a familiar presence in the lives of the community. She was an image to which they turned in times of need in their homeland, throughout the arduous journey to their new country and during their adjustment to their new land.

With the help of Bishop Ludden of the Diocese of Syracuse, Monsignor Lynch and important persons in the community such Cecelia Rapetti Kernan the church of Santa Maria di Monte Carmelo was incorporated into the Syracuse Diocese in July 1895.

Source: History of St. Mary of Mount Carmel (prepared by the History Committee for the 1996 centennial celebration)