

First pastor Castelli guides new church



REV. ANTONIO CASTELLI



The first Mass was celebrated on Dec. 20, 1896, in the church basement. Bishop Scalabrini blessed the cornerstone on Sept. 15, 1901.

1896-1903

This is the second in a series of articles highlighting the history of our parish leading up to its 125th anniversary. Previous articles and issues of "More Good News" are available at www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com.

With large and small monetary donations, and the sweat of those unable to give a financial contribution, a plot of land stretching from Catherine Street to Jay Street was purchased and the first soil was turned in April of 1896.

The modest coffers of the new parish ran out quickly and a loan from the bishop was required to continue work. On Dec. 20, 1896, Father Castelli was able to celebrate the first Mass in what then was the basement of the new building. In 1898, a rectory was built adjacent to the rising sanctuary so that the pastor would be close to his flock.

It was at this time that the Society of St. Mary of Mount Carmel was founded. Its principal function



A.J. VALENTINI

was to raise needed funds to eliminate the debt accrued during construction of the church. By 1901, the church and rectory were debt free.

With that settled, Father Castelli and the Mount Carmel Society could concentrate on building the church above the basement. On Sept. 15, 1901, Bishop Scalabrini blessed the cornerstone of the new church.

It was a difficult year. Inclement weather sometimes took its toll by preventing the celebration of Mass in the poorly appointed basement. By June 29, 1902, however, the modest house of worship was able to be used for its first Mass.

Father Castelli, feeling the rigors of building a parish from the ground up and the pressure of an ever growing flock requested, and was granted, an assistant — Father Joseph Formia. It must have been written in the book of fate because a year later Father Castelli died. His funeral was celebrated at Mount Carmel by Bishop Ludden, and he was laid to rest in Saint Agnes Cemetery on Arthur Street in Utica.

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