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Graham Millar

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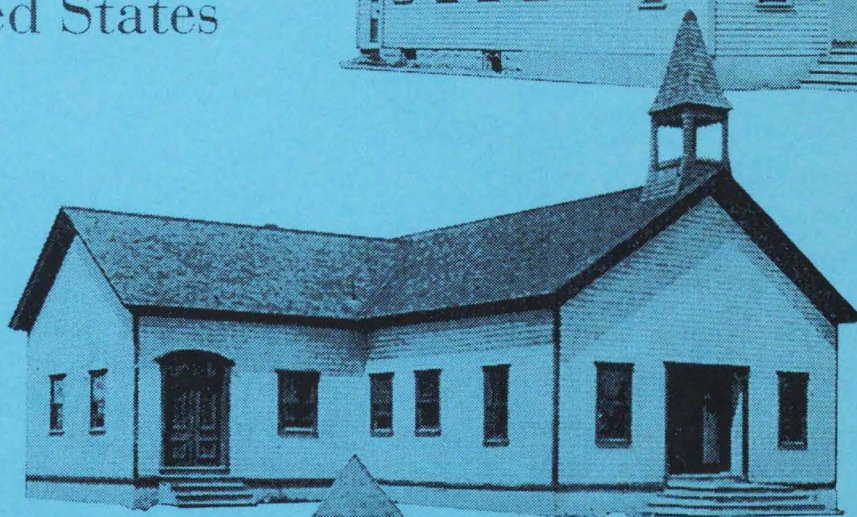
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Edison Street Baptist Church

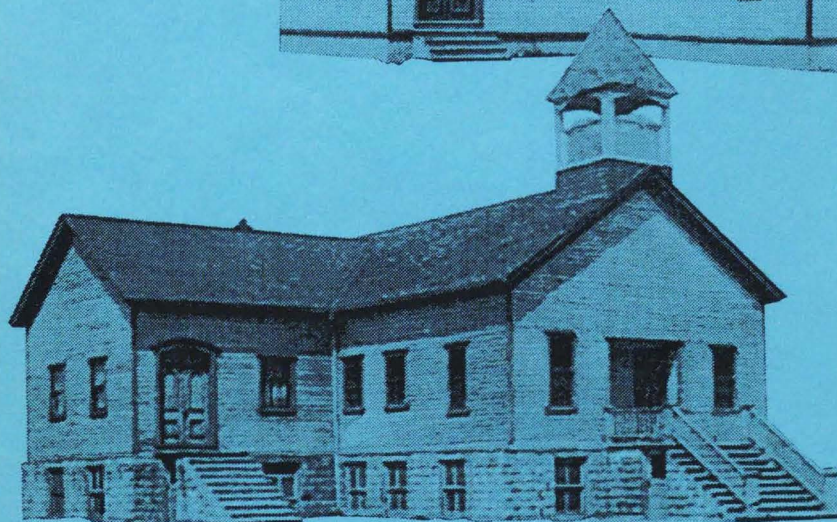
The First
Italian Baptist Church
In The United States



1896



1900



1912



1996

EDISON STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

**THE FIRST ITALIAN BAPTIST CHURCH
IN THE UNITED STATES**

A CENTENNIAL HISTORY

BY

GRAHAM MILLAR

**WITH THE EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE OF
ERNEST NOTAR**

**PHOTOGRAPHIC LAYOUT BY
FRED URSITTI**

**PUBLISHED AS A CENTENNIAL PROJECT BY
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DEDICATION

**To the people of the Edison Street Baptist Church,
past, present and future.**

**Jesus Christ the same yesterday,
today and forever.**

(Hebrews 13:8)

About the author:

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and is a member of the Episcopal Church of the Advent in Kenmore, New York*

*All quotations from the Scriptures are from the King James Version, the Bible
which has been in the most common use throughout the history of the church.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

In the Beginning	Page 1
How Amiable Are Thy Tabernacles	Page 10
Seek Ye First the Kingdom	Page 17
Go Ye Therefore	Page 33
Illustrations	Between Pages 44 and 45
Sing Unto the Lord a New Song	Page 45
Serve the Lord With Gladness	Page 56
Appendices	Following Page 58

ERRATA

Page 11, line 13: Read *Paolo*, not *Paulo*.

Page 22, line 20 and page 44, line 10:
Read *Missions*, not *Ministry*.

Page 29, line 28: Read *next*, not *nest*.

Page 31, line 15: Read *1936*, not *1938*.

Page 31, line 18: Read *some*, not *sone*.

Page 47, line 8: After *most* add *active*.

Page 52, line 6: Read *numbers*, not *numbered*.

Page 52, lines 28 to 30 should read: *It also took an active role in the merger of the American Baptist Churches of the Niagara Frontier with the American Baptist Churches of New York State. The new local entity became the Niagara Area Baptist Association.*

Page 54, line 6: *Southside Baptist Church* should read, *The Good Shepherd Baptist Church on Southside Parkway.*

Page 55, line 4 : Read *search*, not *each*.

Page 56, line 2: Read *heard*, not *hear* and *two*, not *one*.

Page 56, line 3: Read *the*, not *then*.

Page 58, line 11: Read *was*, not *waw*.

In both Sources and Acknowledgements and Select Bibliography the correct number of microfilm reels of the church records is *five* reels.

In Highlights, 1912: Read *raised*, not *rays*.

In list of Sunday School Superintendents: second name from end should be *Joyce DiPirro*.

Dates on photo of Rev. Davey should be *1955-1961*.

In the Beginning

In 1885, shepherds from the village of Pescasseroli, in Abruzzi, Italy made their annual trek to the lowland pastures where they spent every winter. That year's migration may have seemed like many that they and their forebears had undertaken for as long as any one of them could remember, but there would be a difference which would affect them, their descendants, and what was to them an unknown city in a far country. The difference was a traveling evangelist who preached the Gospel in a way they had never before heard, the faraway city was Buffalo, New York, and the shepherds and their families would found a new church in that new place. It would become the Edison Street Baptist Church. This is the story of that church and its people.

The ancient village of Pescasseroli is located about seventy miles east of Rome in that portion of the western Abruzzi known as Aquila; it is now part of the Abruzzi National Park. Its existence as a recognized community traces back at least as far as the eleventh century - the name is found in documents of that time. That we have reliable knowledge of its development until the early twentieth century is largely thanks to Pescasseroli's most famous son, the internationally renowned historian and philosopher (and as a political figure, rigorous opponent of Mussolini) Benedetto Croce, who included a section about his native village in his larger history of the Neapolitan region. Croce was the son of a wealthy local landowner. When his parents were killed in an earthquake, he moved to Rome to live with an uncle, then subsequently settled in Naples.

It was Croce who suggested the most plausible origin of the name of his native town. Pesca, he believed, was formed from the Latin *pesculum*, in Italian *pescio* or *pesco*, meaning a high, steep place, describing the slopes of the Apennines which encompass the region. Seroli he thought to be a reference to *Sarolus*, the Latin name for the narrow upper reaches of the Sangro River on whose banks the village is sited. Thus, in Croce's conclusion, *Pesculum ad Sarolum*, the high steep place along the upper Sangro, eventually became Pescasseroli. This contradicts an often repeated romantic story told by the villagers and their American descendants about a pair of unfortunate medieval lovers named Pesca and Serolo. That tale, Croce tells us, was

invented by a shepherd poet, Cesidio Gentile, whose verses were favorites among the villagers. Like other such products of imagination, it took on a life of its own, and was repeated as long-ago legend. An article in a Buffalo newspaper in 1908, reporting on the Pescasseroli community in that city, accepted it as definitive.

From its beginnings through the mid-nineteenth century, Pescasseroli was part of a feudal society - feudalism lasted in southern Italy until unification, which for Abruzzi happened in 1860. The town was subject to numerous changes of masters, resulting from political developments, inheritance, forfeiture, or outright sale. How the rural folk were treated depended on the kindness, or lack thereof, of whoever was in charge. Complications arose when political rulers and the Roman Catholic church had disagreements about religious, political or economic matters. Additionally, nearby settlements could be bitter rivals, as was Gioia dei Marsi, or friendly, as was Opi, which for many years around the sixteenth century formed a single community with Pescasseroli. The Opi - Pescasseroli connection would have an interesting manifestation some three centuries later.

The region was often touched by violence. Wars took their toll in people and property, as attested to by the castle ruins above Pescasseroli. These lasted long beyond the middle ages. There were military engagements during the Napoleonic era, the fighting involved in the establishment of a unified Italy and, in the twentieth century, there were two world wars. The first, though fought farther north, took its toll in young men from the village; the second was fought nearby and wrought economic change. It also cost the lives of no less than thirty-three of the men of the area, some of them dying as far away as Russia. When war was not the risk, brigandage often was. Roving bands of armed men, whose existence Croce blamed on the extreme poverty of peasant families, and in later years the failure of rural Italy to share in the promised prosperity of a united nation state, roamed the countryside killing, pillaging and ravishing. This scourge did not end until the latter years of the last century.

The Apennines are, as the name Pescasseroli indicates high and steep places. They are also prone to disastrous earthquakes, such as the one which took Benedetto Croce's parents. The soil is stony, and fertile places in the upper valleys are limited. Winters are long, cold and snowy. Until the advent of the national park, after which tourism replaced the traditional ways of earning a livelihood, there were two essential means of survival, farming and sheep herding. On the fertile land, wheat

and potatoes were rotated as alternate year crops. This required backbreaking work by both the women and the men, but it was not alone sufficient for survival. What was also necessary was the raising of sheep, and that meant transhumance - *transumanza* in Italian - tending the sheep in the summer pastures of nearby highlands from May to September, and moving to winter pastures in the lower valleys of Puglia where they remained from September to May.

Thus every September, until World War II put an end to the raising of sheep as an industry in southern Italy, the men, and the boys over seven years old, would make a two week journey from the higher to the lower pastures. It was not an easy journey, nor was life in the pastures any easier. Accommodations for the sheep were only slightly less primitive than those for the shepherds. The sheep were herded into open pens bounded by stones. The shepherds lived in rude huts constructed of poles, covered by branches. For hundreds of years that was the pattern of life, and there was little expectation that it would change.

Although Italy has historically been overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, it also has a long Protestant tradition, which predates the Reformation by well over three hundred years. Its basis is in the Waldensians, or Waldenses - in Italian *Valdesi*. Waldensianism had its beginnings with Peter Waldo, (also rendered as Valdo or Valdes), a prosperous merchant of the city of Lyons, France, who around 1170 turned from a life of commerce to one of religion, and began preaching doctrines which stressed simplicity, rigorous morality and the virtues of poverty; in these he has been compared to St. Francis.

Peter Waldo and his followers rejected much of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice, including the authority of popes and bishops, the belief in purgatory, the practice of granting indulgences, the use of holy water, the observance of saints' days and of sacraments other than baptism and communion, and the traditional mass, which one Waldensian writer called an "abomination in the sight of God." All of these the Waldensians saw as human inventions, not ordained by the Bible. Like the later Reformers and their successors, the Waldensians based their doctrine firmly on the Old and New Testaments; whatever failed the test of biblical authority was to be rejected. These new ideas were spread by itinerant preachers who, walking barefoot, traveled in pairs, sometimes in the guise of peddlers to avoid arrest or to gain entrance to homes where they would then proselytize.

Teachings so much at variance with those of the church were bound to be opposed by the religious authorities. In 1183 the Council of Verona declared the Waldensian teachings to be heretical. Nevertheless, and in spite of intermittent and sometimes rigorous persecution, the Waldensians continued to preach and to practice. Their ideas spread far beyond the region around Lyons. By the middle of the sixteenth century there were active Waldensian communities in Italy as well as in France.

As the Reformation made larger and larger inroads into Roman Catholic Europe, Waldensianism became identified with Protestantism; indeed, John Calvin and Guillaume Farel, the major figures in reform in Geneva, found in it much that they could admire and much that was similar to their own theology (including an at least implied predestinarianism). To the Vatican, of course, all of this was heresy, and heresy was viewed as a threat to social and political order, as well as to the authority of the papacy. Thus the church and governments struck out at dissenters. In 1545 the French king, Francis I, oversaw the massacres of twenty-two Waldensian villages. Fifteen years later, the Italian Waldensian communities in Apulia and Calabria were violently erased.

Although greatly diminished in numbers, the Waldensians did not vanish. Some took themselves away from Europe. One group from northern Italy crossed the Atlantic and in 1667 settled in the former Dutch town of New Amsterdam, now New York. Later, more would find their way to the Americas. Many merged into larger Protestant denominations, especially the Methodists. One group, emigrating in the late nineteenth century, has retained its unique identity in Valdese, North Carolina; still others, in the same century, would settle in South America. And significantly, a number survived in the Alpine regions in the north of Italy. Their history had not ended; neither had their influence.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a measure of religious toleration, even if not of complete religious freedom, had developed in Italy. In 1848, the ruler of Sardinia, Charles Albert, issued an Edict of Emancipation granting civil rights to his non-Roman Catholic subjects. As unification progressed, relations between the new Italian kingdom and the Vatican became extremely strained, especially since the popes had lost their temporal political powers when the former Papal States were incorporated into the new nation. It was not until the Mussolini government signed its concordat with the papacy in 1929 that cordial relations were resumed.

A result of the new and more open religious climate was that although Roman

Catholicism remained the "established" religion in Italy, other faiths were permitted to operate openly. One result of this was that Baptist and Methodist missionaries arrived from Britain and from the United States, hoping to spread evangelical Christianity throughout the land. (English Baptists had begun working in Italy in 1864, Southern Baptist from the United States joined the efforts in 1870.) Another was that the Waldensians were once again able to preach their message beyond their mountain enclave. New Protestant congregations were formed, and new converts were made. One of those converts was a scholarly Roman Catholic priest named Pietro Tagliatela. He would become one of the outstanding figures among the Italian Protestants.

When in 1885 the shepherds from Pescasseroli were in their winter pastures in Puglia, Pietro Tagliatela was preaching nearby, in the city of Foggia. Tradition among their descendants relates that the shepherds were told by Giuseppe del Principe a fellow townsman who had become a traveling colporteur - an itinerant seller of religious tracts - about the preacher and his message. Curious, and apparently also motivated by their unhappiness with their own parish priest, some of them made the journey to hear what he had to say. What they heard convinced and converted them. They invited Tagliatela to preach in their village. He did so, according to Croce, sometime in 1886.

The new message was hardly welcome to the local priest, who had been known to burn publicly in the village square any Protestant Bibles he seized from adventurous residents who had acquired them. The village was, after all, the home to a much revered black Madonna, pilgrimages to which during the proper church festivals could earn one indulgences. (A copy of the Madonna is in St. Lawrence Roman Catholic Church on East Delavan Avenue in Buffalo.) This was clearly no place for heretical notions to be tolerated. But they did spread in spite of the priestly opposition, especially, we are told after Tagliatela convinced one of the converts to abandon the mistress with whom he was living and return to his wife. This, we are told, earned him plaudits from many of the women of the town, who then joined the ranks of the converted.

A list of those men he considered to be faithful converts in Pescasseroli and in nearby Opi was made by Tagliatela, dated October 9, 1886. It includes Giuseppe del Principe, Gaetano Macro, Paulo and Cesidio Gentile, Filippo and Cesidio D'Arcangelo, Donato and Antonio Notarantonio, Francesco and Cesidio Saltarelli, Francesco di Pirro and Gerardo di Paoli. Once again the neighboring villages were linked, this time in a new religious experience.

The priest was not the only one to oppose the new evangelical message. Villagers split into two camps - Roman Catholics on one side and Protestants on the other. To quote Croce, "there were "accusations, insults, mutual mocking and ridicule, accusing the Catholics of ignorance and superstition and the Evangelists of unbelievers, which with easy transition became 'atheists' and 'socialists'." The latter were, not surprisingly, encouraged by the priest. It became very difficult for Protestants comfortably to participate in village life; it was even forbidden that their dead be buried in the local cemetery - that was reserved for loyal Catholics. Burials were somehow taken care of in the middle of the night, whether in the cemetery, where a new grave would have been noticeable, or elsewhere is not recorded. (There is a story that on occasion the Protestants resorted to worshipping in a nearby cave to escape persecution. This is, however, not firmly established as fact, and its origins are obscure.) Given their economic conditions, emigration was almost certainly in the minds of many of the people of Pescasseroli and nearby Opi, both Catholic and Protestant. For the latter it would also be a means of practicing their beliefs unhindered, as well as providing an opportunity to live above the bare subsistence at which they were existing. The new country they chose was the United States; the city was Buffalo.

Large scale Italian emigration to the United States was mainly a product of the "new immigration" of southern and eastern Europeans which began in the 1880s. Until then, Italians who left their native country were more likely to settle in South America than in North America. To be sure, there were a few who did find their way to the United States prior to the latter years of the nineteenth century. These include the some who settled in parts of what was once New Spain, and a scattering in the

British colonies Among them were the two hundred Waldensians who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1667 - meaning, it should be noted, that the first recorded organized group of Italians to enter what became the United States were Protestants. They rarely appear in histories of the period, having apparently merged at some time into the rest of New York's colonial population. In Virginia, where Italians are recorded as being present from very early times, Thomas Jefferson had an Italian neighbor, with whom he became close friends, and himself undertook to learn Italian. His admiration for Italian culture, especially that of the classical period, is demonstrated in the Italian name he gave his beloved home near Charlottesville - Monticello - "little mountain." Nevertheless, the early, and admittedly incomplete, immigration records show few Italians - only thirty are reported as entering the United States in 1820, and estimates for the years 1860 to 1880 indicate an Italian-American population of approximately 14,000.

Emigration from Italy was opened up at least partially by the changes which took place after unification was completed in 1870. Previously, governments had restricted their subjects' opportunities for leaving; now those restrictions were eased. At the same time, the population of Italy increased to the point where survival on the poor soils of much of the country became extremely difficult. This was especially so in the southern portions of the country, where poverty was endemic. Thus the conditions were right - many felt the need to leave at about the time their government allowed them to do so. Some arrived as "birds of passage," who earned money in the United States, then returned permanently to Italy. Estimates suggest that this was the case for about one-third of them. Many more, however, stayed, and by 1900 there were some 480,000 Italians in the United States. By 1910, there were 1,300,000, and ten per cent of the foreign born population of the nation were people of Italian birth.

As newcomers, the Italians were subject to the humiliating conditions often imposed on a new and "different" population. A high percentage were *contadini*, poor tenant farmers. Most were illiterate, and few had any skills beyond agriculture or herding. They spoke Italian, not English. Jobs would, for most of the men of the first generation, be limited to heavy, unskilled labor, typically in the construction industry, in mines or on the railroads. These jobs were among the hardest, riskiest, lowest paying and least secure available, but often they were all that were to be had. Many were victimized by the exploitive *padrone* system of contract labor. The women very rarely sought employment outside of the home. In their highly traditional male dominated society, their job was to care for their families. The exception to this was that at harvest season, women and children frequently moved

to farm areas near to the cities in which they lived and were hired on as pickers of fruits and vegetables.

As well as finding themselves at the bottom of the economic scale, Italians found themselves socially outcasts. Studies indicate that in the early years of the twentieth century, they were the most residentially segregated of all European immigrants. In many cities, including Buffalo, Italians were more segregated than were blacks. Residential conditions were often abominable. One slum dwelling in Buffalo, a structure owned by one of the city's wealthiest and most prominent families, was so bad that it became known as "the pigsty." Furthermore, Italians were not considered trustworthy by some other Americans. As an example, when in 1888 one Italian resident of Buffalo was killed by another, the authorities ordered the arrest of almost all of the city's Italian residents. Elsewhere, between 1874 and 1915 thirty-nine Italians were killed, mostly lynched, by mobs in the United States, and the most prominent victims of the Red Scare of the 1920s were two Italian immigrants named Sacco and Vanzetti. It is no wonder that numerous Italian families chose to "Americanize" their names.

Not only did the long-settled Anglo-Saxon Protestants discriminate against Italian immigrants, so did some of their coreligionists. Unlike the Irish, Germans and Poles, the Italians did not on their initial arrival bring with them their own clergy. By the time Italians began arriving in considerable numbers, the Roman Catholic church in the United States had been dominated by Irish clergy and an Irish episcopate. Irish Catholicism differed considerably from that of Italy both in outlook and practice, one author has suggested it represented virtually a new religion to Italian immigrants. Where the church was not Irish, it was frequently German. In many places, though apparently not to any great extent in Buffalo, the Italians were given distinctly second class status. Sometimes, the Italians were relegated to worship in the basement, while the rest of the congregation worshiped in the main sanctuary upstairs. As a result, some of the Italian immigrants would be open to conversion. Several Protestant denominations began work among Italian immigrants, seeking converts. The Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians were most active; less so were the Dutch Reformed and the Episcopalians. The arrival of Protestant countrymen would make that conversion somewhat easier.

Buffalo's Italian connection is much older than the city itself. When in 1679 the

explorer La Salle sent his ship *Griffon* from the Niagara River into Lake Erie, his chief lieutenant was a man usually referred to in local histories by the French-sounding name of Henri de Tonty. Actually, he was born Enrico Tonti, and is the first Italian documented to have visited Western New York. Many years later, as the region was opened to American settlement after the Revolutionary War and the subsequent adjustments made by the Jay Treaty of 1796, most of the land came under the ownership of a group of Dutch investors known as the Holland Land Company. That company's head agent in the United States was the Italian-born Paul (or Paolo) Busti. Though Busti was headquartered in Philadelphia, and never personally visited the area, it was he who was responsible for sending Joseph Ellicott to survey the company's lands and to lay out the pioneer village which would one day grow into the city of Buffalo. Busti Avenue, appropriately near the heart of Buffalo's former West Side Italian neighborhood, commemorates his name.

A small Italian community developed in the city during the early years of the nineteenth century. The first to arrive in significant numbers were political exiles from the European revolutions of 1848. They, and the bulk of the Italians who settled in the city prior to 1870 came from northern Italy. With the easing of restrictions on immigration and the worsening economic conditions in southern Italy which followed unification, people from the southern provinces began a large scale movement to the United States, including to Buffalo. Some 14,000 Italians moved into the city between 1880 and 1890. By 1892, they had become sufficiently prominent to erect their own arch over Genesee Street as their part in the commemoration of the quadricentennial of Columbus' voyages.

Separated by dialect and by traditional provincialism, Buffalo's Italians tended to settle in distinct neighborhoods. "The Hooks," the Canal Street - later Dante Place - section along the banks of the Buffalo River, was home mainly to Sicilians. Neapolitans moved along Swan and Seneca Streets just east of Main Street, Campobassese into the Lovejoy section and Calabrians into South Buffalo. Emigrants from Abruzzi preferred to live near the city line along or near East Delavan Avenue. That relatively new section of the city was at once rural and urban: it was almost all open land, yet it was near enough to the recently completed Belt Line of the New York Central Railroad to give reasonable access to the rest of the city. For the Protestants from Pescasseroli and Opi, this would come to be their new home and the site of their church.

How Amiable Are Thy Tabernacles

On September 14, 1896, the following article appeared in the Monday evening edition of *The Buffalo Commercial*:

A very interesting service was held yesterday afternoon, when the First Italian Baptist church of Buffalo was formally dedicated. This is not only the first church of the kind in Buffalo, but the first in this country. Addresses were made by Al [sic] Bellondi, Rev. A. S. Coats, Rev. O. P. Gifford, and Rev. George R. Williams.

Rev. T. J. Morgan had charge of the services. The Baptist Young People's Union built the church. Every seat was taken before the services opened. The church building is a frame structure on Edison Street, extremely plain and simple.

Whether Cesidio Saltarelli left Italy for America in 1887 primarily for religious reasons or primarily for economic reasons, cannot at this remove be fully known; most likely, it was a combination of both. The fact that numbers of people from the same towns in Italy who had retained their Roman Catholicism, and would become loyal members of Buffalo's St. Lawrence parish, also emigrated at the same time, argues that economic conditions clearly played a heavy part in the decision to leave the homeland. We do know that in the region in and around Pescasseroli, 198 passports for emigration to the United States were issued between 1886 and 1893, the bulk of them in the three years 1889 to 1891. More certain is that when he disembarked from the ship *Chandernagor* on December 12, he cannot then have known that he would be one of the founders of a new congregation in his adopted land, nor could he have guessed that the young son who later joined him in America would eventually serve as its pastor for longer than any other. Within the year, Signor Saltarelli was to be joined by some of his neighbors from Pescasseroli and Opi. The passenger list of the *Cachemire*, which arrived from Naples on June 2, 1888, included Filippo D'Arcangelo, Paolo Gentile, Gerardo Ursitti, Gaetano Macro and Giuseppe del Principe. Each of them is listed as traveling alone, in the typical Italian immigrant pattern, whereby the male head of the family arrived first, then sent

for the others after he had established himself. They were soon after joined by others, including Donato and Antonio Notarantonio (whose family name later would be shortened to Notar). All of them had in common more than their origins in that part of Aquila in Abruzzi; they were also Protestants, and they would form the nucleus of that new congregation.

Like others from Abruzzi, the newcomers, who at first lived in other parts of the city - some in "The Hooks" because housing there was cheap - were eventually attracted to the East Delavan area, and by the end of the century had become part of a unique community centered on Hickman Avenue and Edison Street, both of which ran north from Delavan Avenue about two blocks inside the city line. Although the neighborhood also housed people of German and some of Irish background, it was the Italians who seemed to stand out, as an article in *The Illustrated Buffalo Express* in 1908 explained. In that article, Cesidio Saltarelli, Filippo D'Arcangelo and Paulo Gentile are described as the *vecchi*, or elders of the community, although others of the men played important roles. It was, according to the son of one of the early immigrants, Gerardo Ursitti who seems to have acted as a kind of informal, benevolent *padrone*, encouraging others from their part of Italy to join those already in Buffalo, and apparently helping to find employment for them.

To the Buffalonians, or at least to the author of the *Express* article, a peculiarity of the East Delavan Italian community was that many of the residents, "as in the other Italian colonies in Buffalo," kept goats, which grazed on the abundant open fields. A peculiarity to the Italians was the name of Hickman Avenue. There is no sound of "h" and no letter "k" in the Italian language (the sound "k" is indicated by the letters "chi"), so pronouncing the street name was a problem - in the dialect from their part of Abruzzi the immigrants would have sounded it something like "eekman" or "eegman" - and naming it in a letter sent back to friends or family in the old country was virtually impossible. By 1904 the city's officials had come to recognize the difficulty, and in that year the Board of Aldermen and the Common Council, on which there were no Italian-American members, voted unanimously to change the name to Roma Avenue. As an incidental, a resident of that neighborhood, Zachariah Gentile, son of Paolo Gentile, in 1931 became one of the pioneer Italian-American members on the council.

In the meantime, missionary work by various Protestant denominations, including the Baptists, was going on in Buffalo, as it was elsewhere in the United States. In Buffalo, the Baptists, who had been pioneers in establishing a church for African-

Americans on Michigan Avenue, set out to evangelize among the European immigrants. The 1898 Buffalo city directory lists four German Baptist churches and two missions, along with one Polish church. Baptists were also active among the Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, the Irish (whose strong attachment to Roman Catholicism proved difficult to change), and a number of years later, among the Jews of the city. The first Italian mission appears to have been the one opened in a rented hall on Ohio Street near Illinois, in an area then and now known for its ethnic mixture. It was later moved to Pearl Street, nearer to the major Italian settlement in the city. Another, which originally was formed on Trenton Street on the West Side to work among the Irish, changed its emphasis when that section of Buffalo became largely Italian.

It was to the Ohio Street mission that, in 1894, the Buffalo Baptist Association invited, through the Home Mission Society, a Colgate University student named Ariel Bellondi, the person whom the *Commercial* misnamed as "Al." Ariel Berechia Bellondi, was born in Stradella, Italy in 1872. His father, Vincenzo Bellondi, known as "the sacred poet" for his over 1,000 hymns, was a prominent Protestant minister in Florence who had been converted from Catholicism and suffered considerable persecution, including public excommunication by Pope Leo III. In 1893, young Ariel, of whom he have a photograph taken when he was doing missionary work among workers in the *padrone* system in Italy, was invited by the superintendent of the Methodist missions in Italy to come to the United States to attend Colgate to study theology. As things happened, he made his mark as a Baptist.

Ariel Bellondi turned out to be the ideal person to work with the recently emigrated people from Abruzzi, but his first meetings in the hall on Ohio Street attracted almost (or, one account infers, absolutely) no one. It was a discouraging start. Then a rumor began circulating among Buffalo's Italian community that this young man was a son of Giuseppe Garibaldi. Garibaldi, who was one of the leading figures, and perhaps the most visible hero, in the unification of Italy, had been in the United States during the Civil War; and his son was said to have come to the area to look after the Italians here. Though the rumor was just that - a rumor, and the young seminarian was no relation to the great Italian patriot, it did the job of attracting an audience. Among that audience were some of the Abruzzi Protestants. An account written years later by a son of one of them describes what happened:

Some of those men who had been converted in Italy became interested and went to hear this young man and immediately

recognized that he was preaching the gospel. An acquaintance was formed which developed into a warm friendship, and arrangements were made to open a mission in a home on Fillmore Avenue near East Ferry Street, where a group of these men lived. About a year later many of those families were moving out to Hickman Avenue ... [and] the mission was transferred to the home of Filippo D'Arcangelo, 31 Hickman Street.

The next year, 1895, was an auspicious one for the Protestant Italian community in Buffalo. On Wednesday, May 8, thirty-four Italians - twenty-eight men and six women - publicly professed their faith and were baptized in the Prospect Street Baptist Church, located at the corner of Prospect and Georgia Streets. It was, reported *The Buffalo Baptist Record*, "the most representative gathering of Baptists we have ever held in Buffalo." Some 1,200 people were in attendance, and the platform displayed both the American and Italian flags. The sermon, "On the Seed of the Kingdom," based on John xii: 24-25, was preached by the Rev. Dr. E. E. Chivers of the Baptist Home Mission Society, who had come from New York City for the event. Ariel Bellondi spoke in Italian to those of his countrymen - forty-three of them - who were present. Additionally, and most importantly, to quote *The Record*. "Rev. W. H. Main made an appeal for money to build an Italian house of worship, and about \$900 was secured, in addition to the offer of Mr. G. S. Graves to provide the lot." Gilbert S. Graves was a member of the Emmanuel Baptist Church; the lot he donated was located on Edison Street, just north of East Delavan.

It would be helpful if we had the names of the thirty-four who were baptized on that spring evening, but we do not. The Prospect Street church building still stands, but its present congregation is not affiliated with the local Baptist association. Whatever records the old congregation had are either lost or unavailable. Inquiries about them directed to local Baptist sources and a search in the American Baptist Historical Society's archives in Rochester were unsuccessful, nor does anything related to the event, other than the newspaper article, appear in the collections of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. As for possible baptismal records which may have been housed at the Italian congregation which was formed after the baptisms took place, those which survived two fires (which will be described later in this narrative) date from no earlier than 1909, and do not indicate the place of baptism, nor in many cases the year.. An interesting question is raised by the numbers reported. Forty-three Italians are said to have been present, yet thirty-four were baptized. Who were the other nine? Were they simply spectators? Were they

Protestant Italians who were already affiliated with other Protestant churches and came to lend their support to the event? Were they the already converted immigrants from Pescasseroli and Opi, who may already have undergone baptism either there or in this country? Nothing which could be found in any of the sources consulted indicates an answer.

A disturbing note, which says something unfortunate about the relationships among the branches of Christianity, at least as manifested in Buffalo during the latter years of the nineteenth century, is the reprint of a comment which appeared in the Roman Catholic *Union and Times* the day after the baptisms took place:

What has become of the crowd of Italians whose perversion by immersion to the Baptist sect was so loudly heralded a few days ago? Think of mixing oil and water! Italians may become bad Catholics, and even infidels, but Protestants never.

Somewhat more pleasant, even if hardly more ecumenical, and perhaps bit of a period piece to the eyes of a century later, was the acrostic poem honoring Ariel Bellondi attributed to A. S. R., and dated Buffalo, June 4, 1895. The first letters of the lines spell out his name, including his middle initial. It expressed clearly the admiration in which Bellondi was held:

A stranger from fair Florence came,
Regardless of his ease,
In Winter's cold and Summer's heat,
Ever his aim, his Lord to please.
Leading his countrymen to Christ,
Beseeching them to leave
Belief in image, priest, and shrine,
Eternal life, by faith receive.
Lift up your heads, ye saints!
Look on the whitening field;
Of men and women, not a few,
Now to the Lord, in full submission yield.
Depend *still* on His word, dear toiler for the Lord
I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

Until a church could be built, the nascent congregation, numbering some fifteen

families, conducted its services in the attic of a the D'Arcangelo home on what was then Hickman Avenue. Chairs, doubtless lent by some of the families, were set up in the space, and tables were fashioned of boards laid on sawhorses. In Bart D'Arcangelo's words: "They had a portable organ. Bellondi played it. They had Sunday School pictures on an easel...they passed out leaflets. People sat on chairs." Since Mr. Bellondi was stationed and lived downtown, he was obliged to commute each Sunday to conduct worship. This he did by bicycle from his home on Prospect Street, or by taking the Belt Line to the closest station, then walking the remainder of the distance, a journey by foot of at least two and a half miles. Given the vagaries of the local weather, this was no small chore. That he did it faithfully each Sabbath testifies to his commitment to his Lord, and to the people he was being called to serve.

With money raised from the promised pledges from the May, 1895 baptismal service and with the essential and enthusiastic assistance of the Baptist Young Peoples Association of Buffalo, who had made the new church their special project, along with a grant of \$400 from the Baptist Home Mission Society, a chapel was erected in the summer of 1896 on the west side of Edison Street on the lot donated by Gilbert Graves. The total cost was \$1800. Facing east, it was constructed of white painted wooden clapboards on a concrete block foundation. There was no basement, nor was there a bell in the small, open steeple. A flight of five steps led up from the level of the street to a single door which had a small window. The door was flanked by a pair of signboards and by two larger windows. The six windows on each of the side walls were also of clear glass, the ones closer to the front of the building being slightly larger than were the other five. A shed, whose purpose is not known, extended from the back of the building. Apart from the vestibule, the interior consisted of a single large room, lit by oil lamps mounted along the walls and by an oil chandelier which could be lowered from the ceiling. Heat was provided by a single pot bellied stove.

As the *Commercial* commented, the structure was "extremely plain and simple." So, of course, had been and would be countless small American Protestant churches built from the early colonial period through the present time. Simplicity in worship and in the worship environment is a hallmark of much of the Protestant tradition here and elsewhere, as witness the classically simple churches for which New England is famous. Certainly, Peter Waldo would hardly have objected.

On Sunday, September 13, 1896, the First Italian Baptist Church, as the chapel

was now named, was formally dedicated. According to the program, which has survived, the service was lengthy, and in English. If the Italian language was used, it does not appear there. A prelude was followed by the singing of the Doxology, and by a prayer. Then the congregation sang ‘Come Thou Almighty King .’ The responsive reading was from Psalm 84: “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!” Addresses were heard from the president of the Baptist Young People’s Association, and by the Rev. O. P. Gifford, representing the pastors of Buffalo. As an interlude, a vocal solo, “Jerusalem,” was sung. The service continued with an address by the Rev. A. S. Coats, the pastor of the First Baptist Church, entitled “The Origin of the Work,” and an address by Ariel Bellondi, “Our Work in Buffalo.” Those were followed by a scripture reading - the text is not listed in the program - and by the hymn ‘Our Country’s Voice is Pleading.’ Two more addresses were heard, then another solo, then a sermon, “Christ and His Church,” delivered by the Rev. T. J. Morgan. There was a final prayer, the singing of “America,” and a benediction.

It was not until after the dedication of the building that the new congregation was officially organized, and Ariel Bellondi was called to be its first pastor. Church records list Leonard Gentile as the clerk and A.[Antonio] Sabatino as the treasurer. An exact date for the formal organization is hard to pin down, but *The Home Mission Monthly* states that it was in November. That “in reverse” series of events may be a reason for the confusion. Regardless, according to the *Monthly*, by 1899 the church had a membership of some “sixty souls,” and a promising future. It was, as its name stated, the First Italian Baptist Church, but that was not only in Buffalo. It was, and is, the very first Italian Baptist church in the United States.

At this point it seems appropriate to look back to Pescasseroli and see what became of the little Protestant community there. Benedetto Croce tells us in his history. Most of its members emigrated to the United States. Almost all who remained were “swept away,” by which one hopes only means reconverted, by a mission of the Passionist Fathers in 1912, an event commemorated by an inscription on the parish church. The last Protestant resident of the village died a few years afterward. Thus the legacy of Pietro Tagliatela lives on far from the fields in which shepherds heard his Gospel story so long ago.

Seek Ye First the Kingdom

For the first three years of the new church's existence, Ariel Bellondi remained its pastor. The congregation grew, at least partly as the result of a number of Protestant Italians who had joined or attended other churches now becoming members of the congregation on Edison Street. How many, and whence they came, we do not know, for no membership records from the time have survived. (The earliest membership list that could be found in the church records is one from 1913, and that is incomplete.) We do know that the Sunday School was formed, and that it too grew, but again the exact membership in those earliest years is unknown. We also do not know the amount of the budget or how much Pastor Bellondi was paid. It was almost certainly not a large salary, for the church needed to be supported by funds from outside sources, such as the Home Mission Society for most of its early history.

What is known is that there was no money paid to keep the building clean and in good order for worship. That function was performed by the women of the church. Bart D'Arcangelo recalled, "I was 3 or 4 years old and they'd take me along with them...I'd dust the chairs....we cleaned many years, well up to the 50s, they finally hired a janitor. People from other churches would marvel how clean it was...."

Having accomplished much during his five years in Buffalo, Ariel Bellondi left the city and the church in 1899, for a visit to Italy. On his return, he continued to work with his fellow Italian Baptists in other parts of the United States. He would continue to be revered as the congregation's founding pastor, and in later years occasionally returned to it as a guest. When he died early in 1950, a special memorial service was held for him. As his successor in 1899, there arrived the Rev. Angelo Peruzzi.

Angelo Peruzzi is almost invariably described as "patriarchal." The photograph of him which hangs in the church parlor shows a fully bearded man who very much resembles the traditional depiction of an Old Testament prophet. He was born in Treviso, Italy, in 1846, and as a young man was enrolled in the forces of Garibaldi. (It is interesting to speculate what the members of the Buffalo Italian community who had expected a son of Garibaldi when Ariel Bellondi arrived may have thought when one of the great man's legion actually settled in the city.) Converted to Protestantism,

Peruzzi spent many years in his native country traveling as a colporteur and evangelist. In 1890, he emigrated to the United States, and served in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, in Haverhill and Boston, Massachusetts, in Albany, New York and in Providence, Rhode Island in addition to Buffalo, which was his second pastorate. The author of numerous religious tracts and biblical studies, he lived until 1927, when he passed away in Wilkes-Barre. A copy of part of *Il Primo Capitolo Della Genesi*, "The First Chapter of Genesis," itself part of his *Studio Biblico*, published the year before his death, is treasured by the church today. Descendants of his family are still members of the church in Buffalo; a son who settled in Pennsylvania was one of the founders of the Planters Peanut Company.

It was during Mr. Peruzzi's pastorate that the church building was first enlarged. A wing containing a reading room for the young people was constructed the south side of the structure. A Young People's Society was begun, and chose as its first president Peter Saltarelli, the future pastor, who as a boy had followed his father, Cesidio Saltarelli, from Italy. It was also during this time that the church had its first woman officer, for in 1900 Miss Mary D'Arcangelo was elected clerk, and served for the ensuing year. Also during the Peruzzi ministry, the Buffalo Baptist Association accepted the church into full fellowship.

When Angelo Peruzzi accepted a call to another city, he was succeeded, after a brief interim with a supply pastor, by the Rev. Luigi Scelfo, a native of Sicily, who was to serve two separate pastorates at the church on Edison Street, from 1903 through 1907 and 1909 through 1912. The intervening years were spent in a church in Brooklyn. For some or all of his time in Buffalo, he also served the mission on Trenton Street, where his Sicilian roots would have given him much in common with that heavily Sicilian community. (The Trenton Street mission was eventually incorporated as the Second Italian Baptist Church, and maintained close ties with its sister congregation on the other side of the city. It was closed and the property was sold in 1943.)

Once again, we rely on the memory of Bart D'Arcangelo, who stated that during Mr. Scelfo's pastorates, "...the spiritual life of the church was greatly increased. A harmonious atmosphere existed. A number of new members were admitted though baptism. During his second ministry, improvements were made on the building and [a] new electric lighting system installed..." This replaced a gas lighting system which at some time, possibly during the enlargement, had itself replaced the original oil lights. Unfortunately, due to the loss of so many records, we do not know how

many new members were baptized or otherwise added or lost during those years, nor do we know how many were immigrants or how many converts.

For the work of Giuseppe Buggelli, a native of Rome, whom the *Express* in 1908 described as “a highly educated man who has at his heart the uplifting of his countrymen in this land,” and who served in Buffalo between the two Scelfo pastorates, we have a first hand description, written by Pastor Bugelli some years later in Italian and subsequently translated into English. It deserves to be quoted from extensively, for it gives us an eye witness account not only of the life of the church on Edison Street, but in addition sheds light on other portions of the Italian Protestant community on Western New York by someone who was directly involved as their spiritual leader. [Pastor Buggelli’s letter has here been edited, and material not directly related to the area churches or events has been omitted. The material in parentheses appears so in the original; editorial interpolations are in brackets. Copies of the Italian original and the English translation are in the microfilm of the Edison Street Baptist Church archives.]

My residence in Buffalo covered the second period of 1907 [until] the beginning of 1909. My intense work in that important city seems that it was blessed by God.

When I arrived I found only the flourishing church of Edison Street (composed of Abruzzese) and the Trenton Ave. Mission (composed of Sicilians). The Trenton Ave. Mission was previously developed in a short time and on the 23rd of February, 1908 it was organized into the Second Italian Baptist Church.

In March I opened another mission in the Presbyterian Church on Humboldt Parkway...which in a short time was largely attended by Italians living in that community. In October, I started to evangelize the Italians in Dunkirk, N. Y. Every week an Italian service was held in the First Baptist Church of that city.

The Edison St. church flourished magnificently and contributed generously. I remember when a special collection was taken in November on a Sunday which amounted to \$332.

Interest aroused in the city and elsewhere. In a moment of crisis

there was instituted an Italian League of Workers and I was elected president. [The nature of the crisis is not mentioned.]

In the Buffalo Express in the illustrated number of Sunday, 24th May, 1908, there is a long and magnificent article on our work... illustrated by 10 fine photographs, from which stand prominently the photos of the founders, Saltarelli, D'Arcangelo and Gentile. The article is very interesting, for the news it gives of Pescasseroli, for the photographs and for the history of the principal families of the church.

For Columbus Day [1908?] I was invited to deliver the main address of the occasion in the name of the colony.

I remember with a great deal of affection all the brethren of the Buffalo church. Some of them have gone to glory. Their remembrance still teaches or influences us. To the remaining I send my sincere and cordial regards.

To this should be added some of what the *Express* article, written by Ada Walker Camehl, recounted about Mr. Buggelli, his ministry, his church and Buffalo's Abruzzi community, for together the letter and the newspaper article have much to say about all of those, and provide an interesting "snapshot" of life at the time among the people he served.

Mr. Buggelli, we are told "deplores the neglect of their native language and of its brilliant literature among his people, have thus changed their tongues as well as their skies," As the eighty-five children of the community attended the local public school - an annex of School 23 at Delavan and Roma - the Italian language began to be lost among the young, even at home. Thus the pastor began holding his own classes, where they could study "their own language in its purity."

Regarding the church itself, the *Express* reported a Sunday School attendance of "90 *bambini*," and a Young People's organization of thirty-five. The church, it said, paid its own bills, and in the previous year made a contribution of some \$400 to the Baptist Union. The Trenton Avenue and Humboldt Parkway missions are also mentioned. The latter attended to the spiritual needs of what was then another colony of Protestants from Pescasseroli, who lived on Sidney Street, which runs from

Humboldt to Fillmore Avenue, two blocks north of East Ferry Street. (The Presbyterian Church in which they worshiped later became a Christian Science church; the building is still there, housing an African-American congregation.)

About the economic condition of the Roma - Edison community, the *Express* had this to say:

And the colony is prosperous....there are no beggars here. No one is poor and several are very well-to-do. All live in their own comfortable houses. They now own 45 houses [together] valued at \$35,000, and the new houses which the rising generation are building resemble the thousands of our more pretentious city homes. One house which a young son of Signor Gentile is putting up for himself and his bride is very attractive, being entirely made up of concrete blocks, and in the latest style of construction.

Eighty-seven years later, the Gentile house, which was built on a lot about half a block from the church, is still structurally sound.

The Rev. Giovanni Battista Castellini, the church's next pastor, was born in Italy into a Roman Catholic family. An undated clipping from an unknown journal, pasted into the first volume of the scrapbook *Cyclopedia of Northern Baptist Ministers*, and housed in the American Baptist Historical Society in Rochester, New York, recounts that he was converted to Waldensianism, and was trained in his native country by the Waldenses for their ministry, then became a Methodist. After he came to the United States, he chose to join the Baptists. He was baptized in Covington, Kentucky, with "hopes to return to Italy as a Baptist missionary."

For almost nine years, from the fall of 1912 until February of 1923, Mr. Castellini served the Buffalo church. The most obvious thing that the church's neighbors saw during those years was that the building took on a new appearance, outside and inside. The entire structure was raised, and a basement, dug by hand by members of the congregation, was placed underneath to provide adequate space for the Sunday School. Photographs show that the entrance doors to the basement were at the side of the enlarged front steps. (Those steps are now inside as a result of the 1926 expansion, and the basement is entered through the church hall.) Additionally, and for the first time, a bell was placed in the belfry. In the interior, there was a new organ, a refurnished pulpit and a new communion set. The placing of the bell, it

must be noted, was not an unmixed blessing. Some years later a member of the congregation who lived across the street from the church and found his peace too frequently disturbed by its tolling, asked that the bell be rung only on special occasions, "not for every little gathering."

The life of the church also underwent important changes. Membership continued to increase. Not all of the new members shared the ethnic background of the founders, and surviving church records show more and more non-Italian names. For that reason, and because the children and youth had, in spite of Mr. Bugelli's efforts, grown up speaking English, services in English were initiated on Sunday evenings. The Sunday School had been conducted in English from the beginning, partly due to the need for volunteers from other city Baptist churches to serve as teachers, and who spoke no Italian, also because the immigrant parents were concerned that their children learn English so as to more easily assimilate into the majority society.

There were other innovations. A women's union, which would eventually expand its size and scope, began to function, and a building fund, intended to add a gymnasium, was started. For the latter purpose, the lot between the church and the adjacent Ursitti house was purchased. Much of the fund-raising was carried out by the "Faithful Few," a young men's Bible study class (of which more later on). In 1922, the church received a signal honor. The annual convention of the Italian Baptists (now the Association of Evangelicals for Italian Ministry) was held there. It was a fitting and deserved tribute to what had been accomplished during Mr. Castellini's tenure, and, in a larger sense, to what had been accomplished since the "plain and simple" chapel had been dedicated over a quarter of a century before.

When Mr. Castellini left early in 1923, the pulpit was filled for the next year on an interim basis by Mr. Samuel Hagen. He was the second non-Italian to serve as the congregation's pastor - the first was the Rev. Frank H. Young in 1903, between Mr. Peruzzi and Mr. Scelfo..

Within a year, the Rev. Frank (Francesco) Cali, was called to be the new full time pastor. According to information found in the Baptist archives in Rochester, Francesco Cali was born in Cesaro Messina, Italy, in October, 1885. The record does not indicate whether he was born into a Protestant family or if he was a convert, nor does it tell us at what age he emigrated to the United States. We do know that he received a Bachelor of Philosophy degree from Brown University, that he for some time attended the Newton Theological Seminary, that he was a member of the

Class of 1915 in the Italian Department of the Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and that he was ordained in 1919. From 1915 until he left for Buffalo nine years later, he served the First Italian Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island.

The call to Mr. Cali was approved by the church on the last day of 1923. He immediately accepted it verbally. In February, he wrote his formal acceptance, to become effective in the first day of June. His letter gives some insight into the financial arrangements of the church, as well as into the new pastor's thoughts about his ministry. In it he urges the congregation to pick up a larger share of his salary, which was to at least have matched his Providence remuneration of \$1,150, and was to have been split evenly between the church and the Buffalo Baptist Union. He saw the church's taking more responsibility to be a means of working toward the goal of self support. Leaving the specific amount up to the church, he cited the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." His family's moving expenses to Buffalo were to be shared equally between the Union and the church, which was also to pay half the costs of his travel to Buffalo to conduct evangelical services later that month.

Frank Cali's ministry in Buffalo was tragically short, yet in the less than two years in which he served the congregation, he left a physical impact that, especially to the rest of the community, defines the church, for its physical appearance and its ability to serve its neighborhood are to a large extent his legacy. Early on, he became convinced that the church should be a Christian center for the community, and that to accomplish that end, it would have to be considerably enlarged. Although a fund for an expanded gymnasium had been instituted during the previous pastorate, it was not nearly enough to accomplish the new goals. Mr. Cali, with the backing of the congregation, set out to raise the money that was needed.

In January of 1925, Dr. Divine, a fund raising specialist (his first name is not in the records), arrived and conducted a week of meetings. These resulted in pledges of \$34,541 from among the church's ninety-two members. The Buffalo Baptist Union, which functioned in effect as the fiscal arm of the Buffalo Baptist Association, added another \$5,000, and a like amount was provided by the Hudson Street Baptist Church. The latter contribution is memorialized in a plaque, dedicated in 1931, above the doors to the gym. With some of the money, the church purchased the lot immediately to the north of the building, land needed for the expansion of the sanctuary, which was part of the project. The rest went into construction and furnishings. Ground was broken on Independence Day, 1925; construction began in

October, and was completed the following June.

Comparing photographs of the church prior to and after the new construction was completed demonstrates how much the exterior of the edifice changed, and those changes were reflected in alterations to the interior. A new front wall, much closer to the street, was built for the sanctuary, which was extensively remodeled, and in which a new, tiled baptismal pool was installed. The outside stairs were replaced by inside stairways, one leading up to the sanctuary and other down to the basement, which was now entered from the inside rather than from the outside. This arrangement was not only more attractive, but also safer in wet or icy conditions. A short front stoop led to the new main entry, whose doors were topped by a fanlight and set in a decorative doorcase. The old steeple was taken down, and a more impressive new one, louvered, and surrounded by a neo-classical gallery above the base, was erected.

The wing containing the gymnasium, offices and meeting rooms now took up most of the back portion of the lot to the south. Instead of one window and a door facing Edison Street, there were four windows and a more ornate door surmounted by a pediment and what appeared from the outside to be high-mounted sidelights - one of which was actually the restroom window. As with the sanctuary, the longer outside stair was replaced by a small stoop and interior stairs leading up to the main floor and down to the basement, which contained a kitchen as well as Sunday School rooms. In two of the main floor rooms, ornate marble fireplaces, apparently salvaged by church members from other remodeling projects on which they were employed, were installed. The one in the pastor's office is still in place; the other was removed at a later date.

The clapboard exterior siding was covered with red brick, all of this giving the structure a decidedly "colonial" appearance, quite in fashion with the popular public and church architecture of that time of the sesquicentennial of the United States. It was the architect's desire that the building should resemble Independence Hall in Philadelphia, as a symbol that the congregation, like the nation, was an independent body. Seventy years later, the church appears much the same from the outside, although internal rearrangements - the kitchen, for example was moved upstairs - and interior and exterior redecoration have taken place during that time.

Reminiscences about Frank Cali, recorded many years afterward, almost unanimously stress his kindness, as well as his enthusiasm and his innovations.

Evidence in the church records indicates that it was during his ministry that the church began its formal relationship with the local Council of Churches, and it was he who first instituted a congregational newsletter, *The Edison Beacon*, which is the ancestor of future such publications, including the present-day *Edison Echo*. They also stress their sadness that Pastor Cali did not live to see all of his hopes and his plans for the church come to full fruition.

One day in January, 1926, Frank Cali and a group of the young people from the church played volleyball in the almost completed gymnasium. He seemed to be in active good health, but on the next morning he was seized by an attack of kidney stones, an attack apparently brought on by the previous day's exertion. Emergency surgery was performed, but without success in saving his life. He died on January 18, at the age of thirty-nine. Needless to say, his congregation was stunned. When stained glass were later placed in the refurbished sanctuary, one was dedicated to his memory. He is the only pastor so honored.

The next pastor uniquely combined the beginnings of the church with its future. Pietro Eddy Saltarelli was born in Pescasseroli on June 11, 1879. His father, Cesidio Saltarelli was, as we have seen, one of the initial converts to Protestantism, was the first to leave for America and begin the community in Buffalo and was one of the charter members of the First Italian Baptist Church. At some time after he had become established here, he sent for his son, who was soon known by the English form of his name, Peter. Young Peter's selection as the first president of the church's youth organization, and then as the first member of the congregation to become president of the city-wide Baptist youth, was perhaps a harbinger of his life's work as a pastor. He attended the International College in Springfield, Massachusetts, and was a member of the class of 1910 of the Italian Department of Colgate-Rochester, which department was then located in Brooklyn, New York. During his ministerial studies, one of the schools required him to learn a trade in addition to his theological studies, thus he acquired the skill of carpentry. Given the minimal salaries then paid to the clergy, this seemed to make sense, and would, in addition, come in handy if a church needed repairs. He seems to have applied the trade during his summers while a student, and may have later used it during his pastoral career as a means of supplementing his income.

From 1910 to 1914, Peter Saltarelli ministered in Brooklyn. He then returned to Buffalo for three years, and subsequently served pastorates in Wayne, Pennsylvania and in Mount Vernon and Port Chester, New York. In 1921, he was the minister of

a Methodist Church in Jamestown, New York, whence he was called to his home church in March, 1926 as the successor to the late Frank Cali. He had been one of three persons suggested by Professor Mangano of Colgate's Italian Department to fill the vacancy. Given the recent tragedy which had visited the congregation,, the name of someone already well known and respected must have been most welcome to the leaders and members. His pastorate in the church began on June 1, and would continue for the next two decades.

One of Peter Saltarelli's first duties must also have been one of his most pleasant, for on June 13, not quite two weeks after assuming his new job, he preached the evening sermon at the dedication of the newly reconstructed church. Numerous Baptist dignitaries took part in the almost day-long ceremonies. Among them was Ariel Bellondi, the man who had first led the congregation. How joyous he must have been to see what that plain and simple chapel on Edison Street had now become.

Parishioners who were asked to describe Peter Saltarelli some years after he had retired as their pastor used such descriptions as, "a very gentle person," "a gentle fellow, couldn't make him mad," "such a gentleman," "a super person," and "just the most beautiful person." They also remembered his energy and his piety: "a very active man and a very religious man." One of the fondest memories was of him reading *Pilgrim's Progress* aloud to the students in the summer Vacation Bible School. It was a daily treat they anticipated eagerly: "How eagerly we awaited hearing Christian's adventures in the slough of Despond and his meeting with the giant Despair." It is interesting that this son of the one of the congregation's founders, the first - and to this day the only - person brought up in the church to become its pastor, should preside over numerous and significant changes in the church and in how it presented itself to the community around it.

That community had itself changed as the area developed over the years since the church began in 1896. As it filled with houses and businesses, so that one could no longer walk though open fields from Bailey Avenue to Eggert Road, the area immediately around the church became less Italian and more mixed in its ethnic makeup. If the church was to become what was intended by the recent expansion, a Christian center for the community, it would need to speak the community's language. Additionally, the younger members of the congregation, now mature, and developing, or having developed into leadership positions, had grown up speaking English, and some had married spouses of non-Italian background. A sampling of

the available records shows that there were four non-Italian members baptized as early as 1913, and an increasing number of these affiliated with the congregation as the years progressed. Additional new members from the neighborhood, hardly all of whom could realistically be expected to be of Italian origin, were being pursued. The morning services in Italian were becoming an anachronism in an increasingly Americanized congregation. There was even the consideration of having two pastors, one who would work with those members who spoke Italian, the other to work with those who spoke English. This idea, when put to a vote in 1923, was defeated.

How rapidly the change of language took place is a subject about which those who witnessed it disagree. One member recalled, "the Italian Bible and Italian Hymnals were used, and all of a sudden they were gone. Others remembered the process as being somewhat more gradual, and, in fact, there were for a time morning services in both languages - first Italian, followed by English - before the Italian was completely dropped. English phrases had begun to appear in the church minutes as early as 1918, and beginning in 1923, the congregational records were kept entirely in English. We do not have the personal testimony of the first generation about these innovations, and the results of a questionnaire on the subjects of language and the church name, circulated in 1926, have not survived, so we do not know how they felt. Regardless, the change took place. The First Italian Baptist Church now spoke English.

As early as 1919 there are references in printed programs to the Edison Street Sunday School and to the Edison Street Athletic Association. Perhaps inevitably, and for the same reasons that the use of the Italian language was superceded by English, the very name of the church was also becoming something of an anachronism and, some thought, a barrier to the recruitment of new members from outside of the Italian-American population. Discussion of the church name appears in the church minute book as early as 1923, when there was debate about what the church should be called in its constitution. Initial editions of *The Beacon* displayed two names: First Italian Baptist Church and Edison Street Baptist Church, the former disappearing from the newsletter's cover in 1927. Whatever ideas the pastor and church leadership may have had, there must have been some amount of controversy and discussion among the membership, because no official name change was made until seven more years had passed. The occasion which forced a final decision was the requirement that the church be incorporated under New York State's Religious Corporations Act. At a congregational meeting on April 18, 1934, the new name was officially adopted by a vote of 24 to 12. Why only thirty-six of well over a hundred

members voted is not known. The First Italian Baptist Church would from then on be known as the Edison Street Baptist Church.

At this point, a little bit of explanation is in order. Why, one may ask, is the Edison Street Baptist Church located on Edison Avenue? The answer is this. The church address, as it appeared in the city directory, was 28 Edison. The directory does not use the designation "street" after a name of a thoroughfare; the reader is to assume "street" unless, for example, "avenue," "place," "parkway," or some other appellation appears. Thus one finds "Main" or "East Utica" without the designation, but "Bailey Avenue," "Glendale Place" or "Humboldt Parkway" with one. In South Buffalo, there is an Edson Street and in the City of Lackawanna there is an Edison Street. For a number of years, mail for the church was misdirected to number 28 on one of those similarly named streets, or mail for number 28 on one of them was delivered to the church. The simple solution, it appeared, was to alter the designation of Edison Street to Edison Avenue, and that is what was eventually done.

The Great Depression which began in 1929 had effects throughout the country, including on churches such as the one on Edison. As members lost employment or became underemployed, it was often difficult for them to fulfil pledges, and so the church's income was affected negatively. A janitor, hired when the financial picture was brighter, had to be let go, requiring the congregation once again to be responsible for custodial services, and other adjustments had to be made.

One of the adaptations to the Depression eventually became a congregational tradition. In order to save postage costs at Christmastime, it was decided that members should exchange their holiday greeting cards at the church, rather than spend the cent and a-half for the stamp needed to mail each card. On several Sunday mornings before Christmas, the people brought to church the cards intended for fellow members. During the service, the cards were sorted by a group of the men, who happened to be postal employees, and after the Christmas Eve service each family collected those addressed to it. If the savings seem slight at this remove in time, one must remember that in the 1930s a sandwich and a cup of coffee could be had for fifteen cents at a lunch counter almost any place in the city - or the country. Long after the economic crisis had passed, the exchange was found to be enjoyable that it continues to the present.

A brighter note to the financial situation was the money received from the Buffalo Board of Education, which from 1927 to 1932 leased temporary classroom space in the building until School 71 was completed. The situation was not perfect; there were neighbors' complaints about the deportment of some of the children in the school. "Your attention is called to the fact that the property adjoining that which the children are entitled to use in connection with the school is being molested to the extent beyond further silence and allowance," wrote one neighbor, who was also a member of the congregation. Such complaints had to be dealt with by the church leaders as well as by the principal. Disagreements arose over facilities, such as the time the school authorities wanted the gymnasium divided for school use, an idea the church rejected because to have done so would have interfered with its very successful athletic program, which had become a popular neighborhood activity. On the whole, however, the arrangement was a plus for the church, both in terms of needed income and for the renovations done by the school board to the Sunday School rooms, which facilitated the church's own educational tasks, and which are still very much in evidence. The public schools used the rented space not only for elementary education. They were also used for citizenship classes. Preparing another generation of new Americans was a most appropriate use for classrooms in a church itself founded by immigrants.

Depression or not, the church did not stand still. Membership grew, and the church's facilities continued to be developed. It was during those years that the stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Bible were installed on the north and south walls of the sanctuary. One of them was the window dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Frank Cali; the others were placed by families in honor of early members of the congregation. On the death of Pastor Saltarelli's wife, Anna, in 1931, he and the family presented to the church the illuminated window which forms a background to the baptismal pool. On the outside, a neon cross, which remained for the next sixty years, was mounted. Furthermore, in spite of the nation's economic woes, the church's indebtedness was reduced by approximately \$30,000. It stood at only \$7,000 by the fall of 1936.

Ten years after he began his ministry on Edison Street, Peter Saltarelli had another joyous occasion to celebrate - the congregation's fortieth anniversary. It was not an event taken lightly, as the program makes clear. On Sunday, September 27, 1936, there were two special services, which included as preachers two of the three surviving former pastors. The sermon at the 10:30 AM service was delivered by the Rev. Ariel Bellondi; that during the 7:30 PM service by the Rev. Giovanni Castellini.

(The other surviving pastor, the Rev. Luigi Scelfo, for whatever reason did not take part in the celebratory activities.) A special program was held on the same day for the Sunday School.

On Monday evening there was a reception which incorporated music and what the program listed as "Treasurers from Memories Chest," a series of five, five minute speeches reflecting on the congregation's past, along with a display of historical pictures. Tuesday the 29th brought "A Historical Review of the Life of the Church through Pictures and Prologue," plus remarks from Pastor Saltarelli and from the executive director of the Buffalo Baptist Association. The commemoration concluded with a banquet on Wednesday evening, at which a number of people who had worked with the church, along with others from the city's Baptist community, were the guests of honor. These included the pastor of the Michigan Avenue Baptist Church, Buffalo's oldest African-American congregation, with which the Edison Street church had a long and close relationship.

The program itself is of considerable value. Professionally printed, with the costs defrayed by the inclusion of advertisements from local merchants, it is much more than a simple listing of events, committee members, pastors, church officers and guests. Included is a five page history of the church prepared by Bart D'Arcangelo, which remains a major source for any subsequent account of the congregation's first forty years. Most of that history had been personally experienced by Mr. D'Arcangelo, and he had access to the surviving early members, making it the closest thing to an eyewitness account that we are ever likely to have available. All later church histories, including the present one, have relied on it heavily.

Also in the program there appears a complete membership list, the earliest such that can be found. Listed are 128 active members and 24 "associate" members, some of whom appear to be members of other congregations who served in various capacities with the Edison Street congregation, along with other persons who seem, by their names, to be family members of those active, but who had not, for some reason or another, been taken into full communion. The names on the list reflect the ethnic origins of the congregation, and also its changing nature. Ninety-three of the names of the active members and thirteen of the associate members are of apparent Italian origin, including some, such as Notar and Archangel, which are known to have been altered from their original forms. Using both categories of membership, the Italian portion of the congregation figures out at almost exactly seventy percent. Some of the other names, such as Anderson, reflect marriages between women who

were church members and husbands who were of other than Italian ancestry. Interestingly, the most common name on the lists is the clearly non-Italian Choops family, of whom ten individuals appear as active members. They represent membership from the nearby community, something that was now a goal of the church, and something that would increase with coming years.

It is of some interest that the advertisements in the program are also reflective of the congregation and the neighborhood. A large proportion of the ads are from church members who had local businesses, for example, Petrella's grocery, Notar's garage, Gentile's pharmacy, Ursitti's delicatessen and DiAddario's wallpapering. The German presence in the neighborhood is also evident in Walter's and in Baehre's florists and in Rautenstrauch's delicatessen. That the Baptists and their Roman Catholic neighbors were generally on friendly terms with each other is indicated by the largest advertisement; the entire back cover was taken by a business owned by a Roman Catholic: Daniel Amigone's funeral home.

If the events of 1938 brought happiness to the Edison Street congregation, one event of 1938 brought different emotions. On the afternoon of Palm Sunday in that year, a fire broke out in the front of the sanctuary, somewhere around the organ and the baptismal pool. The cause seems to have been some sort of electrical malfunction. Whatever the cause, the celebration of the Savior's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which had begun the day with joy, ended in sadness. Church members years later remembered the smoke billowing from the windows, and the men rallying to save what could be saved, as the Fire Department, whose quick response prevented a more severe loss, poured water into the structure. Bibles, hymnals, pews and other furnishings were taken through the doors as quickly possible; they were literally "thrown out," remembered one who witnessed the fire as a young girl, and whose father was doing some of the throwing. The pulpit Bible was saved, but was badly scorched; it still sits in the church safe.

While fire damage was confined to the area where the conflagration had begun, there was considerable smoke and water elsewhere. Among the losses was the organ. Also lost were many of the congregational records, which had been stored in a section of the basement directly under the pulpit area, and which suffered irreparable damage from the thousands of gallons of water needed to quench the fire. Partly for that reason, there is no complete record of the church for many of its years. Total

damage, according to the insurance adjusters, was \$6'783.96 to the building and \$944.88 to the contents. (Those very exact figures were estimated by the adjusters for the very exact fee of \$666.01.)

Disastrous as the fire was, the church was resolved to continue its worship and its activities without interruption, and that is what happened. "We didn't skip a Sunday," one member proudly recalled. Repairs were begun immediately. Since many of the men were engaged in the construction industry, they and the younger men, under their supervision, were able to perform much of the work of restoration. Some of the major work was contracted out, either to members who had made bids for the work, or to outside firms, and material for the rebuilding had to be purchased. The largest item was the replacing and repainting of the woodwork in the front of the sanctuary, along with the repair of the baptistry, the tile on which had to be replaced and the plumbing redone. A new roof was needed over the sanctuary, gutters replaced, the stained glass windows cleaned and repaired, the pews and floors refinished and rewaxed, pulpit furnishings and the communion table reconditioned, new chandeliers hung, carpets and drapes cleaned or replaced, and in the downstairs kitchen, a new linoleum floor installed. While the sanctuary was being fixed up, worship services were held in the gym, which had escaped major damage.

The organ, in or near which the fire had started, was a total loss. It had been purchased used from the Central Park Baptist Church in 1929 for fifty dollars, paid for over three months. Much more money than that would be needed to replace it. What to do? It was, it seems, the organist, Elvira Pandolfi Osborn, who suggested that each family set aside one cent at each meal as a contribution. The "penny a meal" plan was accepted, and eventually enough funds - some \$1575 - were collected for a new instrument, an Everett Orgatron, which was dedicated in August, 1940.

Thus was the church restored after the fire, and thus it would face the future, looking confidently forward to a fiftieth anniversary to come in 1946. Before that, another national crisis would have to be faced, and it, like the previous one, would have an effect on the congregation. It was called World War II.

Go Ye Therefore

“All Baptists are missionaries at heart.” So wrote Joseph M. Overfield in *Years of Trial and Triumph*, his informative brief history of the Buffalo Baptist Association. Put another way, Baptists seem especially determined to carry out the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” That missionary zeal is what led the Rev. Elkanah Holmes to be the first Baptist minister to preach to the newly settled population of Western New York in the early nineteenth century, and it was that same zeal which led to the establishment later in the century of the First Italian Baptist Church. It also led Baptists from other churches in Buffalo to reach out to the church on Edison Street, to nurture it when it was new and as it matured. In the same spirit, it led the people of that church, from its beginnings until the present day, to reach out beyond its own walls to its neighbors, to the larger community in the city and the region, and, in terms of financial support, across the seas. The following chapter describes some examples of these ways of Christian outreach; it also gives us an opportunity to look at some of the church’s organizations and operations which transcend any single pastorate.

Jesus’ injunction, “Suffer the little children to come unto me,” was taken very seriously by nineteenth century American Protestants. As a result, Sunday Schools were established throughout the country, and the newly formed First Italian Baptist Church was no exception. Its Sunday School was established in 1897, the year after the church was founded. For the first seven years, the superintendents were members of other Baptist churches in Buffalo. They appear in the records as Mr. and Mrs. Robb in 1897, Mr. William B. Robb (possibly the “Mr. Rob” of the previous year) from 1898 through 1900, and Charles Wood in 1901. There is “no record” listed under superintendent for 1902, then a Mr. Williams appears in 1903. Thus, in those critical beginning years, the Sunday School had for its leadership dedicated fellow Baptists who chose to make the journey out to the Pine Hill area each Sabbath to ensure the Christian education of the young of the congregation. As was true for Pastor

Bellondi, this was not always an easy trip.

The non-Italian leadership also ensured that the Sunday School would be, as well as a means of teaching the Gospel, a means of assimilation for members, young and old, of the church. The volunteers, as far as we know, spoke only English, so English was of necessity the language of the church school. It was probably so also as a result of design, for a clearly stated goal of the Baptists and of the other Protestant denominations working among recent immigrant communities in the United States was to promote the assimilation, or as they liked to say, the ‘Americanization’ of the newly arrived peoples into the mainstream on the nation’s culture. To become a good Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian or whatever else Protestant was also seen as a way to become a good citizen of the republic, and that meant speaking in the tongue of the majority.

In 1904 John Peruzzi, one of the sons of the Rev. Angelo Peruzzi, became the first church member to lead the Sunday School. He served as superintendent until 1910, then again from 1913 to 1923, with Laurence Gentile and Antonio Cervi holding the position in 1911 and 1912, respectively. In 1923, Bartholemew D’Arcangelo took over the responsibilities, which he continued to carry out beyond congregation’s fortieth anniversary.

Under the leadership of the dedicated people from outside and within the church, the Sunday School grew rapidly. By the beginning of January in 1911, the first year for which we have records, there were recorded in attendance ninety-four students and seven teachers; through the years up to the 1920s the average attendance was between eighty-five and ninety, including the pupils and teachers. The students, whose Sunday studies began at noon until 1929, were recorded in three categories: the Primary Department, the Bible Class and the Main School. As a fairly representative example of those years, the record for March 30, 1913 lists twenty-seven primary, eleven Bible class and forty-eight main school students and ten teachers. The records for other years around that time show similar figures.

We have for the year 1914 a Register of Male Scholars and a Register of Female Scholars, covering some six pages and 141 names from age three through adults. Assuming no Anglicization of names, 101 are Italian and 40 are non-Italian.(The one child whose first name only appears is assumed to fit in to the latter category, since the surname of a child of one of the mostly Italian members would have been easily known and most probably recorded.). This puts the Italian proportion of those

scholars at just over seventy percent, a figure very similar to the membership ratio some years later at the fortieth anniversary. Many of the non-Italians listed in that 1914 Sunday School record also appear in the 1936 membership list, indicating that the affiliation begun in childhood was frequently carried into adulthood. The addresses which appear with the non-Italians indicate that the church was by then very much on the way to becoming a neighborhood institution, for every one for whom an address is given (there are none listed for the primary grades) is from a street in close proximity to the church. This neighborhood presence would, of course, reinforce the use of English in the Sunday School, and, as we have seen, eventually in the regular worship of the congregation.

By the mid 1930s, Sunday School membership and attendance had reached its highest point. Some 200 were registered, and attendance reflected those numbers. March 28, 1937 saw 166 pupils and teachers taking part in Sunday School, a figure larger than the church membership. From that point, for reasons not fully clear - other than a lot of the children of the members grew up - the registration and attendance began a slow but not steady decline. By the late 1930s average attendance was between sixty and one hundred; in 1943 and 1944 it was in the high forties. Following World War II, a time when the neighborhood was enlarged in population by the construction of the Langfield housing project, Sunday School membership again rose, reaching an average in the high seventies and low eighties in 1948, but registration figures, while remaining high, were not always reflected in attendance. On a "sunny and fair" August day in 1949, only 47 of 167 were present. Records seem to be missing for the years 1949 to 1963, but by 1964 attendance was averaging somewhere between 50 and 80, with many of the children living in Langfield.

The story in more recent years has been rather less cheerful. By the 1970s a serious decline in registration and attendance had set in, so that the Sunday School rooms had few tenants. During the next decades, only a handful of children were appearing; on some Sundays the staff outnumbered the pupils. A happier note is that the Vacation Bible School still continues to serve the children of the congregation and the neighborhood. By 1996, the Sunday School enrolled fifteen adults, and a small, somewhat fluctuating number of children.

Among the communicants of other Baptist churches who over the years gave their time and talents to the Edison Street congregation, four in particular are the most

frequently mentioned in member's recollections: Miss Cora Estabrook, Miss E. Grace Wood, Miss Julia Ford and Dr. Wesley Backus. Each of them deserves a special place in the history of the church.

Miss Cora Estabrook was a very tall, slim lady who lived on Forest Avenue near Elmwood, across from the State Hospital, as it was then known. She was a member of the Delaware Avenue Baptist Church, located in what was then Buffalo's most prestigious residential area, and the home church to many who were among the city's business and civic leaders. Most clearly, she believed that her privileged position carried with it responsibility, for it was her habit to go to Freddie's at Main and Masten, where she would purchase quantities of day-old doughnuts to give to people in need. "She had boxes and boxes of doughnuts," recalled one member of the Edison Street church, where seemingly some of the doughnuts also found their way. Sunday mornings were spent at the First Italian Baptist Church, where she taught Sunday School, for which she also played the piano, and conducted well attended training sessions for other teachers. In addition, Miss Estabrook gave piano lessons to a number of the girls in the congregation, led the church choir and directed its annual Christmas programs. For many years she made the trek from Forest to Edison; her work ended only at her death at the age of about ninety. "She had years she gave to Edison," said one member. Added another, "There should be something in the church dedicated to that woman. She gave her all."

E. Grace Wood, another member of the Delaware Avenue church, was described by one who remembered her in 1985 as "a great lady, who brought a whiff of the larger world to our eastside neighborhood. She had been born on a yacht, worked as a journalist in New York City, traveled widely and eventually came to Edison and taught the young women's class." Convinced that the young ladies needed more than what the Sunday School curriculum contained in order to make their ways properly in the majority society, she strove to teach them proper manners and bearing. She shared her life's story with them, and advised them how to conduct themselves when interacting with those outside their immediate family and neighborhood. The lessons were not unappreciated, and given the testimony of later years, neither were they forgotten.

Julia Ford was a home economics teacher, who also combined the teaching of Sunday School with lessons on dealing with the world outside of church. Again, the

1985 recollections of one of the pupils: she “polished some of our rough edges by inviting us to her home on Winspear where she supervised our preparing and serving a meal. She also took each of us individually downtown to a restaurant for dinner.” The restaurant of choice was Laube’s Old Spain, which once stood on Main Street in what is now the Theater District, and was considered to be one of the city’s finest. One of the young ladies who for some reason did not get a the dinner invitation many years later expressed her disappointment; she felt she had missed something very worth while. That same young lady soon had cause to be most grateful for Miss Ford’s presence at Edison. During World War II, when her husband was in the service, the house in which she and her young children were living was sold, and she had to look for new accommodations, something not easily accomplished during the war. Fortunately, Miss Ford, by then Mrs. Saltarelli, had a vacant apartment in her Winspear Avenue home, and offered it for rent. The offer was quickly accepted.

Concerning Miss Ford becoming Mrs. Saltarelli, her marriage to Peter Saltarelli took place sometime after the death of the pastor’s first wife in 1931 and the anniversary celebration in 1936, for she is listed as Mrs. Peter Saltarelli in that year’s membership list. However the romance blossomed, the young ladies in Miss Ford’s class had no doubts - they convinced themselves that it was they who had brought it about.

Dr. Wesley Backus was for forty-three years a dentist - his office was at Grant and Ferry. He was married, with two daughters, and was active in his professional association and in community organizations. He was also a deacon in the Delaware Avenue Baptist Church, a Mason and an avid fisherman. Those three aspects of his life came together in his relationship with the Edison Street Church. Sometime around 1927, he volunteered to teach some of the young men who belonged to the Bible class known as the “Faithful Few.” He apparently enjoyed his teaching, and the young men apparently enjoyed it too. Their relationship would lead to the formation of a new church organization which took the name of The Square Within the Circle.

The first meeting of the organization was held in Dr. Backus’ home on Wellington Avenue; subsequent meetings were held “every so many days” at member’s homes, in public libraries, at the church (for the use of which the group agreed to make a four dollar donation every time they met there), or elsewhere - one was in the Lafayette Hotel, others in a place referred to in the minute book as the Ote Osceola. Members were divided into classes of four, based on dates of their joining. Officers’ titles

reflected Dr. Backus' Masonic interests: the leader was called the Renowned Noble Prince, other titles were similarly impressive, such as Marshall, Commisary, Sentinel and Clerk of the Court. There were twenty-three offices, which rotated on a regular basis, so everyone had a turn at having a high-sounding position in the organization. The pastor was designated as Prelate, and Dr. Backus took the title of Judge Advocate. As its symbol, there was, not surprisingly, a square surrounded by a circle. Inside the square were the numbers 193737. These referred to the nineteenth book, thirty-seventh chapter, thirty-seventh verse of the Bible, the book of Psalms 37:37, which reads "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

One of Dr. Backus' most popular innovations for the young men was the annual fishing trip he organized for them to North Bay, Ontario or to similar fishing sites in Canada. Each year from 1929 to 1937 as many as fifty men from the church, often including the pastor, would go fishing together, enjoying good fellowship and good naturedly competing for the largest catch. Another of his ideas was the institution of "mystery trips" which took place every Memorial Day - or Decoration Day as it was then commonly known. These trips involved not only the young men, but also the young women. On the appointed morning they would meet at the church or some other convenient location, and travel by auto, by bus or by truck to an unknown destination. Part of the fun was trying to be the first to figure out the clues provided about where they were going. Destinations included Chestnut Ridge, Sturgeon Point, and other locations in Western New York or across the border in nearby Canada. According to all accounts, the excursions, like the fishing trips, were heartily enjoyed by all who participated.

All good things end sometime, and so did Dr. Backus' relationship with the Edison Street church. Ironically, given the use of the number 193737 by the Square Within the Circle, this took place in 1937. When Dr. Backus died thirty-seven years after that, in 1974 at the age of seventy, members of his class were pallbearers at his funeral. In his memory, they gave the communion table which still serves the church.

On several occasions the congregation also benefitted from the services of the Rev. Arthur Ventura, who, like the early pastors who served the Edison Street church, was a native of Italy, where he received his early education, and was a graduate of Colgate's Italian Department. Mr. Venturi was retired from the full time

ministry to Italian Baptist congregations such as the Mariner's Temple in New York City, the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, and the Italian Baptist Mission in Waterbury, Connecticut. He had also served for a time at the Baptist church in Lancaster, New York. At Edison he ministered both as an interim pastor and as a part-time visiting pastor, and for some years taught the Adult Bible Class. His association with the congregation ended with his death in 1974. Of him it was later said, "We are forever indebted to him for his love and inspiration to us."

A major part of the church's outreach to the larger community was and still is found in the use of the gymnasium. As early as 1919 programs were being conducted by the Edison Street Athletic Association, using the available facilities, and, as already described, the 1926 expansion was largely fueled by the desire to improve and enlarge those facilities. In 1927 a council was created to oversee the Athletic Association. The young people of the congregation and the neighborhood have been able to use the gym for numerous activities during all that time, and for a number of years a basketball league composed of teams from several of the city's Baptist churches competed for fun and for trophies, some of which were won by the host team, and are on display in the church. The gym was in use three nights a week, and became so popular that a committee had to be formed to coordinate the requests for its use. To help pay for the maintenance of so busy a venue, a five cent per member fee was instituted for outside teams which used it. One proposed use was denied. The church's young men in 1931 asked permission to install a pool table for their recreational use. The church officers did not consider pool playing to be an appropriate activity inside a church building, and turned them down.

Among the activities held in the gym for the community were not only basketball games but also boxing and wrestling matches, athletic nights featuring such participants the Buffalo Turners (*Turnverein*), and on one occasion a display of what were described in the program as "athletic arias." What the latter consisted of no one seems to remember. When the New York State Technical Institute, now Erie Community College, began its intercollegiate basketball program during the late 1940s, it was still temporarily housed in the former Pierce-Arrow automobile factory on Elmwood Avenue. The old plant contained no place in which the team could practice. Through the good offices of a faculty member who was also a member of the church, the team was allowed to conduct its practice sessions in the gym. That same faculty and church member was once able to secure the great American

Olympic star, Jesse Owens, to speak to an overflow gathering in the gymnasium for the minimal fee of \$75.00

Sometimes one form of outreach can lead to another. For many years, beginning as least early as 1918, Troop 72 of the Boy Scouts of America was sponsored by and met in the church. Boys from the neighborhood as well as from the congregation belonged; there were about as many boys from St. Lawrence as there were from the Edison Street church. So successful was the scouting program that a "log cabin" facade, which is still in place, was constructed on the wall of the basement room in which the scout troop conducted its meetings. "We had," recalled a former scout, "one of the famous Boy Scout troops...and we had the Cowboy Patrol, a musical group that played all over Buffalo and all over Western New York." The scouts involved themselves with troops from other churches and organizations in the city, regardless of those troops' sponsors' ethnic or racial background. Eventually, these contacts reached beyond the city and beyond Erie County to the Tuscarora Indian Nation which is in - but not part of, as the people of Tuscarora will clearly remind anyone - Niagara County.

Soon, the contacts between the church and the Tuscaroras expanded. The scouts continued to exchange programs with their counterparts on the reservation. At one time they took their "cowboy" program to entertain their Native American hosts - those were less ethnically sensitive and "politically correct" times, and the program was received with the intended good feelings. Scout leader Paul Creola got church leaders and Tuscarora leaders, many of them also active Baptists, to meet together. Members of both churches became friends and the young people's groups and individuals among the older members visited back and forth. "Many fond relationships were developed," some of which have continued to the present. Gifts, including a pair of miniature moccasins from the Tuscaroras, were exchanged; a Tuscarora chief was the featured speaker to the church men's club, and Thanksgiving programs were presented. Some church members were "adopted" by the Tuscaroras. Members of the Edison Street church volunteered to work at the reservation mission and at its Baptist church. Financial support was provided, and when Tuscarora Baptist Church burned down in the 1970s, a special contribution was made to help with the reconstruction.

Outreach can also be combined with fellowship and with helping one's own parish, as the history of the Edison Street church women's groups makes clear. Over the years since the first women's organization started to function during Mr. Castellini's pastorate, has been known by a few different names, including the Women's Union, the Ladies' Aid, the Edison Guild the World Wide Guild and the Women's Guild. There have also been special associations for the younger women; one of them was styled the Edison Sally Peck organization, another the WWG, which three letters stood for a title of eleven words: World Wide Guild Working With God for the Whole World Good. Together and separately over almost eighty years, those organizations have raised needed funds for the church through annual bazaars selling, as one member put it, "all kinds of things...baked goods...afghans...baby things...pillows...Christmas decorations...aprons." Between the sale of handmade goods and food sold at the event, as much as two thousand dollars has been cleared in a single November event. There have also been and continue to be rummage sales, which aid the church by raising money and aid the neighborhood by providing an opportunity to buy things at bargain prices. A major thrust has always been and the sponsorship of missionary activities, in which the younger women's organizations seem to have taken a particular interest. Support has been given as well to numerous outside charities, including children's homes such as the Upstate Children's Home in central New York State and the *Casa Materna* in Italy. Another activity to which the women devoted their time was providing clothing and gifts to the Tuscarora Reservation, as their special contribution to that ministry. During World War II, through the Evangelical Committee for Relief in Europe, they provided boxes of food and clothing to Italy. It was the women who first sponsored and, with them and their daughters clad in green and red aprons, ran the annual spaghetti dinners which have since become a church and community tradition. They have also at various times rolled bandages, helped prepare layettes for babies and performed other tasks as the need in the church, the community or elsewhere arose.

As well as providing financial support and material goods for causes within the church and beyond its walls, the women have, like many churchwomen elsewhere, taken responsibility for providing the necessary arrangements for the monthly Communion services. They prepare the bread and grape juice, see that it is ready and in place for the service, and clean up afterward. To all these activities, they have always had the added joy of working together and enjoying each other's company in a truly Christian environment.

The men of the church also organized for work, outreach and fellowship. We have already seen how some of the younger men organized during the 1930s for study, worship and fellowship. Some of those young men became the core of a more permanent organization which reached out not just to the men within the congregation, but also to those in the neighborhood. When it formally organized it took the name of the Edison Street Community Men's Club, whose stated object is "to promote the spiritual, intellectual, social and physical welfare of its members." In promoting those goals the men's club has been involved in worship and study, has listened to a variety of speakers on subjects of interest and enlightenment, has played baseball and bocce, and has gotten together over the years for such social events as picnics and steak roasts at member's vacation homes or backyards.

Perhaps its best known activity to those outside of the church has been the annual spaghetti dinner, which, as noted above, had been initiated by the women, and was prepared and served by them for several years. The dinner was taken over by the men as many of the women who had originally done the job aged and could no longer perform all of the physically demanding chores it required. The dinner became a community event not only in that the men's club is a community organization, but also in that merchants in the neighborhood made significant donations of the ingredients, and many outside of the immediate church family have made it a point to attend. The sauce - derived from a "secret recipe," say the men who prepare it - is prepared ahead of time, and from the beginning "everybody showed up to make meatballs," so that the customers will have plenty to eat and be served promptly. Those who could not attend the dinner, or who wished to have some of the sauce to adorn their pasta at home, can buy extra quantities that are sold in jars. The dinner has become a church and neighborhood tradition, attracting as many as 500 to 600 people. Though the men's club now numbers only a few, still enough remain so that with the help of some of its "alumni" from the suburbs, the dinner is still held, and still attracts large crowds every April.

For over thirty years there was an active Couples Club at Edison. Recalled one of its members, "We met once a month, most always in our homes. Once in a while for something very special we would meet at church....we would play games, and have a little devotions and once a year have a banquet at some really nice place. We

would have entertainment. It was very interesting, but then when TV got popular it started to break away, then of course, some of the people passed away and the other members...didn't come any more. There are very few of us left. It was a wonderful fellowship...always something to do." Another added, "We had quite a group...once in a while we'd collect some money and then we'd give it to the church." Those words were recorded in 1985. Since then more of the members have died, and the club is only a fond memory to the very few who are left. Younger members have other ways of joining together, thus no successor organization exists.

There has been a young people's organization, eventually affiliated with the Baptist Youth Fellowship, at the church since at least 1903. Over the years it has been extremely active, and those activities have been well and fondly remembered by many of those who took part in them. There were meetings with other Baptist youth, including those belonging to the Delaware Avenue, Delavan Avenue and Michigan Avenue churches. There were Christmas plays, Christmas parties for the children at the Goodyear Home in Williamsville, and New Years Eve Watch Night services. In the winter, the members went tobogganing at Chestnut Ridge and Delaware Parks, ice skated and went on sleigh rides; in warmer weather they gathered for picnics at the Creola's country property in Elma and at the Saltarelli's cottage on the lake. At other times they enjoyed box socials. Along with Pastor Saltarelli, they participated in a religious radio program on the old station WBNY.

When the Italian Baptist conventions met in Buffalo, the youth acted as guides, taking the out of town delegates to see the sites, including Niagara Falls. During summers they attended church camps and conferences at Camp Vick in Sandusky, New York, where Edison was one of the first among Buffalo's Baptist churches to send a delegation, and at Green Lake. To raise money they sold candy and pizza - which at one time went for \$1.00 for a whole pie. The experience was perhaps best summed up in the words of one member in this way: "Frequent association with other Baptist churches in the area occurred with youth and adult groups. Conventions, meetings, boards and activities in Buffalo as well as the state were organized this way, giving a wider perspective to church membership." It was a perspective that was obviously well cherished by those who had the good fortune to receive it.

Outreach is also accomplished by sharing financial resources with others, and over the years the Edison Street church has supported a host of causes, local, national and international. Some have already been mentioned, but there are many others. Missions, church related facilities and organizations and special funds for use in several distant lands have benefitted; included are worldwide mission funds and specific ministries in the Cameroons, Haiti, and Puerto Rico, a hospital in the Philippines, relief efforts in Armenia, the Waldensian Aid Society in Italy, and more generally Alive in Missions, One Great Hour of Sharing, The World Mission Offering and the World Wide Movement. Nationally, there has been support for a church in Alaska, for the Association of Evangelicals for Italian Ministry and its publication *The New Aurora*, as well as for the Gideons, the Minimum Salary Plan to support the pastors of small churches, the Fairport Home and the Board of Missions for the USA. Locally, money has gone to the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, the local Billy Graham Crusade, the City Mission and the Faith and Hope Mission, to the Angel Tree Christmas gifts project, to the Cancer Society, to a fund for fire victims, to Concerned Ecumenical Ministries and the Council of Churches, as well as to the Niagara Area Baptist Association. That a relatively small congregation has this record of giving to others is clear testimony to its own devotion to the command, "Go ye therefore...."

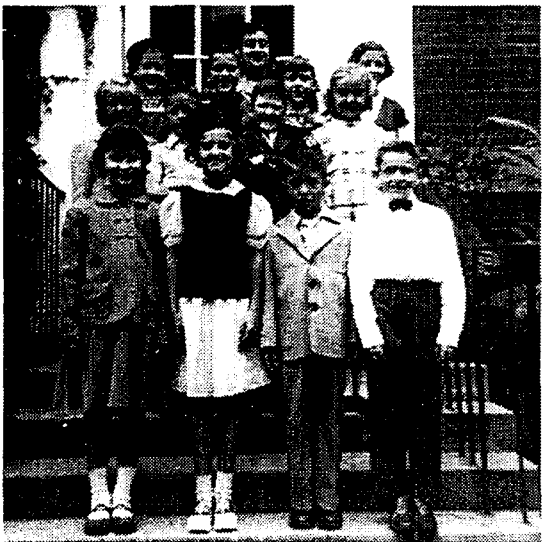
Fellowship



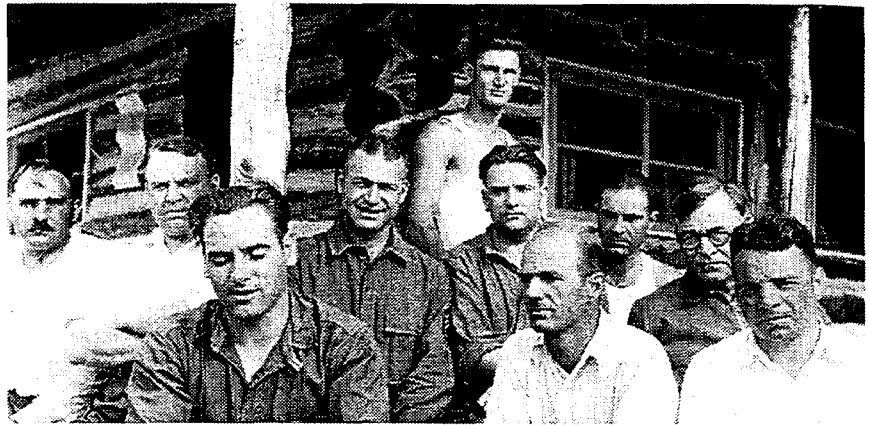
Vacation School Workers, 1922



Outing, early 1900s



Sunday School, 1951



Camping Trip, 1940

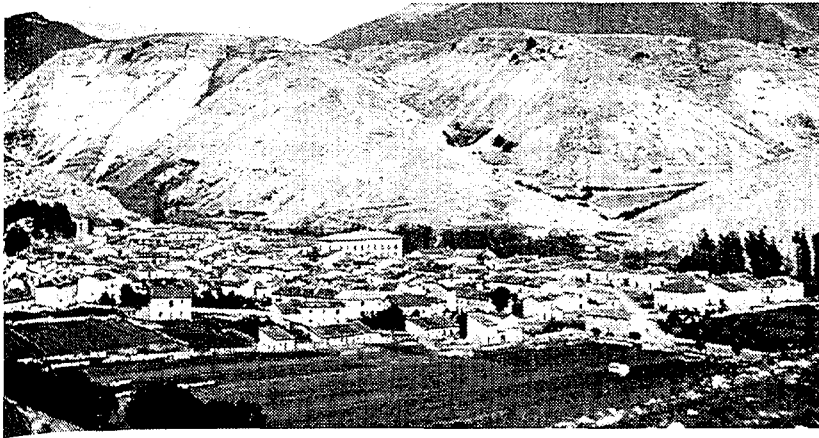


Christmas Bazaar, 1979

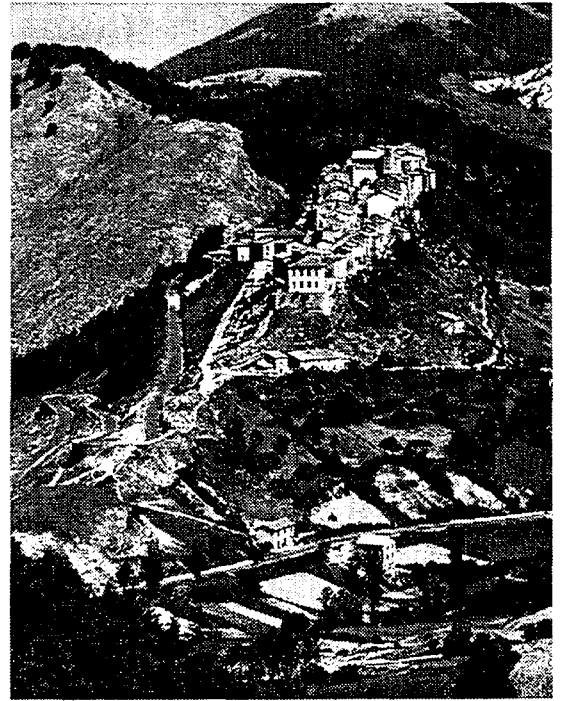


Youth Choir, 1968

Beginnings



Pescassaroli, Italy in the late 1800s



Opi, Abruzzo region of Italy, 1988
(near Pescassaroli)



Roma Avenue, 1880



31 Roma, 1996



Painters, 1900



Church Elders, 1896

Fellowship



Spaghetti Diner, 1989



Birthday Celebration, 1940s



Pipe The Car, Fishing Trip, 1924



Italian Convention, Brooklyn, 1941



Sunday School, 1968



Church Women, 1967

Fellowship



Class of 1918



Choir, 1989



Fishing Trip, 1923

Ready for the Big Roundup



This is the Cowboy Patrol of Troop 72. It will put on an act at Monday night's roundup. Left to right, the boys are: Henry Cervi; Lincoln Martin (seated on floor); Clarence Martin (standing); Alfred Costantino (accordion); Alphonse Cervi (guitar); Herbert Moeller (sitting on floor); William (Rusty) Shaw (banjo); Franklin Archangel (violin).

The Big Roundup, 1960s



Spaghetti Dinner, 1987

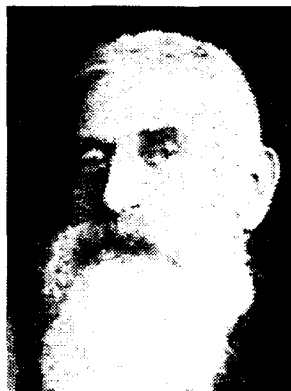


Group photo, undated

**Ministers
of The
Edison Street
Baptist Church**



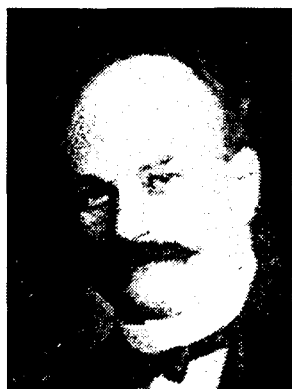
Rev. Bellondi
1896-1899



Rev. Peruzzi
1899-1902



Rev. Sceflo
1903-1907 & 1909-1912



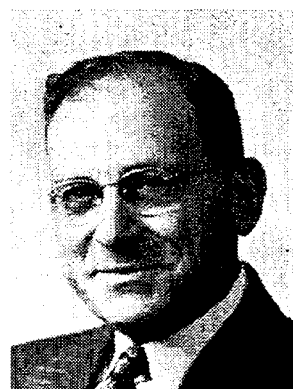
Rev. Buggelli
1907-1909



Rev. Castellini
1912-1923



Rev. Cali
1924-1926



Rev. Saltarelli
1926-1946 & 1955-1957



Rev. Gay
1947-1948



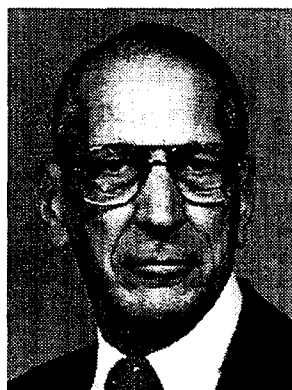
Rev. Goodwin
1949-1954



Rev. Davey
1955-1957



Rev. Glover
1962-1964



Rev. Rossi
1965-1978



Rev. McGaw
1979-1984



Rev. Martin
1985-1994



Rev. Williams
1995-

A SUPPER
 Will be Given by the Young Men's Class of the
First Italian Baptist Sunday School
 1000 W. 2nd St. Toledo, Ohio
Tuesday, May 13, 1919 - 6:30 to 10 P.M.
 Tickets, 50 cents
 Proceeds to go toward a Remembrance Building for Deaf

CONTINUED ECONOMY IN CITY GOVERNMENT
 ELECT
ZACHARIAH M. GENTILE
 REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE FOR
COUNCILMAN-AT-LARGE
 Endorsed by Civic Defense League
 No. 15 on Ballot
 Primary Day - September 15 - Noon to 9:00 P. M.



THIS DISCHARGE SHOULD BE
 FILED AT THE ERIE COUNTY
 CLERK'S OFFICE IMMEDIATELY

Buffalo Savings Bank
 713
 TO
 Box 303
THE EDISON STREET BAPTIST CHURCH
 OF BUFFALO, NEW YORK

DISCHARGE OF MORTGAGE

State of New York,
 Erie County Clerk's Office
 Recorded in Liber 6963 of Mortgages,
 at page 315 on the 11 day of
 July 1929 at 2:38 o'clock P.M.

Documents of the
 past 100 years at
 Edison Street
 Baptist Church

Edison Baptist Picnic
 ANNUAL CHURCH
 SATURDAY
July 15
Como Lake
 RACES - CANES - SWIMMING
 Prizes for Children
 SOFT BALL GAME for Ladies
 Married vs Single men

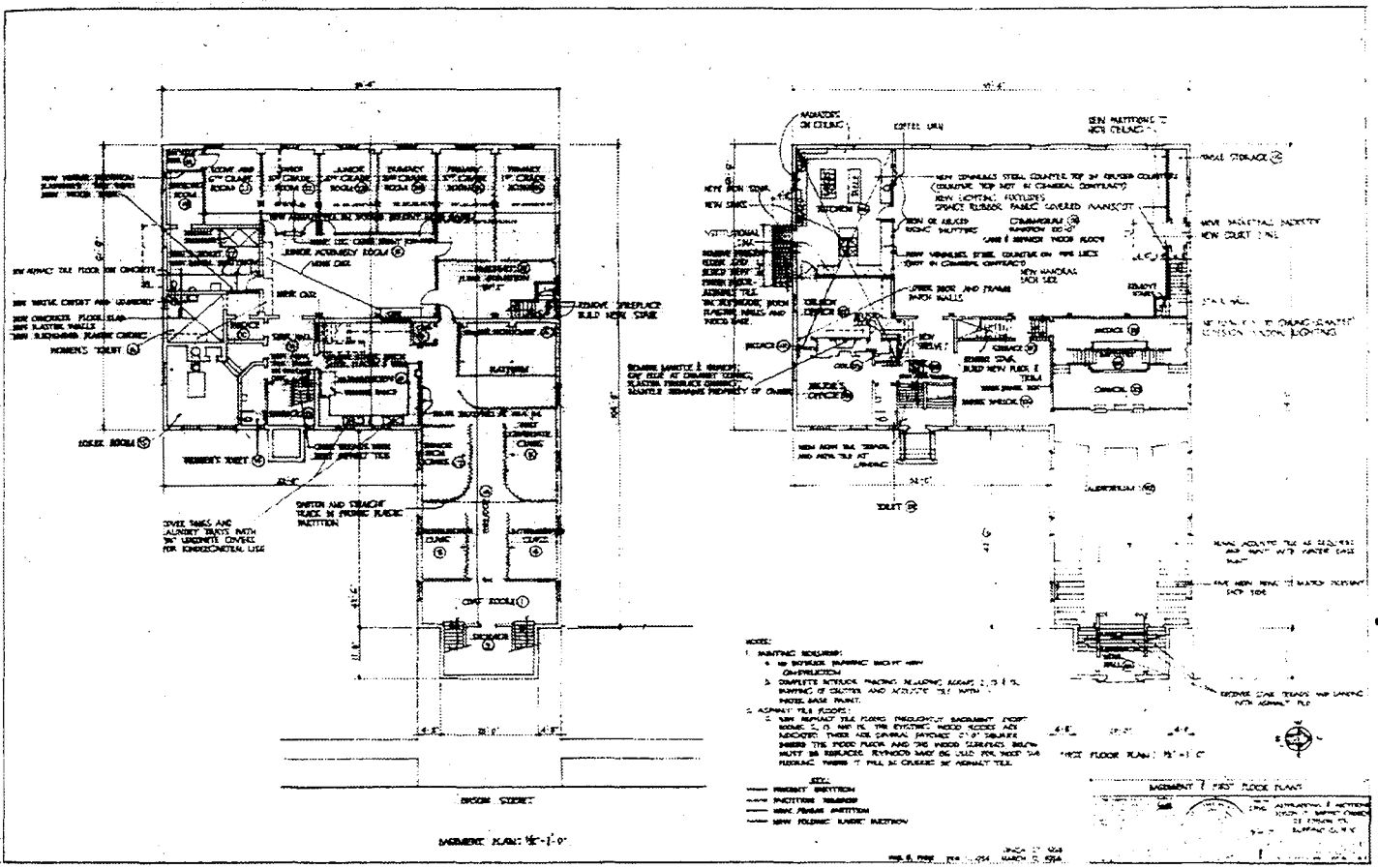
CHURCH AT 12 NOON SHARP
 MUST BE AT CHURCH AT 11:30
 WATCH FOR SIGNS AT PARK

Edison Street Baptist Church
 1930

ANNIVERSARY BANQUET
 OF THE
 Edison Street Baptist Church
 Wednesday Eve., September 30th at 6:30
 Adults 50 cents

LIB 6963 PAGE 315

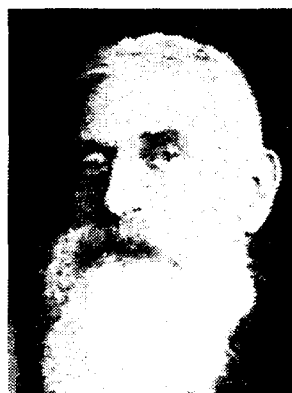
Fourth Annual Rejuvenation and Supply
BUILDING FLOOD UNIVERSAL
 1929
 Adult 50c
 FRIDAY EVENING DEC. 14
 8-25-27



**Ministers
of The
Edison Street
Baptist Church**



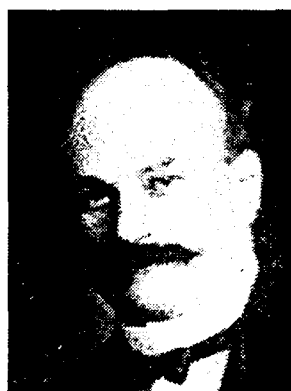
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1979-1984



Rev. Martin
1985-1994



Rev. Williams
1995-

Sing Unto the Lord a New Song

The United States entered the Second World War fourteen years into Peter Saltarelli's pastorate. The new organ was a little over a year old, and the organist and choir director had introduced some innovations into Sunday worship: anthems and introits. The choir was making itself known beyond its own walls by presenting programs at other churches throughout the city, and by at least occasionally joining Pastor Saltarelli in his WBNY radio broadcasts. For the people of the church there was financial stability, and within a year's time another penny-a-meal campaign would be instituted, this time with the purpose of supporting a special fund to pay off the mortgage on the building. More significantly, in 1944 the congregation became entirely self supporting, no longer relying on assistance from the national or local Baptist organizations for its fiscal needs.

No institution in the nation escaped the effects of the war. For the Edison Street church, as with all other public buildings, that meant the development of a detailed plan of the church building and its facilities, including the water supply for firefighting, in the event that hostile air forces were able to overcome distance and defenses and attack targets in the Buffalo area. Such plans may seem like curiosities now, but at the time they were taken very seriously, and for good reason. There was another effect: four members of the church had fought in World War I; fifty-two men and one woman of the church were inducted during World War II, either through the draft or as volunteers into the armed services. They served in all branches, some as enlisted personnel and some as officers. In their honor, a service flag, dedicated on Mothers' Day, 1943, was placed in the sanctuary. Most returned when the war was over. In the memory of one who did not, Jack Hancock, who gave his life in 1944 in the South Pacific, a special memorial fund was established to assist the youth of the church in attending conferences and similar church-related programs.

In 1946, the church, which had been recently redecorated as a result of a two month, 2,500 man-hour effort by the men, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Once

again there was a printed program, though this time instead of advertisements, members and friends of the church made individual and family contributions to its cost. The program includes, in addition to a schedule of the celebration's events, an updated church history, lists of officers, church organizations and meetings illustrated by two pages of photographs, a list of the contributors, an honor roll of those who served in World War II, an 'In Memoriam' page dedicated to members who had passed away, and a prayer composed for the occasion by member Louis Macro.

The celebration began with a historical review and reception on Saturday, September 26. On the next day, Sunday, special services featuring special speakers were held for the Sunday School, for morning worship and for an evening vesper service.. The first pastor, the Rev. Ariel Bellondi returned again to the church he had founded and spoke to the Sunday School, the Rev. Antonio Mangano, the Colgate professor who had been instrumental in recommending Mr. Saltarelli as a candidate for pastor, preached at the 11AM worship, and the Rev. Anthony Vasquez, who led the Italian Baptist Association delivered the vespers message. A supper followed the day's events. Monday brought a celebration as joyous, no doubt, to the congregation. The penny-a-meal campaign had brought in \$5,100, enough to pay off the mortgage. A banquet was held, and the mortgage was ceremoniously burned. The church, for the first time in its history, was debt free.

If there was a downside to the events of 1946, it was represented by something else that appeared in the printed program, the leave-taking message from the Rev. Peter Saltarelli, who was stepping down after twenty years as pastor of the church in which he had been raised, and from which he had answered the call to the ministry. In later years he would return to the church as a visitation minister with the title of Pastor Emeritus. Meanwhile, the congregation would need to seek a new spiritual leader.

It is a commonplace that whoever succeeds a popular pastor, especially one who has served for a many years, does not last long in the position. That was certainly true of Mr. Saltarelli's successor, the Rev. J. Murray Gay, who served only from February, 1947 to the last day of December, 1948 according to the church's official register of pastors (although the Registry of the Northern Baptist Convention gives the dates as 1946, when he worked part-time at the church, to 1949). Mr. Gay, a native of Tennessee and the son of a clergyman, was a graduate of Tufts College, and had just finished his studies at Colgate- Rochester Divinity School when he was ordained at the Edison Street church in June, 1946, at the age of twenty-eight. He

quite obviously had a serious interest in music, for he studied voice part-time at the Eastman School of Music from 1942 to 1948. Whether it was the fact that he followed Mr. Saltarelli's two decades of church leadership - a new pastor in that situation is frequently the object of unfavorable comparisons - or whether his being the first non-Italian to be the permanent pastor required an adjustment that was too difficult for him and for the congregation, little is found in church historical sources by which to remember him. A history prepared for the ninetieth anniversary states only: "Both the Couples Club and the Baptist Youth Fellowship were most under Rev. J. Murray Gay's pastorate." When he left Edison, he moved to California.

Artemas Porter Goodwin was born on his family's farm near Albion, New York in 1900, and attended a one-room schoolhouse. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Colgate University and the Rochester (later Colgate-Rochester) Divinity School. His wife was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Cornell University, who took an active role in his ministries. Mr. Goodwin had served as the pastor of churches in Vernon and Newfane, New York, and was ministering at the Roger Williams Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island when called to the Edison Street church in 1949. He served there for five years, during which time the church grew in numbers and diversity of membership, a nursery was begun during the morning service time, a displaced person was adopted by the congregation, and a parsonage was purchased a few blocks from the church, at 283 Weston Avenue. Significantly, the Board of Deacons, quite probably at the urging of the pastor adopted a statement defining the attributes of good church members. They included: (a) a godly life, (b) regularity of worship, (c) accepting some task in the church and (d) financial support. It was a time of increased activity, such as the church's participation with other nearby Protestant churches in a Good Friday service in 1951, held in a local movie theater and attended by some 700 people, and the conducting of a Discipleship Week in 1953. Both Mr. Goodwin and his wife were given credit for much of what happened. In 1954, Pastor Goodwin accepted a call to the West Baptist Church in Oswego, New York., where he served until his retirement in 1965. Many fond memories went with him to Oswego.

A native of Kings Norton, England, Edison's next pastor, the Rev. Horace Leslie Davey, was educated there and in Canada at Carleton College in Ottawa and at McMaster University in Hamilton. Ordained to the Baptist ministry in 1928, Mr. Davey went to Liberia, where he served as a missionary on a Firestone Rubber Company plantation. While there, he and his wife adopted a native child who had been abandoned in the countryside. During World War II he held chaplaincies in both

British and American air forces. After the war, he returned to Canada and became pastor of the Baptist church in Eastview, Ontario. Subsequently he ministered at the Ellwood United Presbyterian Church in Kenmore, New York, at the Baptist church in Sutton, Quebec, and at the United Presbyterian church in Franklinville, New York. It was from there that he accepted the call to the Edison Street Baptist Church, which he served from 1955 until 1961.

The most obvious reminder of Mr. Davey's years at Edison Street is to be seen in the present appearance of the church, for during that time improvements to the sanctuary and the Sunday School facilities worth some \$75,000 were accomplished. They were planned in 1958 and were completed and dedicated two years later. The prime contractor was a firm owned by a church member, who submitted the lowest of several bids for the job. Physical improvements were not the only things to happen in the church while Mr. Davey was pastor. The Christmas Creche was, it was said, "his inspiration." It was also during his pastorate that the congregation celebrated its sixtieth anniversary. Peter Saltarelli, who had been filling pulpits on a supply basis after his retirement, had returned in his emeritus role, and was thus able to be a pastor at three such commemorations.

Mr. Davey and Mr. Saltarelli apparently made a highly compatible team. Unhappily, it was a team that did not last for many years. In December, 1957 Peter Saltarelli passed away. His admiring colleague and his longtime close friends in the congregation were deeply saddened. In his memory, a new organ, a Hammond Concert model, much larger than the one it replaced, was purchased through gifts from the Saltarelli family, and members and friends of the church. It was dedicated in December, 1959, just two years following Mr. Saltarelli's death. Two more years after that, the church suffered another blow. Pastor Davey, who had been suffering from a long-term serious heart condition, submitted his resignation for reasons of health, effective at the end of December, 1961. He died at a nephew's home in Canada within a month. Of him it was said, "He loved our church and our people, and his love for the late Rev. Peter E. Saltarelli was a joy to all."

The next pastor, the Rev. John Glover, was also destined for a brief tenure on Edison Street. While he was, as a church history states, "instrumental in organizing a Young Adult Group and in starting a Church Memorial Fund," and while he seems to have been well liked by those who later talked about his two year ministry, his theology and his liturgical preferences were moving away from the Baptist Church. One long-time member, who became and remained a close friend, recalled that he

was the first pastor of the church to wear a clerical collar; another mentioned his preference for formality in the morning worship. In September, 1964, he addressed a letter to the congregation announcing his resignation, effective October 22. "It is," he wrote, "imperative because it involves ministerial ethics and my own integrity. For some time now I have found that in increasing degree I am not in accord with Baptist practices, tradition and government....Therefore my ministry will not continue in the Baptist tradition but in the Protestant Episcopal Church." Thus Pastor Glover became Father Glover, and the congregation had once again to search for someone else to be their minister.

The Rev. Frank Rossi grew up in Pennsylvania, and was a graduate of Eastern Baptist College in that state and of the Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia. He was ordained to the Baptist ministry and became pastor of the church at Osbornville, New Jersey in 1957. After two year at that post, he began doing extension work for the New Jersey Baptist Convention with a new congregation at Cranford. If there were intervening assignments, they are not recorded. but in 1965 he was offered a call, which he accepted, to the Edison Street Baptist Church.

Much happened during the thirteen years that Mr. Rossi served as pastor. Attendance and giving increased, the Christian Education programs, including Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and Bible study for people of all ages, were revised and strengthened, leadership training programs inside the church and through attendance at conferences and camps were emphasized, the Key 73 Evangelist Program was begun, "cottage meetings" at members' homes in preparation for Lent were held, a new sound system was installed, and the newsletter, by this time renamed the *Edison Echo*, which had lapsed some years before, was revived. The newsletter now reached out to the larger community, as did the invitation to the Bailey-Delavan Community Services, which organization was invited to use the church's facilities for some of its programs, including a neighborhood nursery school. Pastor Rossi was involved in the merger of the Niagara and Buffalo Baptist Associations into the new American Baptist Churches of the Niagara Frontier. He also was engaged in ecumenical activities, including those involving Roman Catholic churches. While working on all of these projects, he still was, not incidentally, able to preside at the church's seventy-fifth anniversary.

Something that neither Pastor Rossi nor the congregation wanted to happen did so on Saturday, August 26, 1972. While the Rossi family was away at their summer cottage at Chautauqua, gas leaked from a malfunctioning hot water heater in the

basement of the parsonage on Weston Avenue. Having accumulated for some time, it was ignited by a spark or the pilot light, and exploded. The parsonage and its contents were a total loss - "the only thing left standing was the pipes to the bathroom." Other than what they had at Chautauqua, most of the family's possessions: clothing, furnishings and the mementos of their lives together were destroyed in the blast. So were many of the church records, for it was Mr. Rossi's habit to work from the parsonage rather than from the church office, and he had taken many of the records home with him. Their destruction left irreparable gaps in the documentation of the church's history.

Within two months, using money from the fire insurance settlement, and with a mortgage to cover the difference in cost, another parsonage was purchased, this one located at 183 Tudor Road in Cheektowaga. Pastor Rossi expressed his gratitude to the congregation in a letter to the congregation, from which excerpts follow: "Our lives have been wonderfully enriched, as we have been so many times before, by your compassion during the time of our mutual loss of the parsonage and its contents. Today I confess we have witnessed a miracle in the way this congregation has moved, in just two short months, from dismay to the expression of hope in a bright tomorrow. By Christ's own formula...you will receive a hundred-fold return in the love that you have so lavishly bestowed upon us." The new - and still the present - parsonage was fully paid for, and the mortgage burned by 1976.

When Mr. Rossi moved to a church in Painesville Ohio, in 1978, the congregation selected the Rev. Allan McGaw to be their next pastor. Mr. McGaw was born in 1921 in Parry Sound, Ontario, and emigrated with his family to Ohio in 1930. A graduate of Mount Union College in Ohio and of the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, he was ordained in Lakewood, Ohio in 1945, and subsequently ministered at Baptist churches in Maine, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Connecticut and New York. After two years with the American Baptist Fund of Renewal Campaign, he was employed at Cushing Junior College, until it closed in 1978. At that time he decided to return to a local pastorate.

During Mr. McGaw's five years at Edison, the constitution under which the congregation currently operates was adopted, and the Pastoral Relations Committee, designed to facilitate communication between the pastor and the people of the church, was instituted on the recommendation of the American Baptist Convention. Giving to the church and to missions was increased to the point where the congregation became one of the highest in per capita giving among those affiliated

with the American Baptist Convention. Locally, the church's commitment to the Bailey-Delavan Community Services was enhanced with the addition of a neighborhood basketball league. Emphasis was also placed on calling wherever the need existed. In 1980 the membership rolls were reviewed and corrected. The church had been acquiring new members, and the stewardship records indicate a more diverse population, as well as the movement of several of the Italian families to other areas of Western New York, including North Buffalo, the Town of Tonawanda, Orchard Park and Clarence. Some of the new members resulted from the 1975 closing of the Delavan Avenue Baptist Church (and some more would result from the 1985 closing of the Central Park Baptist Church). On the other hand, people who long ago had stopped attending or supporting the church were still carried on the rolls. The corrected list showed 174 active members.

A statement prepared for the American Baptist Churches of the Niagara Frontier in 1980 gives insight into the church and how it perceived itself at that time. "Edison Street Baptist Church is a city church well established in a changing neighborhood," is reported, and went on to discuss the church's demographic, noting a large number of older members without young children, as well as its record of community involvement. It concluded, "The fellowship of the church is strong, with a sense of mutual caring and a welcome to strangers." The demographic situation is clarified by figures printed in the *Echo* the next year, indicating fifteen members over eighty years old, the oldest being ninety-two.

For two years following Mr. McGaw's retirement from the ministry in 1983, the congregation was served by interim pastors, including the Revs. C. Jefferson Griffith, Pierre Tangent and Sharon Harris-Ewing. Meanwhile the members of the Pulpit Committee sought someone to become their permanent spiritual leader. That search came to a successful conclusion in 1985 when the Rev. Richard Martin accepted the call extended to him.

Richard Martin was born in 1941 and grew up in Rockville Indiana. He received the degree of B.S. in Secondary Education from the Indiana State University in Terre Haute, and then his M. Div. from the Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul Minnesota. His first pastorate was in Burlington Iowa; from there he moved to posts in Minneapolis, Walled Lake and Grand Bank, all in Minnesota. In 1977 he became the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Arcade, New York, whence he was called to the Edison Street Baptist Church.

The historical sketch written for the ninetieth anniversary in 1986 has this to say about Mr. Martin's then new ministry:

Rev. Martin began his ministry with us on January 1985. Under his direction, the congregation has been busy building the Kingdom of God. The Grow by Caring Ministry has encouraged church growth in spirit and numbered. Through Rev. Martin's guidance, our association as a church has become stronger with the American Baptist Churches of the Niagara Frontier, the Epiphany United Church of Christ, the Bailey-Delavan Community Services Programs, and other activities for a more effective community witness.

In 1985 the church boiler, which had almost catastrophically failed, was replaced at a cost of almost \$16,000. Collecting the insurance settlement proved almost as difficult a job as the installation of a new boiler. In that same year the church history project, which is described in the Acknowledgments and Sources at the end of this book, was organized and began functioning. In 1987, an Allen organ was installed in the sanctuary, replacing the almost thirty year old Hammond. The new instrument, which cost \$13,500, was like its predecessor dedicated as a memorial to Pastor Saltarelli. On the same day, a set of chimes were dedicated in memory of John and Mary Peruzzi. In other years of Mr. Martin's pastorate, the church participated in the Alive in Mission, whose planning sessions were held at the First Shiloh Baptist Church on Pine Street in the heart of the city's African-American community, helped sponsor the Buffalo Billy Graham Crusade, developed its own lending library of some 200 volumes, extended again its work with the Bailey-Delavan Community Services, adding a "Latchkey" after school child care program, installed new signs and lighting and replaced the old outside neon cross, took part in CROPWALK and became a toy distribution center for the *Buffalo News* Neediest Fund, instituted an Older Members Appreciation Day, and once again accepted the task of hosting the Association of Evangelicals for Italian Missions. It also took an active role in the Baptist Churches of New York State, which became the overall regional American Baptist coordinating agency.

Efforts were instituted to attract new members and to promote more involvement of the existing ones. In 1985 the congregation took part in the American Baptist Convention's Growth by Caring program, intended to strengthen its ministry through witnessing, caring and sharing. The Diaconate began a new member drive in the neighborhood by passing out what they dubbed "Rainbow," brochures explaining the

church's programs, and took part in the ABC's Inviting People to a New Life program by conducting its own Invite a Friend to Church Sunday, this held in March, 1992. The pastor consulted regularly with the membership, and in 1991 reported on the recommendations of a Church Growth Task Force, which suggested an emphasis on three specific areas of the church's ministry: Evangelism, Inward Journey, and Community Outreach.

Finances became and remained a serious concern. As the neighborhood changed, attendance fell - the average in 1979 was 66 people at Sunday worship - and with it, giving to the church also dropped. For 1988 pledges toward the budget were 15% less than projected expenditures, and there was a 10% shortfall in the receipts of those pledges. By 1992, the *Echo* was headlining its budget message URGENT as the downtrend continued. In February of that year, only 84% of the \$62,717 annual budget had been pledged; needed receipts averaged \$1206 per week, and only \$929 was being given. Fortunately, the men of the church handled most of the minor repair and maintenance needs, therefore saving considerable in the costs of those areas, but money was a problem that would continue. In 1994 the budget deficit was 22%.

The events of Mr. Martin's pastorate took place around the celebration of the congregation's ninetieth anniversary. As in earlier years, this one saw the return of former pastors, in this case the Revs. Allan McGaw and Frank Rossi along with their wives, along with visits from members of the families of Pastors Peruzzi and Saltarelli. The featured speaker was the Rev. Dr. Anthony Vasquez, pastor of St. John's Baptist Church in Philadelphia and the long-time president of the Association of Evangelicals for Italian Missions. One especially interesting feature was a tour of the church building, pointing out all of the changes that had been made to it over the years. The festivities concluded with, "See you all at the centennial celebration in 1996."

Mr. Martin left Edison after eight years as pastor, and in April of 1993, just a month before the Association of Evangelicals for Italian Missions met at the church, the Rev. David P. Foulk arrived as interim. During the almost two years when he occupied the pulpit, the church did not, to his and its credit, stand still. The church's programs, including the commitment to the Bailey-Delavan Community Services, continued and expanded. "Pastor Dave" and the members went door to door in the neighborhood to discover the peoples' needs and explain how the church could meet them. The congregational Prayer Tree was revitalized and renamed the Prayer Chain, a Cheer Group was started to visit and conduct worship services in area

nursing homes, the Junior Choir was given a monthly part in morning worship at the church, the senior choir participated in a Fellowship of Choirs with other Baptist churches, and to symbolize their willingness to “come to Jesus” as a regular part of their lives, the congregation began sitting in the front of the sanctuary during Communion. The congregation participated in a series on “Rediscovering the Parables of Christ” with the Southside Baptist Church, and in a joint Good Friday service at the McAlpine Presbyterian Church.

The Search Committee, consisting of eight members of the congregation including the Moderator, was having a difficult time. The changes in the nearby community, which was undergoing the turbulence that also plagued other parts of the city’s East Side, combined with the church’s shaky financial situation, made it necessary to find a candidate who could minister successfully in an unusually challenging situation: a white, still heavily Italian-American body located in what was now an almost totally African-American neighborhood. At least one candidate tentatively accepted the position, then had second thoughts and declined.

After an almost two-year quest for a new pastor, on October 9, 1994 the Rev. E. Darlene Williams was invited to preach at the Sunday morning worship service. On December 12, following a congregational potluck dinner, she met with the officers of the church. A congregational meeting that day confirmed her as the fifteenth regular pastor of the Edison Street Baptist Church. Her formal installation took place on Sunday, May 7, 1995.

E. Darlene Williams is a graduate in Elementary Education from LeMoyne - Owen College in Memphis, Tennessee. After seven years of teaching regular and special elementary classes in the public schools in Anchorage, Alaska, she entered the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, from which she was graduated in 1995, and was ordained at the Second Baptist Church in Mumford New York. At the same time she began looking for a church to serve, the Edison Street congregation was searching for someone to take over its spiritual leadership. The contacts between them began in April, 1995, the month before her graduation from the seminary. That their mutual needs coincided she believes was no accident: “God wanted me to be here,” she later told an interviewer.

Within five months after the new pastor had been installed, a decision was made which it was hoped would cement the church’s commitment to its neighborhood. The adjacent Ursitti-Lang house at 20 Edison Avenue was purchased at the cost of

some \$66,000, with the idea that at some later time the facilities might be used for church purposes such as programs for children, youth and senior citizens. In other words, the Edison Street church was not going to go the way of so many other urban parishes and either close or relocate.

In the personal narrative which accompanied her application to the each committee, Pastor Williams concluded with these words: "I believe that it is the responsibility of the pastor to serve with the people of God. The pastor shares in the responsibility of church education, growth, mission, evangelism, worship, planning, and outreach." In her first article for the *Edison Echo*, she wrote, "The Edison Street Baptist Church is a church which is uniquely blessed by God." Discussing the church's future in an interview with the writer of this history, she spoke of the need to serve its entire constituency - the women, the men, and the children with equal diligence; the need to maintain the historic Italian identity while reaching out to the increasingly African- American population now living the immediate neighborhood; and the need, as the only Baptist church in the area, to "serve as a planter" to convert, to train and to send out people to minister to all of that community. With the new pastor, that new work has already begun.

For the church's hundredth anniversary, a major celebration was planned. Among the highlights: On Friday, October 25, visual and audio displays, and a "Welcome Home Reception" followed by a special program in the sanctuary; on Saturday, October 26, a banquet and program at an area restaurant; on Sunday the 27th, a special Sunday School program reflecting the centennial theme "Pressing Toward the Mark," taken from Philippians 3:14 - "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," then a buffet luncheon followed by a Celebration Worship Service featuring as speaker the Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, Executive Director of National Ministries for the American Baptist Churches. Also planned for the weekend were the dedication of a historical marker jointly sponsored by the church and the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, recognizing the congregation's special place in the history of the region, and the completion and the first distribution of this history.

The Edison Street Baptist Church throughout its hundred years has, as the 96th Psalm commends, sung a new song on many occasions, first as the Protestant voice to Italian immigrants, then to both those original congregants and their American children and neighbors, and now to its new African-American neighbors. It is both

significant and symbolic that a recent baptism of three young people represented all who have heard that song: a descendent of one of the original families, the child of one of the newer white families, and, for the first time ever, an African-American.

Serve the Lord With Gladness

The historic site marker mounted at the entrance to the church hall for its centennial reads as follows:

EDISON STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

Immigrants from Abruzzo, Italy founded the First Italian Baptist Church in 1896 in a building incorporated into this one. They converted to Protestantism in 1885 before coming to the United States beginning in 1887. This was the first congregation of Italian Baptists in the U.S. It adopted its present name in 1934.

Being Italian and being a Baptist is to many people a most unusual combination. There are, in fact over 50,000 Baptists and other Evangelical Christians today in Italy, and there were at one time some 75 Italian Baptist churches in the United States, of which about two dozen still remain as members of the Association of Evangelicals for Italian Mission.

For the members of the church on Edison Street, being an Italian Baptist brought about some interesting stories, of which a few bear repeating here.

A teacher in a class at Kensington High School was having a discussion of ethnic groups and neighborhoods. He asked who in the class was Protestant. When one student who attended the Edison Street church raised his hand, the amazed teacher responded, "Cervi, Italian, Protestant?" An earlier experience was of a student at the former Hutchinson-Central High School. A close friend, who later became the city's first Italian-American mayor, frequently asked, "You're an Italian. How can you be a Protestant?"

Said another, "My Italian friends on the West side, my classmates, were shocked....They couldn't understand me being a Protestant [and] an Italian. They said, "but you're different." What amazed others was the fact that some of the

people of the church were fair skinned, blue eyed and blonde. Their friends told them they didn't look Italian either.

Regarding how well the young people from St. Lawrence parish and those from Edison got along, we have this testimony: "There were never any fights or anything like that. We were best friends with Catholics. Let me stress this....Many of the Catholic boys from St. Lawrence came over to our gym." Another recalled that when she was catering a dinner at St. Lawrence, the priest, noting an unfamiliar face in the kitchen, asked her if she was a member there. When she responded that she went to Edison, he told her that she was a nice lady, anyway. It needs to be remembered in this regard that there were families which had split membership - some members of Edison, others of St. Lawrence. Evidence from interviews indicates that the friction was not great.

While some felt that their Protestant faith made them suspect among fellow workers at some places of employment, and at least one changed jobs because of that, most reported no real difficulty. Like the students, the reaction was usually one of curiosity: Said the colleague of one, "You're the only Italian girl I know that's not Catholic." That colleague later became the neighbor of one of her friend's Edison Street Sunday School classmates. She now knew a second Italian Protestant.

"We assimilated very quickly," commented one member of the church, and she was not mistaken. Italian Nights recreated life in Pescasseroli and Opi, spaghetti dinners remain a tradition, and visual reminders of the Italian heritage abound in the church. Notwithstanding all of those, the members of the Edison Street congregation from the very beginning made their way in and into the majority culture.

Several members of Edison have owned their own businesses, many as contractors and in the fields of construction consulting and management; others have held executive and upper level management positions in national and international corporations. Some have become professionals: lawyers, dentists, accountants, architects, librarians, engineers and pharmacists. Several have been educators, including classroom and special education teachers at very level from kindergarten through university; some have been educational administrators; one was a college president.

There have been labor leaders, politicians, law enforcement and safety personnel, nurses, physiotherapists, health care technicians, cooks, caterers, and computer experts. There have been entertainers, amateur and professional; one was a circus strongman. Members have served in all branches of the military and the church has been especially diligent in sending leadership to the local Baptist associations..

“The church was like a medieval village,” said one member, “the church was the focal point. You were always there.” Recalled another, “...everything was centered around the church... [it] actually was like a big family.” Some who had grown up in the church remembered the restrictions that being a Baptist might impose on one’s social life: “We weren’t allowed to smoke. We weren’t allowed to drink. We weren’t allowed to play cards. It was very puritanical. Totally opposite of what people think of those gay Italians.”

Most often reminiscences have been of the church’s atmosphere: “the warmth; people were real friendly,” “The community was so strong,” and “It’s a nice church, very friendly....People never want to go home.” And perhaps the most telling of all: “Edison served as the foundation of my Christian life.”

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands;
Serve the Lord with gladness;
come before his presence with singing.
Know ye that the Lord, he is God;
it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;
We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter into his gates with thanksgiving;
and into his courts with praise:
be thankful unto him, and bless his name.
For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting;
An his truth endureth to all generations.

Psalm 100

APPENDICES

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This history has relied heavily on the materials collected in 1985 by the Edison Street Baptist Church History Project, directed by Dr. James R. McDonnell, Professor of History at the State University of New York College at Buffalo, with the cooperation of his colleagues Dr. Monroe Fordham, Dr. E. O. Smith and Dr. Carol L. Mc Donnell, and with the assistance of students at the college. As a result of their labors, the existing church records from 1896 to 1985 were microfilmed, and are available on four reels. The project also involved audiotaped interviews with church members, which recently have been transcribed. The microfilms and the interview transcriptions have been an invaluable and necessary source in compiling this book.

The author has benefitted from the cooperation and assistance of the staffs at the following libraries and archives: the Library Learning Center of Niagara County Community College, the Library of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, and the American Baptist Historical Society's Archives in Rochester, New York and Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

A number individuals provided additional information and support. Dr. Joseph Grande graciously shared his knowledge of the history of Buffalo's Italian community; any errors which appear here about that subject are mine, not his. Chief Kenneth Patterson of the Tuscarora Nation provided first-hand insights into the relationship between the Tuscaroras and the Edison Street church. Maria Notar Haynes reviewed the early drafts, and made valuable suggestions for improvement; she also added her perspectives on the history of the church. Fred Ursitti designed and executed the photographic layout for this book. He also assisted in their selection and designed the cover.

The members of the church History Committee, whose names appear in the list of the anniversary committees, provided valuable suggestions, and information, as did the church Clerk, Philomena Paglia.

My sons, Christopher, Alexander and Scott helped me find my way through the wilderness of word processing. My wife, Norma, with her usual good patience put up with the annoyances which happen when a spouse is engaged in writing.

That this book was written was largely due to the efforts of Dr. Ernest Notar. It was he who first suggested that I write it, and throughout he has cheerfully provided additional sources, explanation, direction, and when he thought necessary, some gentle prodding. Without him, it would not have been done.

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HIGHLIGHTS IN EDISON STREET BAPTIST HISTORY

- 1885 Conversion to Protestantism. A courageous few make a beginning.
- 1887 Emigration from Pescasseroli , Italy to Buffalo, New York.
- 1894 Buffalo Baptist Union began working here.
- 1896 First chapel built on present site; congregation founded as First Italian Baptist Church.
- 1900 South wings added. Church admitted to Buffalo Baptist Union.
- 1909 Electric lighting replaced gas lights.
- 1912 Structure rays for construction of Sunday School rooms downstairs. Bell installed in belfry.
- 1925 Expansion planned; building fund campaign launched.
- 1926 Present edifice dedicated.
- 1934 Church incorporated; name changed to Edison Street Baptist
- 1938 Fire in church, followed by extensive remodeling.
- 1940 Installation of new organ.
- 1944 Church became self supporting.
- 1946 Mortgage burning coincides with fiftieth anniversary celebration..
- 1948 Gymnasium opened for general use.
- 1949 Adopted a displaced person after World War II.
- 1950 Parsonage at 283 Weston Avenue purchased.
- 1955 Fiscal year changed to coincide with American Baptist Churches.
- 1958 Interior improvements planned; Improvement Fund launched.
- 1960 Interior improvements dedicated.
- 1969 Mortgage for interior improvements burned .
- 1972 Parsonage destroyed. New parsonage at 183 Tudor Road purchased.
- 1973 Key 73 Evangelistic Program launched.
- 1974 Pledge of \$5,324 made to Upstate Children's Home at Oneonta, NY
- 1976 Parsonage mortgage burned.
- 1978 New sound system installed.
- 1985 Boiler replaced. History project initiated.
- 1986 Ninetieth anniversary celebrated.1987 New Allen organ dedicated..
- 1988 Participation in Billy Graham Crusade
- 1990 New church signs, crosses and lighting installed.
- 1992 Church became toy distribution center for News Neediest Fund.
- 1993 Hosted Association of Evangelicals for Italian Missions.
- 1994 Energy saving lighting installed throughout building.
- 1995 Purchased adjacent Ursitti-Lang properties.
- 1996 Hundredth anniversary celebrated. History published; historic site marker dedicated.

**PASTORS WHO HAVE SERVED
EDISON STREET BAPTIST CHURCH**

Rev. Ariel Bellondi	1896-1899
Rev. Angelo Peruzzi	1988-1902
Rev. Luigi Scelfo	1903-1907; 1909-1912
Rev. Giuseppe Buggelli	1907-1909
Rev. Giovanni B. Castellini	1912-1923
Rev. Frank Cali	1924-1926
Rev. Peter E. Saltarelli	1926-1946
Rev. J. Murray Gay	1947-1948
Rev. Artemas P. Goodwin	1949-1954
Rev. Horace Leslie Davey	1955-1961
Rev. Peter E. Saltarelli, Pastor Emeritus	1955-1957
Rev. John Glover	1962-1964
Rev. Frank M. Rossi	1965-1978
Rev. Allan McGaw	1978-1983
Rev. Richard Martin	1985-1993
Rev. David Faulks, Interim	1993-1994
Rev. E. Darlene Williams	1995-

Church Clerks

Rev. Luigi Scelfo
Leonard Gentile
Bartholomew D'Arcangelo
Nicholas D'Addario
Esther Sabatino
Clara Petrella Notar
Ernest Notar
Diana Notar Anderson
Alice Blackmon
Ines Aloisio Lang
Herbert Curthoys
Georgiana Ursitti Militello
Christine DiPirro
Sandra Notar Mounteney
Flora Summe
Cora Geyer
Philomena Paglia

Treasurers

Antonio Sabatino
Antonio Cimminelli
Pauline Pandolfi
Esther Sabatino
Ralph Daigler
Wendell Chubb

Chairs, Executive Board

Paul Creola
Daniel D'Addario
James Lucas
Santo Militello
Herbert Curthoys
Joseph DiPirro, Jr.
Mildred Saltarelli Tout
Daniel Saltarelli
Ernest Notar

Sunday School Superintendents

Mr. and Mrs. Rob
William B. Robb
Charles Wood
John Peruzzi
Bartholomew D'Arcangelo
Leonard Gentile
Antonio Cervi
William Anderson
Ernest Notar
Jeanette Petrella D'Addario
Paul Creola
John Erisman
Margaret Anderson Lowrey
Carmille Anderson Bauer
Margaret Petrella
Joyc DiPirro
Carl and Carmille Bauer

Financial Secretaries

Alphonse Moscati
Gora Geyer
Betty Wartenberg

Organists/Choir Directors

Cora Estabrook
Elvira Pandolfi Osborn
Dr. Gilbert Schulenberg
Dr. Carol McDonnell
Philip Wright

CHURCH OFFICERS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES, 1996

OFFICERS

Pastor: The Rev. E. Darlene Williams
Executive Board Chair: Ernest Notar
Chair, Board of Deacons: Carl Bauer
Chair, Board of Deaconesses: Suzanne Cervi
Church Clerk: Philomena Paglia
Financial Secretary: Betty Wartenberg
Treasurer: Wendell Chubb
Assistant Treasurer: Harold Robinette
Sunday School Superintendents: Carl and Carmille Bauer

BOARD OF DEACONS

Carl Bauer, Harold Robinette, Donald Cervi
George Anderson, Edmond Sabatino

BOARD OF DEACONESSES

Barbara Ursitti, Lenora Johnson, Suzanne Cervi
Libra Santucci, Betty Wartenberg, Wendy Wallace

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

George Anderson, Harold Wilson, Ernest Notar
Carl Bauer, Carmella Anderson, Wendy Wallace

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Suzanne Cervi, Chris Teetzel, Katherine Paglia
Diana Anderson, Sharon Wetzel

NOMINATING AND PERSONNEL BOARD

Donald Cervi, Carmella Anderson, Edmund Sabatino
Carol Poliner, Miriam Miller, John Erisman

MUSIC COMMITTEE

Barbara Ursitti, Donald Cervi
George Anderson, Carol Poliner

PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Carmella Anderson, Wendell Chubb, Carol Poliner

PULPIT SUPPLY COMMITTEE

Dolores Sabatino, Donald Cervi

AUDITING COMMITTEE

Diana Anderson, Miriam Miller

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

Carl Bauer, Betty Wartenberg
Leonora Johnson, Kathy Patrizi

USHERING COMMITTEE

Wendell Chubb, Ted Wetzel, Howard Wilson
Carl Bauer, John Erisman, Edmund Sabatino

DELEGATES TO NIAGARA AMERICAN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Suzanne Cervi, Donald Cervi

AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN

Betty Wartenberg, Chair

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

George Anderson, Carl Bauer, Co-Chairs

ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEES

General Chairs

Pastor E. Darlene Williams and Carl Bauer

Program Committees

Friday Evening: Pastor Darlene; Suzanne Cervi

Saturday Banquet: Pastor Darlene; George Anderson

Sunday Service: Pastor Darlene; George Anderson; Donald Cervi

Dining Committees

Saturday: Diana Anderson

Sunday: Carmella Anderson

History Committee

Ted Wetzel; Dolores Sabatino; Angelo Cervi; Ernest Notar

Lena D'Arcangelo; Sharon Wetzel; Fred Ursitti

Publicity Committee

Ernest Notar; Mark J. D'Arcangelo; Carl Bauer; Kathy Patrizi

Homecoming Information

Donald Cervi

Invitations/Reservations

Katherine Paglia; Carmille Bauer; Diana Anderson

Typing/Mailing

Philomena Paglia; Miriam Miller

Souvenir Booklet

Pastor Darlene

Anniversary Quilt

Women's Guild

Awards

Diana Anderson

