



PRH
SCHOOLYARD

by MARIA
MERLINO
photos provided
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ST. NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINE PARISH CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

The original St. Nicholas building

834

Cent'anni!



St Nicholas Class of 1938.



St Nicholas Sunday School in 1918



Procession in 1969.

The year 1912 was a leap year. The United States presidential election was in a rare four-way contest with Republican incumbent William Howard Taft versus Democrat Woodrow Wilson, Progressive Theodore Roosevelt and Socialist Eugene V. Debs. It was also the year that Italian Augustinian priests leaped across the ocean at the invitation of Archbishop Patrick Ryan, 2nd Archbishop of Philadelphia. Their mission? To minister to the swelling Italian immigrant population.

In 1898, 14 years prior to that invitation, three Augustinians arrived in South Philadelphia and established a parish called Our Lady of Good Counsel. The Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine purchased a building on the southwest corner of 9th & Watkins Streets, former site of Salem Church of the Evangelical Association of North America, for \$14,500 (about \$300,000 in today's money).

In those early days, the Augustinians of Our Lady of Good Counsel Church administered to the spiritual needs of Italian Catholics who lived between 8th and 12th Streets and south of Market Street as far as the Navy Yard. Although he was only 32

years old, Father John Cerruti was appointed first administrator of the new Mission Chapel, which henceforth was to be known as the Church of St. Nicholas of Tolentine.

Archbishop Edmond Francis Prendergast, who realized that there was a great demand for Italian speaking priests in Philadelphia, upgraded the Mission Chapel to an official parish church by transferring the parish records of Our Lady of Good Counsel Church to St. Nicholas. The administrative priest could now become the pastor.

During these years of active ministry in Philadelphia, the Augustinians in Italy assisted those who wished to immigrate to America. Philadel-

phia needed workers. Construction was booming and the trades were in search of a steady flow of laborers to our city. During the 1920s, Augustinians welcomed Fathers and Brothers from the island of Malta and from Spain. The Sisters of St. Lucy Fillipini taught the schools.

Today, St. Nicholas of Tolentine is designated as an Italian National Parish. If you are Italian or part Italian, regardless of whether you live inside or outside the parish, you can become a member of the Church. Almost a century later, students, from Pre-K to 8th grade, still learn Italian. And every Sunday at 8 a.m., Mass is celebrated in Italian, as it has been for the past 100 years.

A man who has lived his entire life in the parish, Father Nicholas Martorano became its administrator on May 2, 1984. On October 17th of the same year, "Fr. Nick" was confirmed as Pastor of St. Nicholas of Tolentine.

"In the year 2012, our centennial celebration will begin but we are still gathering materials," says Father Nick, who wants to spread the word. "We would love any old photos, documents or scans to add to our archives. We especially would like to find early sacrament photos, or exteriors or interiors of the church."

Fr. Nick, who grew up only blocks

away from the Parish he would eventually oversee, has only fond memories of St. Nicholas of Tolentine.

"It's really a world of its own. Growing up here was like growing up in a village. Music legend Charlie Gracie and comedian Dom Irrera are from this parish. Since we'll be celebrating our 100th anniversary all year long, we're hoping they can make contact or an appearance. What uplifting moments they would be!"

St. Nicholas serves its parishioners in a dual role, religious and cultural. Fr. Nick explains. Every year for the past 75 years, a Procession of Saints winds through the Parish neighborhoods, a tradition that dates back to Church rituals rooted in its European history.

The Procession culminates with a Mass and memorable street festival celebrating all things Italian, from food to history to music.

The Parish looks forward to re-connecting with everyone who has walked its school halls, prayed in its historic Church or enjoys fond memories of a Parish that, to this day, welcomes people from near and far to celebrate its rich spiritual and cultural roots in the heart of South Philadelphia.

Cent Anni! ■

100th ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

January 22nd, 11:00 Mass
St. Nicholas Church,
9th & Watkins Street,
Philadelphia
12:00 Noon Communion Breakfast
The IATSE Ballroom, 2401 S.
Swanson Street,
Philadelphia

April 29th, 2:00 PM - Mass
St. Nicholas Church,
9th & Watkins Street,
Philadelphia
4:30 PM - Centennial Gala
Vie, 600 North Broad Street,
Philadelphia

MEMORABILIA SUBMISSIONS

A commemorative book and film are being prepared in conjunction with the Centennial. The committee is in need of historical materials for this project. Parishioners and former parishioners are asked to search their family collections for interesting photos, video or items that involve important occasions at Saint Nicholas Parish.

Website: www.stnickspbila.com

Contact rectory office for tickets and memorabilia submissions: 215-463-1326