

SALESIAN BEGINNINGS IN NEW YORK.

The extraordinary visitation
of Father Paolo Albera in March 1903

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I. Introduction

On November 14, 1900, the Salesians of Argentina celebrated the silver jubilee of the arrival of Father Giovanni Cagliero (1838-1926) and the first Salesian missionaries in that country. To enhance the festivity of the occasion, Bishop Cagliero — he had become vicar apostolic of northern Patagonia in 1884 — and his fellow Salesians in Argentina invited Father Michele Rua (1837-1910), successor of Father John Bosco as rector major of the Salesians, to come to Buenos Aires. Father Rua sent his regrets, but he used the opportunity also to send an extraordinary visitor to the two American continents, to spend two and a half years visiting every Salesian work and every Salesian confrere and sister between Tierra del Fuego and the United States of America.¹

Father Rua designated as his representative for this important responsibility Father Paolo Albera (1845-1921), a very highly esteemed member of the Salesian superior chapter (general council). Father Albera had joined the Salesians in 1860, a few months after their founding, and following his priestly ordination in 1868 exercised various offices of local responsibility. Don Bosco in 1881 appointed him the first superior of the French province of the Salesian Society. Despite the anticlericalism of the French government, Father Albera successfully fostered the Salesians' development in France from three houses to thirteen in eleven years. Father Albera himself was called "little Don Bosco" because of his zeal and kindly personality.

The Salesians' Sixth General Chapter (1892) elected Father Albera spiritual director general (also called catechist general) of the Society. He was re-elected six years later and would be re-elected again in 1904. Correctly antic-

¹ *Bollettino salesiano* (BS) 24 (1900), 303; *Salesian Bulletin* (English ed. published in Turin), 3 (1900-01), 103.

ipating a long absence in the Americas, he handed over his responsibilities on the superior chapter to Father Giulio Barberis (1847-1927), who had for many years been master of novices general of the Society.²

The Salesian Constitutions provided for the role of extraordinary visitor with the authority of the rector major:

Should it be deemed necessary, the Rector Major shall, with the consent of the Superior Chapter, appoint some Visitors whom he shall charge to visit a certain number of Houses, in cases where the great number of these or the greatness of the distances may so require. Such Visitors or Inspectors shall act in the Rector Major's stead in respect of the Houses and affairs entrusted to them.³

The number and greatness of the houses in the two Americas was self-evident in 1900. It would be more than fifty years more before modern transportation and other conditions would allow a Salesian rector major to visit the New World. Some of Father Albera's concerns as Father Rua's vicar in South and North America for two and a half years were to remind his confreres and sisters in the Americas of the abiding love for them on the part of the successor of Don Bosco; to remind them of their unity with the rest of the Congregation in Europe and the Holy Land; to commend their good work for souls; to encourage them in their difficulties and help them seek solutions; to observe and correct faults; to meet other members of the Salesian family, such as students, past pupils, Cooperators, parishioners, and benefactors; to renew ties with local officials both ecclesiastical and civil; to explore the opportunities of future expansion; and to report his findings, actions, and recommendations to Father Rua and the superior chapter.

Accompanied by his personal secretary, Father Calogero Gusmano (1872-1935), Father Albera sailed to South America in mid-August 1900. They landed at Montevideo on September 7. At the request of Father Rua, Father Gusmano chronicled their trip; parts of his chronicle were published in installments in the *Bollettino salesiano* in its various languages.⁴

From Montevideo and Buenos Aires the pair eventually made their way

² Eugenio VALENTINI and Amedeo RODINÒ, eds., *Dizionario biografico dei Salesiani* (Turin: Ufficio Stampa Salesiano), 1969, pp. 12-13, 29-30; Morand WIRTH, *Don Bosco and the Salesians*, trans. David de Burgh (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1982), pp. 257-62; Dicastero per la Formazione, *Sussidi 3: Per una lettura di Don Bosco. Percorsi di storia salesiana* (Rome: pro manuscripto, 1989), pp. 190-205.

³ *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Turin, 1875), chap. IX, art. 17; Eng. trans. (London: Salesian Press, 1907), p. 85.

⁴ Fr. Gusmano's descriptions of their travels appeared periodically in BS under the title "Il Rappresentante del successore di Don Bosco in America" (sometimes this varies), beginning in Nov. 1900 (24:303-07) and continuing through Aug. 1905 (29:228-31); Eng. ed. "Don

southward through Patagonia to the Salesian missions around the Strait of Magellan and northward through the countries where the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) were active: Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. The vicissitudes of weather, quarantines, and politics prevented their reaching Jamaica, to the chagrin of the confreres there.

They finally set foot on the North American continent at Vera Cruz on January 7, 1903. By February 9 they had completed their visit to the Mexican confreres, sisters, and others and were en route by train from Mexico City to San Francisco. They had a stopover at the border city of El Paso, Texas, where the Jesuits were their hosts. At Los Angeles the U.S. provincial, Father Michele Borghino, and Father Bernard Redahan met them and escorted them to San Francisco, which they reached on the 14th.⁵

Salesian work in the United States had begun in San Francisco in March 1897, and that great port was the residence of the provincial from 1902, when the U.S. province of Saint Philip the Apostle was erected, until 1904, when Father Borghino moved to Troy, New York. By 1903 the Salesians exercised pastoral charge over two Italian parishes in the city, Saints Peter and Paul and Corpus Christi, as well as a parish for Portuguese immigrants in Oakland on the east shore of San Francisco Bay.

The first Italians had come to San Francisco in the gold rush of 1849, mainly from Liguria and Tuscany. By the turn of the century, Campania and Sicily were also well represented. The heart of the Italian community was and still is the North Beach section of the city, where Saints Peter and Paul Church is situated. More than 15,000 Italians lived in the parish in 1903, and each Sunday about 1,400 boys and girls came for catechism lessons and recreational activities, according to Father Gusmano.⁶

Rua's Representative in America," Jan. 1901 (3:143-46) through May 1906 (5:102-03).

A large file in the Salesian Central Archives (ASC) at Rome, ASC R30002 *Viaggi in America*, contains Fr. Gusmano's notebooks and multiple scraps of paper with his jottings and observations about his and Fr. Albera's long journey. On these notes the published articles are based. Fr. Gusmano's script is very fine, many of the notes were made in pencil, and in general his handwriting is extremely difficult to read. He records not only the deeds of the Salesians, sisters, and Cooperators, but he also shows great interest in the geography, history, customs, and other features of the various countries and cities which they visited. It should be noted, though, that he sometimes errs in details; e.g., he calls San Francisco the capital of California (BS 29 [1905], 200; Eng. ed. 5 [1906], 80).

⁵ BS 29 (1905), 173, 199-201; Eng. ed. 5 (1906), 79-81.

⁶ Luciano J. IORIZZO and Salvatore MONDELLO, *The Italian-Americans* (New York: Twayne, 1971), pp. 88, 112-13; Jerre MANGIONE and Ben MORREALE, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 193-99; BS 29 (1905), 200-01; Eng. ed. 5 (1906), 81.

After carrying out his visitation of the three Salesian parishes in San Francisco and Oakland, Father Albera insisted on a side trip to Asti, three hours' ride north of San Francisco, where Piedmontese immigrants had established a flourishing wine industry. On Sunday, March 1, the two Italian visitors boarded a transcontinental train, bound for New York, the last stop of their arduous tour of the two American continents.⁷

II. The New York Context

1. *The City of New York*

The Dutch in 1625 made the first permanent settlement of what would become New York City; they called it New Amsterdam, and it was the capital of their New Netherland colony. From the beginning it was a polyglot city; the future martyr Isaac Jogues passed through the town in 1643 and reported that 18 languages were spoken there. New Amsterdam was a commercial center, tapping the vast resources, especially furs, of the wilderness between its fine harbor and the French settlements of Canada.

In 1664 the English conquered the colony and renamed both city and colony New York. Following the British withdrawal from the newly independent United States after the American Revolution (1783), New York became the national capital until 1790. By 1840 it had surpassed Philadelphia as the economic and cultural center of the nation. Its large, deep, and sheltered harbor, the Erie Canal, and the railroads helped it become the most important city on the North American continent. A continuous flow of immigrants from Europe also made it the largest. The city slowly expanded northward from the southern tip of Manhattan Island; what is now midtown — Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Rockefeller Center, Carnegie Hall, Times Square, the Empire State Building — remained farmland into the 1850s.

Manhattan is separated from the mainland by the Harlem River to the north and the Hudson River on the west, and from Long Island by the East River. Continued immigration and the post-Civil War business boom led in 1874 to the annexation of several towns across the Harlem River in Westchester County. The 1890 federal census recorded 1,515,301 inhabitants of Manhattan; another 806,343 lived in the city of Brooklyn, across the East River.⁸

⁷ BS 29 (1905), 201; Eng. ed. 5 (1906), 81-82.

⁸ Ira ROSENWAIKE, *Population History of New York City* (Syracuse U.P., 1972), p. 58. The federal census may have undercounted considerably. A state census in 1892 showed a population of 1,801,739 in New York, and a comparable variance for Brooklyn; see *ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

New York had 25,400 factories to employ its people and attract more.⁹

On January 1, 1898, the city expanded again, annexing the rest of lower Westchester County, which became the borough and county of the Bronx; all of Kings County, including the city of Brooklyn, henceforth the borough of Brooklyn and Kings County; the western half of Queens County, on Long Island, henceforth both borough and county of Queens (the eastern half became Nassau County); and all of Staten Island (Richmond County), across New York harbor from Manhattan and Brooklyn, separated from Newark and Elizabeth, New Jersey, by the Arthur Kill.¹⁰

Thus when the Salesians arrived in New York in November 1898, the city was comprised of five boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx. The total population in 1900 was 3,437,202, which was 930,000 more people in those places than in the census ten years before.¹¹ Only six of the United States had a larger population. Two-thirds of all the imports to the U.S. came through New York's harbor. By 1900, 69 of the 100 largest corporations in the country were headquartered in New York.¹² The city was bound together by a new subway and elevated railway system and by the first two bridges over the East River (the Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges), engineering feats both. (There had been bridges over the narrow Harlem River since colonial times). A modern reservoir system brought 300,000,000 gallons of fresh water to the city every day.¹³

The years between 1880 and 1914 were the years of peak immigration to the U.S. Almost all the immigrants came from Europe, and the vast majority of them entered through New York. In one typical year, 1903, the immigration center at Ellis Island in New York harbor processed 706,113 persons; the next nineteen busiest centers processed a total of 242,925.¹⁴ Many immigrants stayed in New York, attracted by the availability of work and the ethnic enclaves that flourished all over the city. In 1900 over half of New York's residents were foreign born, 173,000 could not speak any English, and 7% were illiterate even in their own language. By 1910 the city was home to about 4,800,000 people, about half of whom (2,330,000) lived in

⁹ George J. LANKEVICH and Howard B. FURER, *A Brief History of New York City* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Associated Faculty, 1984), pp. 179-80.

¹⁰ The counties are divisions of the state for administrative and governmental purposes; the boroughs are divisions of New York City for similar, but local, purposes. Between 1850 and 1853 Garibaldi resided in the village of Clifton on Staten Island.

¹¹ Rosenwaike, p. 58.

¹² Lankevich and Furer, pp. 192, 180.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 178. The Brooklyn Bridge seems to have awed Fr. Gusmano when he visited New York with Fr. Albera; he describes it in great detail in BS 29 (1905), 230.

¹⁴ Permanent exhibit at Ellis Island National Monument (July 1992).

Manhattan.¹⁵ Of the 4.8 million, 1,944,357 were foreign-born,¹⁶ which was 14.4% of all foreigners in the U.S.¹⁷

2. *The Church in New York*

When John Carroll became the first bishop in the United States in 1790, he estimated there were 35,000 Catholics among the 3,929,214 Americans counted in the first federal census, taken that year. The biggest concentration of Catholics was in Maryland, which had been founded by Lord Baltimore in 1634 as a refuge for English Catholics; the see was therefore established at Baltimore in that state. The immigration of French and Irish Catholics led to the erection of Baltimore as an archdiocese and the establishment of four new dioceses in 1808. One of the new dioceses was New York.

Continued growth, especially from Irish and German immigration, required the division of the New York diocese in 1847, with the erection of new sees at Albany (the state capital) and Buffalo. Three years later Pius IX made New York a metropolitan see; the new archdiocese was further divided in 1853, when Newark, New Jersey, and Brooklyn, New York, became dioceses, including all of New Jersey and Long Island, respectively, in their territories. The boundaries of the archdiocese of New York from 1853 thus have included thirteen counties of New York State: within the city of New York, the boroughs of Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx; and ten upstate counties.¹⁸

The overwhelming presence of the Irish in the American Church, especially along the eastern seaboard, meant a predominantly Irish clergy. Of the ten bishops and archbishops of New York from 1808 to the present (1996), nine have been Irish-born or of Irish descent.¹⁹ A survey of the Catholic directories for the turn of the century shows that perhaps three out of four priests in New York fit that same pattern.²⁰

¹⁵ Lankevich and Furer, pp. 189, 204-05.

¹⁶ Rosenwaik, p. 93.

¹⁷ *The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Basic, 1976), p. 14, table A 105-118, reports the total foreign-born population of the country as 13,515,886.

¹⁸ Florence D. COHALAN, *A Popular History of the Archdiocese of New York* (Yonkers, N.Y.: U.S. Catholic Historical Society, 1983), pp. 71-72, which also notes a minor adjustment in the Albany-New York boundary late in the 19th century.

¹⁹ Namely, Bp. R. Luke Concanen, OP, Bp. John Connolly, OP, Abp. John Hughes, Card. John McCloskey, Abp. Michael Augustine Corrigan, and Cardinals John Farley, Patrick Hayes, Francis Spellman, Terence Cooke, and John J. O'Connor. The lone exception was the Frenchman John Dubois, SS, bishop from 1826 to 1842.

²⁰ *The Catholic Directory, Almanac and Clergy List* (M.H. Wiltzius Co.), published annually, was regarded as the "official" directory of the United States and Canada. It is the ancestor of today's *Official Catholic Directory* published by P.J. Kenedy & Sons. Cited hereafter as CD.

At the same time, the large numbers of non-Irish immigrants were not being neglected in New York (in contrast to many other dioceses). The *Catholic Directory* for 1900 shows in Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx twelve churches, chapels, or missions for Italians, eleven churches for Germans, three for Poles, and one each for Bohemians, Canadians, French, Hungarians, Maronites, and Slovaks. In addition, one parish was designated as “English and German” and one was for “colored people.” Many, if not most, of these national parishes or chaplaincies were cared for by priests of their own nationality. Among the religious orders administering them were the Franciscans, Jesuits, Redemptorists, and Scalabrinians. But rapid demographic change in certain neighborhoods often left Irish pastors, like Father Patrick F. McSweeney of Saint Brigid’s Church (121 Avenue B, corner of 8th Street) and Father Thomas McLaughlin of the Church of the Transfiguration (23 Mott Street, corner of Park Street — since renamed Mosco Street), at a loss as their “English” (i.e., mostly Irish) parishioners moved uptown or to the suburbs, and southern and eastern Europeans (and some Chinese) moved in.

Transfiguration once had 13,000 English-speaking parishioners and “was the most flourishing Irish parish in the whole of the American continent. Mott street was the Irish Broadway and Transfiguration Church the centre of Irish refinement and devotion. Since that time the population of the parish has completely changed in nationality.”²¹ A parish census, circa 1895, counted only 1,257 English-speakers, while Italians numbered over 8,000 (many of whom were worshipping at Saint Joachim or Most Precious Blood, Italian parishes served by the Scalabrinians).²² The baptismal register of the church shows that in 1900 there were 74 baptisms of Italians, 24 Irish, and 3 Chinese, and in 1901, 83 Italians, 36 Irish, and 8 Germans, Chinese, or other nationalities; in addition a “supplemental” register for the basement church, where an Italian congregation worshipped separately, records 113 more Italian baptisms in 1901.

At the Church of the Immaculate Conception (511 E. 14th Street, near Avenue B), Irish-born Monsignor John F. Edwards as early as December 1896 distributed flyers printed in Italian with detailed information about all the parish services and the availability of an Italian-speaking assistant pastor. In the wake of the recent Columbian fervor (1492-1892), he appealed to their patriotism too: “This country was discovered by the Italian Christopher

²¹ *The Catholic News* (the archdiocesan newspaper), vol. 17, Feb. 28, 1903, p. 18.

²² *Transfiguration Church: a church of immigrants, 1827-1977* (New York: Park, n.d.), p. 16. The Salesians’ chronicle for 1902 already notes that the parish was in “Città Cinese”: see *Cronaca della Casa Salesiana e Chiesa di Maria Ausiliatrice* [1898-1939], part I, p. 6. Cited hereafter as *Cronaca*, part I indicating the handwritten first 57 pages, and part II the typewritten second section, pages numbered 1-16 (continuing handwritten to p. 31).

Columbus, a Catholic who practiced his religion, and the Italians in America ought to imitate him.”²³

Monsignor Edwards’s neighbor at Saint Brigid’s Church, Father McSweeney, did not seem able to draw the Italians of his parish to church. As we shall see, when the Salesians arrived at Saint Brigid’s they fared no better at first. Father McSweeney tried taking the church to the Italians, so to say, with a “street mission” on 11th Street near Avenue A “in hope that it will make some impression on them. We will have Latin hymns Litany B.V. + addresses.”²⁴ A month later he was proposing to Archbishop Corrigan that a chapel be built for the Italians of his parish and Immaculate Conception:

I want to suggest to Your Grace a plan by which provision *might* possibly be made for the Italians of the contiguous parishes of the Immaculate Conception and St Brigid’s, without incurring expense for *land*, which is generally the prohibitive item.

This: to put up a cheap frame or corrugated iron barn like chapel *over* the grave stones in the centre of the 12th Str. Cemetery — far apart from all other buildings. I am not sure of the practicability of this; but I think it is worth considering + submitting to the judgement of an architect. Perhaps a light building could be constructed without digging at all and so any possible objections of grave owners would be met. ... As the building would be detached + even far away from all other houses, the city might permit it to be of frame. I have no doubt but some good is done by street preaching; but, of course, in this climate it is impracticable except in Summer, the late Spring or the early Fall.²⁵

²³ “Questo è il paese scoperto dall’Italiano Cristoforo Colombo, un Cattolico che praticava la sua religione, e l’Italiano in America deve imitare lui.” Flyer dated feast of the Immaculate Conception 1896; another undated flyer or advertisement: both in the New York Archdiocesan Archives (NYAA), D-4.

Edwards (1833-1922) emigrated from County Clare, Ireland, to Connecticut at age 16 with his father. After moving to New York, he was educated by the Jesuits and remained with them as a teacher for 7 years until he entered the archdiocesan seminary at Troy, N.Y. Upon his ordination in 1866, Abp. McCloskey appointed him to the seminary faculty. After 7 years he was made pastor of Immaculate Conception, where he served 33 years. Card. Farley moved him to St. Joseph’s Church on Sixth Avenue as pastor in 1907. See Philip PASCUCI, “Once Upon a Time in Old New York,” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 3, no. 1 (spring 1992), 16, n. 35.

²⁴ McSweeney to Corrigan, [New York], Sept. 29, 1898 (NYAA D13).

McSweeney (1838?-1907) hailed from Ireland’s County Cork and emigrated to New York in 1849. By the time of his ordination in 1862 he had earned doctorates in both philosophy and theology at the Propaganda Fide College in Rome. He served assistant pastorships in New York City and was pastor in two upstate parishes before his appointment to St. Brigid’s in 1877. Pius X named him a monsignor in 1904. See U.S. CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY, *Historical Records and Studies*, vol. 5, part I (New York, 1909), pp. 235-36; vol. 6, part II (New York, 1913), p. 169; these two sources disagree between themselves whether McSweeney was born in 1838 or 1839. He was “one of the oldest members” of the U.S. Catholic Historical Society (5:235).

²⁵ McSweeney to Corrigan, New York, Oct. 24, 1898 (NYAA D-13).

Nothing came of this proposal until ten years later, when that very site was to be chosen not for a cheap building for the worship of a handful of church-going Italians but for a magnificent church for a flourishing Italian parish.

Archbishop Corrigan, who had done much to provide for the spiritual and material needs of the immigrants, died on May 5, 1902, just four days after the Salesians officially assumed charge of the Church of the Transfiguration. He was succeeded by his auxiliary and vicar general, Bishop John M. Farley, on September 15, 1902.

3. *Italians in New York*

Immigration to the United States has run in waves. The wave that began around 1880 and ran until 1924, when a very restrictive law ended it, flowed from southern and eastern Europe, bringing to America millions of Italians, Greeks, Poles, Slovaks, Jews, and others. In 1881 Italians made up 2.3% of total U.S. immigration; in 1901 they were 27.9%.²⁶

The federal census of 1880 recorded 44,230 Italians living in the entire U.S., 12,000 in New York; these were mostly from northern Italy. The 1910 census reported 1,343,000 in the country, 544,449 in New York; the vast majority of these came from southern Italy. More specifically: between 1899 and 1910, 2,300,000 Italians immigrated; 1,900,000 were from the South. Between 1890 and 1910, the percentage of Italians (by birth or by parentage) in the total New York City population increased from 5% to 11%.²⁷ The migration of southern Italians to America “has been labeled the ‘greatest and most sustained’ population movement from one country to another.”²⁸

In contrast with the more established national groups whose waves of immigration had preceded theirs — the English, Germans, and Irish, for example — and with the Jews, who began to immigrate in masses at roughly the same time, two things were distinct about the Italians. First, between 1880 and 1910 Italian immigration was predominantly of single males, a great number of whom did not mean to remain in the U.S. but to make some money and go home. Although 2,976,000 Italians entered the country between 1880 and 1910, and 44,230 were here prior to that, only 1,343,000 Italians were present for the 1910 census, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. This pattern began to change around 1910.²⁹ Precise statistics are not available before

²⁶ Nathan GLAZER and Daniel Patrick MOYNIHAN, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1970), pp. 184-86; Rosenwaike, p. 203.

²⁷ Cohalan, p. 187.

²⁸ Lankevich and Furer, p. 175, without identifying their source.

²⁹ Glazer and Moynihan, pp. 184-85. *The Statistical History of the United States*, loc.

1908, but one estimate is that 45.6% of all Italian immigrants between 1880 and 1924 returned to Italy to stay;³⁰ in some years, according to another study, as many as 73 Italians returned for every 100 who arrived.³¹

Second, the Italians lived not only in distinct neighborhoods of the city, like other groups, but in neighborhoods distinguished by province or even village of origin, and these neighborhoods, unlike those of other nationalities, underwent almost no change in character until after the Second World War. For example, Mulberry Street (Transfiguration and Saint Joachim parishes) was Neapolitan, Baxter Street (Most Precious Blood parish) was Genoese, and Elizabeth Street (Our Lady of Loretto parish) was Sicilian.³²

Despite the presence of so many single males in the early years of Italian immigration, there was a strong sense of kinship among the Italians and sufficient family presence to mark them as one of the immigrant groups least likely to turn to crime or prostitution or to become a financial burden to the public, e.g., by being committed to an almshouse or charity hospital — contrary to the stereotyped reputation from which they suffered. In addition to kinship, the presence of Italian priests and religious and the proliferation of mutual aid societies were important factors in this kind of stability.³³

The influx of Italians and other Catholics from southern and eastern Europe created a pastoral problem for the Irish clergy of the United States. The Irish, who had begun to come to America by the tens of thousands in the 1840s, were already well established in politics and the best jobs. Antagonism with them over work and cultural differences carried over to the religious sphere.³⁴ For instance, Father McSweeney of Saint Brigid's parish, as we have already noted, was honestly trying to provide for the thousands of Italians who lived in his parish, even to the point of proposing to Archbishop Corrigan that a separate chapel be erected for the Italians. But he proposed the separation because:

cit., shows that in 1910 foreign-born white males outnumbered foreign-born white females by 1,702,031. The trend among almost all immigrant groups was that the first wave was of young men (fathers or eldest sons), who would send for other members of the family once they had established themselves. Between 1899 and 1924, the male to female ratio among Italian immigrants was 3-1; before 1899 it was even higher, e.g. 88% male in 1882-1883. Except among certain ethnic groups, e.g., the Irish, it was very rare for an unaccompanied female to immigrate. See Thomas J. ARCHDEACON, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: Free Press, 1983), pp. 136-37; Thomas KESSNER, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford, 1977), pp. 30-31; Maldwyn Allen JONES, *American Immigration* (Univ. of Chicago, 1960), pp. 180-81.

³⁰ Archdeacon, pp. 118 (Table V-3), 139.

³¹ Kessner, p. 28.

³² Lankevich and Furer, p. 176; Glazer and Moynihan, p. 186; CDs for parish addresses.

³³ Lankevich and Furer, p. 179.

³⁴ For examples of antagonism, see Iorizzo and Mondello, pp. 182-83.

It does seem as if it were necessary to have separate churches or chapels for Italians, as they cannot well be mixed with other nationalities on account of their filthy condition + habits, even if they were willing to come themselves.³⁵

It is not surprising, then, that Protestant missionaries initially made strong inroads in the Italian community, as they are doing today among Spanish-speaking immigrants. Other Italians simply stayed away from church and sacraments. Nor, once Italian priests and religious came to minister to them, were the Italian immigrants quick to provide priests from among their own sons who might one day become Church leaders. It was not until 1954 that the U.S. got its first Italian-American bishop, Joseph M. Pernicone (1903-1985), an auxiliary of the New York archdiocese.³⁶ But by 1994 the U.S. hierarchy looked radically different: although Irish names still outnumbered those of any other nationality, the list included two cardinals, at least one archbishop, and about sixteen bishops of Italian descent, and a great many Hispanic, German, French, Polish and other Slavic names, as well as blacks and at least one American Indian.³⁷ The rise of Italian-Americans to positions of leadership in the Church has paralleled their rise in politics and business.

III. The Salesians in New York

1. *Arrival and Initial Efforts*

As early as 1883 Cardinal John McCloskey, through his secretary Archbishop Michael Augustine Corrigan, wrote to Don Bosco to ask for Salesians to minister to the Italians of New York. While in Rome at the end of that year, the Cardinal followed up his letter by seeking a meeting with the Saint. But Don Bosco was more concerned about sending Salesians to South America at that time.³⁸

³⁵ McSweeney to Corrigan, New York, Oct. 24, 1898 (NYAA D-13).

³⁶ Glazer and Moynihan, pp. 202-04.

³⁷ *The Official Catholic Directory...1994* (N.p.: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1994), pp. LXXII-LXXV. Generally, I have used surnames to make a judgment about national origin; in some instances I know it from other sources.

³⁸ See Pascucci, pp. 6-8; Stephen Michael Di GIOVANNI, *Archbishop Corrigan and the Italian Immigrants* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994), pp. 114, 164. Unfortunately Eugenio CERIA, *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, vols. 16-17 (Turin: SEI, 1935-36), covering 1883-85, makes no mention of these contacts. Fr. Pascucci's article, after touching on the earlier background, deals mainly with the period 1897-1902. So does Fr. Di Giovanni in the six pages (164-70) he gives to the Salesians. Fr. Pascucci also offers biographical sketches of most of the personages he mentions. See also Eugenio CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana 2* (Turin: SEI, 1943), 686.

As archbishop of New York (1885-1902), Corrigan persisted, and the first Salesians arrived in New York on November 26, 1898.³⁹ They were three: Father Ernesto Coppo, the superior, Father Marcellino Scagliola, and the coadjutor Brother Faustino Squassoni.

Father Coppo, born at Rosignano (Alessandria), Italy, on February 6, 1870, had met Don Bosco while studying at the Salesian school at Borgo San Martino. He became a diocesan priest but soon thereafter decided he would like to be a Salesian. He made his profession in 1894 and just four years later Father Michele Rua, Don Bosco's successor, chose him to direct the pioneer New York community. When the new community of Troy was opened he went there as director (1904-1905), then returned to New York as director and pastor at Transfiguration Church. He was later appointed provincial of the United States (1911-1919) and vicar apostolic of Kimberly, Australia (1922-1927). He died at Ivrea in Piedmont on December 28, 1948.⁴⁰

Father Scagliola (1843-1931), too, was from the province of Alessandria. He became a Salesian in 1869, went to Argentina on mission, and was ordained at Buenos Aires in 1878. He worked there and in Rosario, the Falkland Islands, and Spain before being sent to New York. During 1902 he returned to his native province; the house chronicle makes no mention of his departure. He later labored in Mexico, where he died at Guadalajara. Writing his obituary letter, his provincial, Father Luigi Pedemonte, called him an indefatigable worker and noted that many sought him out as a confessor.⁴¹

Brother Squassoni (1871-1922) came from the area of Brescia, Italy. He professed his vows in October 1898, and a month later found himself in a

³⁹ *Cronaca*, part I, p. 1. They were given a warm welcome and very valuable assistance by Msgr. Edwards. BS 24 (1900), 281, and all narratives dependent upon it report the date of the Salesians' landing as Nov. 28, 1898, but both parts of the *Cronaca* clearly say Nov. 26. It is possible, though not likely, that both dates are correct: if their steamship entered the harbor on the 26th but they did not land until the 28th; or if they disembarked at the Ellis Island immigration center on the 26th and were not cleared for admission and transport to Manhattan until the 28th. Except for undocumented persons or those suspected of having some medical or other condition that would forbid their admission, normal practice was for immigrants to be cleared in a single day.

⁴⁰ *Dizionario biografico dei Salesiani*, p. 96; Eugenio VALENTINI, ed., *Profili di Missionari* (Rome: LAS, 1975), pp. 282-84; Pascucci, pp. 14-15, n. 32; "Bishop Coppo Dies," *Don Bosco Messenger* 37 (Mar.-Apr. 1949), 20-21, 24; Brother RAPHAEL, "A Pioneer Salesian," *Salesian Bulletin* (U.S. ed.) 20 (Sept.-Oct. 1967), 22-24.

Troy is situated on the east bank of the Hudson River about 150 miles north of New York City. On the opening of a Salesian school and novitiate there, see Ceria, *Annali* 3 (Turin: SEI, 1945), 361-63.

⁴¹ Pascucci, p. 15, n. 33; 1903 *Elenco generale della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (the annual international directory published non-commercially at Salesian general headquarters, hereafter referred to simply as "directory").

new country! He was a simple and humble religious but suffered from weak health. He returned to Italy in 1915, serving at Don Bosco's original Oratory in Turin and at Chieri before his premature death.⁴²

Without a church of their own, the three Salesians worked at the basement church of Saint Brigid's Church; they lived in a tenement apartment about five blocks away at 315 East 12th Street, between 1st and 2nd Avenues. Hungarian Catholics also used the basement church. In 1896 it was estimated that there were 60 Italian families within Saint Brigid's boundaries, mostly Sicilians and Neapolitans. Two years later Father McSweeney informed the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith — the U.S. was still officially a mission country, subject to that curial body, until 1908 — that he had about 1,000 Italians in his parish. The wider area, including the parishes of Immaculate Conception, Saint Ann (112 E. 12th Street), Nativity (46 2nd Avenue), and Saint Rose (36 Cannon Street), was home to about 10,000 Italians.⁴³

The Salesians quickly found out that, initially, very few of their countrymen were interested in practicing the faith.⁴⁴ The archbishop expressed his gratitude to Father Rua in a letter some six weeks after the missionaries' arrival: gratitude that the Salesians had come to his diocese to care for the endangered Italians, gratitude for the efforts that the three missionaries were making; for example, they went personally to every Italian household in the area to visit the people and invite them to the Italian Christmas Mass. If their initial efforts showed meager results, the archbishop was confident that their priestly zeal would eventually win over their compatriots.⁴⁵

Zeal meant long hours and hard work. Although Father Coppo seems to have written fairly often to Father Rua,⁴⁶ surviving letters from him and the

⁴² Pascucci, pp. 15-16, n. 34.

⁴³ Di Giovanni, pp. 167-68.

⁴⁴ *Cronaca*, part I, pp. 2-3; Pascucci, pp. 18-19. See also CERIA, *Annali* 2:687.

⁴⁵ Corrigan to Rua, New York, Jan. 5, 1899, (ASC 38.CA 9807, fol. 3319 B8). There is a copy of a flier of uncertain date, "Avviso agli Italiani," distributed by the Salesians during this period, telling the Italians where the Salesians lived and that they could call on them at any time, advising them that their souls are their greatest treasures in the world, etc., and informing them of the hours of confessions, Mass, religious instruction, and benediction in the basement church of St. Brigid. See ASC 38(72).3319 D7.

⁴⁶ Many of Fr. Rua's letters to him acknowledge receipt of a recent letter from him. See the collection in the archives of the New Rochelle Province: Provincials, Borghino Folder 1.

The archives of the New Rochelle Province include a mass of material, mostly correspondence, organized under the name of the provincial in office at the time, approximately; thus all of Fr. Rua's 42 surviving letters and notes to Fr. Coppo between 1900 and 1909 are in the Borghino section in the first folder: NR.PROV.BORG.FOL. 1. I shall abbreviate this material as "NRP Borg" followed by the folder number. Other material is organized by house, e.g., the house chronicles, statistical reports, building plans. The photo archive has been completely catalogued. And, of course, there are personnel files, provincial chapter files, etc.

other pioneer Salesians in New York are few, many of them hastily written, and the house chronicle was barely kept.

Various letters detail the work of the missionaries. An outstanding example of such letters was published in the *Bollettino salesiano* of October 1900.⁴⁷ This letter from Father Coppo, addressed to Father Rua, is dated June 8, 1900. He describes New York, the Church's situation there, and the Salesians' arrival a year and a half earlier; he recounts their difficulties and those of the Italians in general; he details their work load, including not only preaching, catechism, administration of the sacraments, home visitations, and the promotion of various associations in the parish, but also hospital visitations, chaplaincies to sisters' convents and the Christian Brothers, and attention to the particular needs of Italians just arriving from Europe; he reports the fruits which all that work has borne. In other letters he narrates his travels to various cities in the Northeast, preaching missions among the Italians.

The letters from North America often refer to the need for reinforcements. In May 1899 Father Coppo wrote to a woman in Italy⁴⁸ acknowledging the great amount of work and noting that another priest would be very helpful for the salvation of thousands of poor Italians. It seems that the lady had inquired of Father Coppo whether a priest friend of hers might come to live and work with the Salesians. Father Coppo replies that the Salesians have few Mass intentions and little other support; hence it will be difficult for a priest to live unless he accepts obedience. He also expresses his concern that a secular priest might not be able to adapt to community life. He wants some proof of the priest's piety and obedience, and he wonders how well he knows Italy. This priest had been in America previously and then gone back to Italy, and Father Coppo wonders why. That hint, and the mention that this priest had come to America with his sister and with another person makes one wonder whether it might be Father Michelangelo Mauro, of whom more will be said; but Father Coppo seems to refer to him as "M.K." and also refers to "the bishop of Jersey City" (presumably the bishop of Newark, in whose diocese Jersey City is located), apparently in connection with this priest. Perhaps, says Father Coppo, the Salesians will be able to take him in.

But a few months later Father Coppo writes to Father Giulio Barberis, the Society's master of novices general, concerning a Father Karam,⁴⁹ who

⁴⁷ BS 24 (1900), 281-83; excerpts in Eng. ed., 3 (1901), 212-13. This letter is the source for much of Fr. Ceria's sketch in the *Annali* 2:687-89.

⁴⁸ Coppo to M.B. Signora, New York, May 25, 1899 (ASC 38.CA 9807 fol. 3319 B10-12/C1-5). A blue-pencil notation at the top of the first page apparently identifies the addressee as Brigida Hechtel.

⁴⁹ Coppo to Barberis, New York, Aug. 11, 1899 (ASC 38.CA 9807 fol. 3319 C6-9). The

came (he does not say whence) with a letter of recommendation. Father Coppo was inclined to accept him into the community as a collaborator, but he preferred a smaller field of work. So Father Coppo wrote him a recommendation to Bishop Michael Tierney of Hartford, Connecticut. Then he asks Father Barberis to find a good seminarian to send them in New York, for Father Barberis knows their needs.

Just two weeks later Father Coppo is writing to Father Barberis again. Much of the letter concerns the community's finances, but he returns to the need for help. Specifically, he requests a seminarian to help Brother Squasoni with his duties, to teach the aspirants, and to give good example, and another priest, especially to help preach missions to the Italians, which have been very profitable to souls.⁵⁰ Father Coppo was preaching many missions in the New York area and elsewhere.

The need for more help was reinforced by Archbishop Corrigan a few months later. He pleaded with Father Rua to send two or three more priests:

In view of the ever growing need to provide as much as possible for the Italians, I am taking the liberty to beg you to find a way of sending two or three more Salesian priests to New York. I am sure that I will find enough work for them, and furthermore that I will be satisfied with the results of the mission that I will give them.

In the hope that you will graciously acquiesce, I thank you and assure you of my deep respect.⁵¹

A notation on the archbishop's letter indicates that a reply was sent on February 16: Two new priests were being sent, and Father Rua invited the archbishop to visit him at the Oratory in May during the prelate's trip to Italy.

Like the archbishop's persistence in seeking Salesians, the missionaries' persistence in seeking the souls of the Italians paid off. By 1900 they had a regular congregation of about 2,000 attending four Sunday Masses; there were catechism classes, parish societies, and a weekly newsletter. They also had chaplaincies with several religious communities and one of the city jails, preached

priest's name is hard to make out because of Fr. Coppo's haste in writing it, and therefore the spelling is uncertain.

⁵⁰ Coppo to Barberis, New York, Aug. 25, 1899 (ASC 38.CA 9807 fol. 3319 C10-12/D1-6). As will be mentioned, the little community had already begun to take in candidates or aspirants to the Salesian life.

⁵¹ Corrigan to Rua, New York, Jan. 30, 1900 (ASC 38.CA 9807 fol. 3319 D8): "In vista del bisogno sempre crescente di provvedere per quanto possibile agl'Italiani, mi prendo la libertà pregarla perché faccia il meglio possibile per inviare in New York altri due o tre Padri Salesiani. Io sono sicuro che troverò ampio [sic] lavoro per essi, e di più sarò tranquillo sul risultato della missione che ad essi assegnerò".

"Nella speranza che la P.^a V.^a vorrà gentilmente annuire alla mia domanda, con ringraziamenti e con sensi di profonda stima ho il piacere rafferarmi..."

missions to Italian congregations all over the city, and ministered on a regular basis to the Italians of the Church of the Epiphany (239 E. 21st Street).⁵²

One measure of the Salesians' success in winning their countrymen back to the practice of their faith is the sacramental statistics from the basement church of Saint Brigid, which show a year by year increase:

	Marriages	Baptisms
1899	61	79
1900	84	320
1901	187	488
1902	214	553
Total	546	1,538

Fr. Coppo also reported two conversions from Judaism. Countersigning the report, Father McSweeney noted: "These mar. + baptisms are from all parts of N. York City."⁵³

On June 9, 1899, the little Salesian community had grown by one with the admission of an aspirant, the secular priest Father Paolino Sapienza, who lived with the community until the autumn of 1901, when he went to White Plains, New York. A letter from Archbishop Corrigan to Bishop Charles McDonnell of Brooklyn testifies that he is "a good priest" and the archbishop knows of nothing against him. There is no indication that he resided in the Brooklyn diocese, but since there were many Italians there, perhaps he did some ministry among them.⁵⁴

On February 18, 1900, the Salesian community became six in number

⁵² Di Giovanni, p. 168; *Cronaca*, part I, pp. 3-6; part II, p. 3. The *Cronaca* and the already cited letter published in BS 24 (1900), 281-83, contain many references to chaplaincies and missions. On the prison chaplaincy, see a letter Corrigan to Warden Pickett, New York, Dec. 9, 1901 (NYAA G-16). On Epiphany parish, see *Cronaca*, part II, p. 4; letters Coppo to Corrigan, New York, July 16, 1901, and April 22, 1902 (NYAA G-17), and Coppo to Farley, New York, May 23, 1902 (NYAA I-5).

⁵³ Report in NYAA D-13 on letterhead of the Church of the Transfiguration (crossed out except for the bracketed words following), with "Basement of St Brigid Church and Chapel of the [Salesian Fathers of Don Bosco] in E. 12th St" written in. The report is dated Jan. 20, 1902, which must mean 1903 since it reports data from 1902 and the Salesians did not move to Transfiguration until May 1902.

⁵⁴ The *Cronaca* (part I, pp. 4-5; part II, pp. 2, 4) records Fr. Sapienza's arrival and his departure to White Plains. The CD for 1901, which indicates assignments at the end of 1900, lists him as chaplain of the Convent of Our Lady of Good Counsel — motherhouse, novitiate, and "farm" for 260 girls (pp. 108, 112). In the three following years he is indexed in the CD as being at White Plains, but there are no listings for him. He is absent entirely from the 1905 CD. The Corrigan letter, Sept. 18, 1901, is in NYAA G-16.

White Plains, the county seat of Westchester County, is about 20 miles north of midtown New York.

with the arrival of Vincentian Father Vincenzo Bertolino and Salesian seminarian Brother Giovanni Ferrazza.⁵⁵

Father Bertolino had been educated by the Salesians in Genoa and had worked previously in the U.S., possibly as a chaplain among the Italians at White Plains. After returning to New York from Italy with Brother Ferrazza, he assisted newly arrived immigrants, using the 12th Street apartment as his headquarters after the Salesians had moved to Transfiguration. He also performed priestly ministry at that parish in 1902. Poor health induced him to go to the Salesians in California — probably at the beginning of October 1902 — but instead of improving he got worse. So he returned to New York early in November 1903, where he died on November 12, assisted by Father Piovano and others.⁵⁶

Brother Ferrazza may have been Father Giulio Barberis's positive answer to Father Coppo's pleas for a seminarian. He was to study theology while assisting his confreres in their various ministries. He was no youth. He had been born at Bocenago (Trento) in 1858, became a Salesian aspirant at Parma in 1896, and completed his novitiate and philosophical studies at Ivrea before sailing for New York. He was ordained a priest at Saint Patrick Cathedral by Archbishop John Farley on June 6, 1903. In 1904, when Father Coppo went to Troy as director, Father Ferrazza became director of the New York community, and on Father Coppo's return in 1905, both were director-pastors of distinct communities in New York: Father Coppo at Transfiguration and Father Ferrazza of the Italians at Saint Brigid's. As Saint Brigid's mission evolved into the Italian parish of Mary Help of Christians on East 12th Street, Father Ferrazza became the founding pastor of that church. Later he was pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Port Chester, New York, where he died in 1921, distinguished for his priestly zeal.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Cronaca*, part I, p. 5; part II, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Cronaca*, part I, p. 5. The CDs for 1901 and 1902 list him as a Salesian, but the *Cronaca* (part II, p. 3), tells us, "D.V. Bertolino era Sacerdote della Missione ordinato nel collegio Salesiano Brignoli di Genova. Fu Cappellano a White Plains per qualche tempo." The CDs indicate that he operated the Home for Italian Emigrants at 315 E. 12th Street — the Salesians' address until they moved to Mott Street. The 1903 CD still indexes him there but no longer as a Salesian; the Salesians were at Transfiguration by then. He did baptisms at Transfiguration between July 1 and Sept. 28, 1902 (parish register). He left for California before Oct. 6, the date of Fr. Coppo's letter informing Fr. Rua of his departure (Rua to Coppo, Turin, Oct. 24, 1902, NRP Borg 1).

Although Fr. Scagliola had returned to Piedmont, he remained listed in the index of both the 1903 and the 1904 CDs at 315 E. 12th Street, like Fr. Bertolino, but was not listed at Transfiguration (or the Italian Home). Finally, in 1905 the editors of the CD removed him.

On Fr. Bertolino's health and death, see Albera to Coppo, June 7, 1903 (NRP Borg 6, document 4 below), and Borghino to Rua, Nov. 18, 1903 (ASC S.319[72] U.S.A., 18-XI-03).

⁵⁷ See obituary letter by Fr. Emanuele Manassero, Sept. 30, 1921, 2 pp. typescript; anonymous biography, 6 pp. ms., in the files of the Salesian studies department of Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle; *Cronaca*, part I, p. 8.

In February 1900, as we have seen, Father Rua invited Archbishop Corrigan to visit him at the Oratory; evidently a letter that has not been preserved (or that has not yet been found in the Salesian archives) had informed the rector major of the archbishop's intention to travel to Italy in the spring. The journey is confirmed by a letter to Father Rua from Trent dated the feast of Corpus Christi (i.e., June 14):

Since I have not had the opportunity to pay you a personal visit, I present myself by letter in order to tell you that the two Salesian priests who are in New York are most satisfactory and are doing much good for souls.

But the labor before them overwhelms all their efforts; hence I come to beg you to be kind enough to send two other good, select missionaries to help them, to continue and develop ever more the profit in souls among the Italians of that city. We need a good priest to assist the immigrants as they disembark so that, right from the start, they can be guided on a healthy road. We need at least one more to work in the city, where there are between 100,000 and 150,000 Italian immigrants — the most ignorant and most miserable that you can imagine. Then another would find himself very useful in the countryside, where many Italians have settled themselves, as well.

I am sorry that I have not been able to pay you my respects in person since I must travel to Rome in some haste in order to fulfill other obligations that have already pressed me for some months.⁵⁸

That this was not Archbishop Corrigan's first supplication for more Salesians is evident from the minutes of the superior chapter meeting of May 17, 1900 (a month earlier), in which we read: "A letter from the archbishop of New York was presented in which he asks for additional personnel for our

⁵⁸ Corrigan to Rua, Trento Iesolo [*sic*], Corpus Domini 1900 (ASC 38.CA 9807 fol. 3319 D9-11): "Non avendo l'opportunità di far a V. R. una visita personale, mi presento per via di lettera, a dirLe che i due Padri Salesiani che stanno a Nuova York, mi danno ogni soddisfazione, e fanno gran bene alle anime".

"Ma il lavoro che trovano a fare supera le loro forze, onde vengo a pregarLa di avere la bontà di mandare a loro aiuto due altri buoni e scelti missionarii per continuare e sviluppare sempre più il guadagno delle anime italiane in quella città. Ci occorre un buon Sacerdote per assistere allo sbarco degli immigranti, affinché questi, fra dal principio, possono essere guidati nella strada sana. Ci occorre almeno un altro pel lavoro in città, dove si trovano fra 100,000 e 150,000 emigrati italiani — i più ignoranti ed i più miserabili che si può immaginare. Poi, un altro si occuperà molto utilmente in campagna, dove pure molti italiani ci sono trasportati".

"Mi rincresce di non aver potuto aver il bene di ossequiarla in persona, siccome ho dovuto viaggiare da Roma in fretta per mantenere altri impegni già presi da alcuni mesi."

The "two Salesian priests" with whom Abp. Corrigan is so pleased would have been Frs. Coppo and Scagliola, still the only ones in New York. The importance of guiding immigrants from the moment that they landed at the Battery (i.e., the former fort at the tip of Manhattan Island) after their clearance of the immigration and public health inspectors at Ellis Island has been amply documented; see, e.g., Mangione and Morreale, pp. 117-18.

house there.” No action by the chapter is noted.⁵⁹ The subject came up again after the June 14 letter:

Archbishop Corrigan of New York in America writes from Trent lamenting that he has not been able to get to Turin. He praises the Salesians who are working in his city, but he observes that they are oppressed by work. He asks for three more of our priests: one to welcome the Italian immigrants at the harbor and help and direct them; another to work among the Italians who in that city number more than a hundred thousand; and a third to give missions in the countryside. Fr. Rua had an answer sent to him that a short time ago we sent another priest and now we will do as much as we can to meet this necessity.⁶⁰

Unless this new priest sent to New York is supposed to have been the non-Salesian Father Bertolino, who had arrived in February, we must suppose that it was Father Giuseppe Villani, who was in Mexico at the time and did not, in fact, arrive in New York until December.

Father Villani had been born at Treccate (Novara), Italy, in 1869 and attended local schools, including the diocesan seminary. When he became a Salesian cannot be discovered from the data available in the U.S., but he was already a perpetually professed seminarian at Puebla in 1897. He was ordained at Puebla in 1900 and then was catechist and prefect of studies at the school there until he left for New York. He remained at Transfiguration until 1915, becoming an American citizen in 1906, and then served at Mary Help of Christians (New York), Philadelphia, and New Rochelle from 1915 to 1921. In 1921 he was assigned to California, where he worked in San Francisco and Watsonville until 1939. In that year he left the Salesians, returned to Italy, and was incardinated in his native diocese of Novara. We do not know when he died.⁶¹

At the same time as Father Villani, another seminarian joined the community. This was Brother Paul Raczaszek, who was in perpetual vows and had been assigned at Caracas, Venezuela, since at least 1897. He left the Sale-

⁵⁹ ASC D869 Verbali delle riunioni capitolari, vol. 1 (14 Dicembre 1883-23 Dicembre 1904), p. 178, line 1: “Si presenta una lettera dell’Arcivescovo di New York in America il quale chiede altro personale per la nostra casa. New York.”

⁶⁰ “Il Vescovo di New York [*sic*] in America Mons. Corrigan scrive da Trento dolente di non avere potuto spingersi fino a Torino. Loda i Salesiani che lavorano nella sua città ma osserva che sono oppressi dal lavoro. Chiede tre altri nostri sacerdoti: uno per ricevere gli emigranti italiani al porto e aiutarli e indirizzarli; altro perché lavori fra gli italiani che in quella città sono oltre in cento mila; un terzo per dare missioni alla campagna. D. Rua fa rispondere da poco tempo aver noi mandato un altro prete e poi faremo quanto potremo per soddisfare a questa necessità” (Ibid., session of June 27, 1900, p. 180 reverse, lines 25-31).

⁶¹ See the annual directories and the personnel files of the San Francisco provincial archives; *Cronaca*, part I, p. 5.

sians, probably in 1903, the last year when he appears in the directory.⁶²

Although the superiors in Turin must have been satisfied with the progress of the Salesian mission in New York — else they would hardly have increased its personnel, especially with a young confrere like Brother Raczaszek — they must also have been hoping for it to settle onto a firmer foundation than the borrowed basement of Saint Brigid’s Church. Father Coppo was very much aware of the importance of settling his community and their apostolic work. But turning his awareness and his desires into reality took some years.

2. *Establishment at Transfiguration Parish*

It was the policy of the New York archdiocese that an Italian congregation (or one of any immigrant nationality) should be established and stabilized and then either build their own church or be given an old one. In 1899 Father Coppo came close to accepting a parish among the Italians of the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, but a secular priest, Father John Milo, offered to build them a church with cash already on hand, and Father Coppo yielded to him.⁶³ In December 1900, Father Coppo proposed to Archbishop Corrigan that the Salesians take over Nativity Church. He offered as his reasons the great number of Italians in the area, the declining number of English-speaking parishioners at Nativity (who, he proposed, should be dispersed among the surrounding parishes of Saint Ann, Saint Brigid, and old Saint Patrick, the former cathedral), and the Salesians’ need for “a convenient and permanent settlement” so as to “advance their mission for the benefit of poor Italians” and allow them to add personnel and foster Salesian vocations.⁶⁴

The archbishop did not think it opportune to make a change at Nativity,⁶⁵ but at some point the following year he offered Transfiguration parish to Father Coppo and the Salesians. It seems to have taken the superiors in Turin more time than Father Coppo thought necessary or expedient to decide whether or not to accept the offer. He wrote to Father Rua twice in December 1901. In his letter of December 4 he tells the rector major that he is waiting for a decision, as is the archdiocese in turn. He hopes that Transfiguration Church will become the base for a vast Salesian apostolate in North America.

⁶² *Cronaca*, part II, p. 3, where his name is spelled “Ranchazech,” records his arrival. See also the annual directories. The Transfiguration and St. Brigid’s/Mary Help of Christians chronicles of these early years seem, by and large, to pass over in silence confreres who left the Society.

⁶³ *Cronaca*, part I, p. 4. Fr. Milo became pastor of St. Roch’s Church on E. 150 St. between Robbins and Wales Aves. (CDs 1902-04).

⁶⁴ Coppo to Corrigan, New York, Dec. 13, 1900 (NYAA G-23).

⁶⁵ Corrigan to Coppo, New York, Dec. 18, 1900 (NYAA G-16).

He has just preached a mission for about 3,000 Italians at Epiphany parish. Because Transfiguration still has about 400 “American” parishioners, an English-speaking priest would be very useful and would be received with open arms. The Salesian priests already in New York and a Polish confrere that they expect will all be celebrating two Masses every Sunday and sometimes preaching three times; so another priest would not be excessive at all and would help with the vocations that Father Coppo anticipated in great numbers. Just eight days later Father Coppo sent his Christmas greetings to Father Rua and repeated the urgency of a decision regarding Transfiguration and the desirability of having an English-speaking priest.⁶⁶

The expected Polish confrere was Father Joseph Zaniewicz, whom the 1902 directory identifies as part of the community of Transfiguration parish. In 1897 Zaniewicz was a perpetually professed seminarian at the Oratory in Turin and would have been ordained there in 1901. As early as December 1900, Father Rua was writing to Father Coppo about a Polish cleric destined for New York; he mentions him again (still not by name) in a letter of October 1901. Although the 1902 directory places Father Zaniewicz at Transfiguration, the house chronicle is silent about him (see note 72 below). So we do not know just when he came to New York; but another letter from the rector major to Father Coppo gives a clue: in February 1902, Father Rua informed the New York leader that the cost of Father Zaniewicz’s trip from Turin to New York was 300 “francs.”⁶⁷

The Polish priest’s experience among his New York confreres was not a happy one, evidently. By mid-September he had moved out of Transfiguration and taken lodgings with a female housekeeper in a part of the city inhabited by his co-nationals. Father Rua was quite disturbed.⁶⁸ Father Zaniewicz became completely alienated from the Salesians, even insulting Salesian Bishop Giacomo Costamagna when that prelate called on him. Fathers Borghino, Coppo, and Gusmano wrote back and forth about the priest until he

⁶⁶ Coppo to Rua, New York, Dec. 4, 1901 (ASC 38.CA 9807 fol. 3319 D12/E1-3). Coppo to Rua, New York, Dec. 12, 1901 (ibid., fol. 3319 E4-6). *Cronaca*, part I, p. 6, reports: “Nel Dicembre [1901] l’Arcivescovo Corrigan promise ai Salesiani la Chiesa della Tranfigurazione [*sic*], a Mott st.” If Fr. Coppo on Dec. 4 was “waiting for a reply” from the superiors, the offer must have come at least several weeks earlier; and if the superior chapter did not discuss the matter until Dec. 23 (see below), it is unlikely that the archbishop confirmed the transfer of the parish to the Salesians before January.

⁶⁷ See the annual directories; Rua to Coppo, Turin, Dec. 5, 1900, Oct. 7, 1901, and Feb. 17, 1902 (NRP Borg 1).

⁶⁸ See Rua to Coppo, San Benigno, Sept. 21, 1902; also from Turin, Oct. 24, 1902 (NRP Borg 1). There is no insinuation of immoral conduct on Fr. Zaniewicz’s part, but discomfort at the potential for scandal is evident.

was finally granted a rescript of secularization and incardinated in the New York archdiocese in 1908.⁶⁹

The superior chapter took up the subject of Transfiguration parish at its December 23 session. The minutes record:

Fr. Coppo writes from America that the archbishop of New York wishes to entrust to us in that city a parish especially for the Italians. The chapter accepts it, recommending that the works be maintained where we first settled in the city with great advantage to our compatriots.⁷⁰

The actual transfer of parish administration was delayed by a fire that seriously damaged the church and by some squabbling with Father Thomas McLaughlin, the outgoing pastor, over the parish debt.⁷¹ But on May 1, 1902, the little community relocated from their East 12th Street apartment to the Transfiguration rectory at 29 Mott Street and assumed responsibility for the parish. The Salesians were Fathers Coppo, Scagliola, Villani, and probably Zaniewicz, seminarian Brothers Ferrazza and Raczaszek, and coadjutor Brother Squassoni.⁷²

Once settled in their own parish, the Salesians faced a minor problem with another congregation of Italians, or more precisely, with their chaplain, Father Nicola Ferretti. Like the Italians at Saint Brigid, this congregation had been using the basement of Transfiguration for their worship while Father McLaughlin and his Irish-American congregation used the church proper.⁷³ Father Ferretti must have been reluctant to move, and perhaps some of his

⁶⁹ See Gusmano to Coppo, Turin, [Jan.] 12, [1906?], Feb. 5, 1906, and Feb. 29, 1908 (NRP Borg 9); Borghino to Gusmano, New York, May 10, 1906, and Coppo to Gusmano, New York, June 14, 1908 (ASC S.319[72] U.S.A.).

⁷⁰ ASC D869 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, vol. 1, p. 197 reverse, lines 13-16: "D. Coppo scrive dall'America che l'Arcivescovo di New York ci vuole affidare una parrocchia in questa città, specialmente per gli italiani. Il capitolo accetta, raccomandando che si mantengano le opere stabilite nella nostra prima stazione in questa città con grande vantaggio dei nostri connazionali."

⁷¹ DiGiovanni, pp. 169-70.

⁷² The 1902 directory lists these seven confreres. *Cronica della Casa Salesiana della [sic] Parrocchia Trasfigurazione, Stati Uniti, Anno 1902-1938-1939*, p. 3, and *Cronaca*, part II, p. 6, give the date of the relocation. The Transfiguration chronicle informs us: "Il parroco fu il Rev. Ernesto Coppo, coadiuvato dal Rev. Giuseppe Villani, e dal Rev. Marcellino Scagliola. Nelle stesse [sic] anno venne in aiuto per la parte inglese il Rev. P. McCarthy." This document in the New Rochelle provincial archives (NY, NY/T.P./FOL 3) consists of 11 typewritten pages, apparently a carbon copy and probably a transcription of an original handwritten copy, bound into a blue folder with most of the title already imprinted. Several similar typewritten carbon copies of the *Cronaca*, part I, are also in the archives, along with a photocopy of the original cited in this paper.

⁷³ The reader is referred back to the Transfiguration baptismal records as reported on p. 63.

basement congregation would have liked him to stay. But two Italian congregations in the same parish, each with its own pastor, presented an obvious problem. Father Coppo wrote to Archbishop Corrigan about this dilemma nine days before the Salesians moved in; he also informed him that, with full-time parochial responsibilities, the Salesians would no longer be able to fulfill several chaplaincies, including pastoral care of the Italians at Epiphany parish.⁷⁴

Father Coppo also enlisted the intercession of Monsignor John Edwards and others in the delicate matter of relocating Father Ferretti and uniting the Transfiguration Italians. Finally, three weeks after the Salesians had moved to Transfiguration, he wrote to Bishop Farley, who had assumed the administration of the archdiocese after the archbishop's death on May 5. Among other things he suggested that Father Ferretti might be able to look after Epiphany's Italians.⁷⁵

A letter from the chancery to Father Coppo on June 5 informed him:

At a meeting of the Board of Consultors yesterday it was agreed to you [*sic*] and your Fathers jurisdiction aver [*sic*] the entire population (Italian as wel [*sic*] as other nationalities) within your parish limits....

P.S. I am also instructed to inform you that, when Father Ferreri returns to the United States, he will not assume charge of the Italians in your parish.⁷⁶

The chronicle of Transfiguration notes: "A single congregation was formed, joining the Italians to the English-speaking parishioners who still remained, with services in both languages."⁷⁷

The "Father Ferreri" of the chancery document is most likely a misspelling (note two other errors and a missing verb). The intended name is probably "Ferretti." The "supplemental" baptismal register of Transfiguration parish shows that Father Ferretti celebrated baptisms in the church basement up until July 6, 1902, and then did one last baptism on January 6, 1903 (these are the last entries in that register). The July-to-January gap could indicate that he was out of the country during that period.

It is less likely that "Father Ferreri" is Father Filomeno Ferrara (1874-1910). He had once been a Salesian (1892-1896), had been ordained a secular

⁷⁴ Coppo to Corrigan, April 22, 1902 (NYAA G-17).

⁷⁵ Coppo to Farley, May 23, 1902 (NYAA I-5).

⁷⁶ New Rochelle Province Archives NY,NY./T.P./FOL 1: a typewritten document containing said letter and one other from 1908, obviously transcriptions of the originals, which apparently no longer exist.

⁷⁷ "Si fece una congregazione unica, amalgamando gl'Italiani el [*sic*] elemento inglese ancora rimasto, con servizio in ambo le lingue" (*Cronica della... Parrocchia Trasfigurazione*, p. 3).

priest, and had come to the United States bearing a recommendation from Father Rua. He rejoined the Salesians in New York, performing his first baptism at Transfiguration on May 2, 1903, and preaching at Saint Brigid's Church on the feast of Saint Aloysius, Sunday, June 21, 1903. He entered the novitiate at Troy in 1904 and must have been esteemed by his superiors from the start, for he was appointed the novices' confessor while himself a novice, according to the 1906 directory. He was professed, served one year in San Francisco, returned to Transfiguration, and distinguished himself as a confessor, preacher, and youth minister until his premature death by drowning.⁷⁸

Although the Italian Salesians spoke some English, Father Coppo had been asking Father Rua for a native English-speaker. With the acceptance of a parish that included a portion of Irish Americans, this became all the more imperative. Father Rua, in turn, had recourse to Father Charles Macey, the superior of the Salesians in England, and Father Michael S. McCarthy was assigned to the New York mission. He probably arrived there in October 1902.⁷⁹

Father McCarthy (1872-1957) was an Englishman professed at the English Salesian motherhouse at Battersea (London) in 1893. Ordained on September 19, 1896, he was almost immediately appointed the first director of the second Salesian house in England, at Burwash (March 1, 1897), but by May it had become expedient to recall him to Battersea, where he remained until he left for New York. He had a troublesome character and "found it very difficult to settle down anywhere." By October 1903 his discontent at Mott Street was known to Father McSweeney, who informed Archbishop Farley that the English Salesian would soon be returning to London. Back in England, he took a leave of absence from the Congregation and was advised, circa 1905, by Father Macey to return to New York; it does not appear that he did so. He returned to active service in his home province in 1907 and served in various Salesian works around England and Ireland until his death.⁸⁰

With Father McCarthy's departure, Father Coppo continued to press for a

⁷⁸ Fr. Ferrara's St. Aloysius sermon is mentioned in BS 27 (1903), 315. The Rua recommendation to Fr. Coppo, dated June 28, 1902, is handwritten (like several for other individuals at various times) on a business card (NRP Borg 1). On the other details about him, see two anonymous documents, one Italian handwritten of 2 pp., one English typewritten of 1 p., in the Salesian studies files of Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle.

⁷⁹ Rua to Coppo, Turin, Feb. 17, 1902, and Oct. 24, 1902 (NRP Borg 1). *The Catholic News* had reported in its May 17, 1902, issue that Fr. Coppo and four other priests, all speaking English, were serving at Transfiguration, and the sermons at all four Masses were in English (p. 18).

⁸⁰ See William John DICKSON, *The Dynamics of Growth: The Foundation and Development of the Salesians in England* (Rome: LAS, 1991), pp. 145-46 and *passim* (the quote is from p. 146); McSweeney to Farley, New York, Oct. 26, [1903] (NYAA D-13); Coppo to Albera, New York, July 5, 1906 (ASC S.319[72] U.S.A.), alluding to Fr. Macey's wish; and the

priest who spoke English fluently. In three surviving letters from Father Rua to him, the names of Fathers Patrick Diamond (1863-1937) and Thomas Deehan (1874-1952) come up, apparently because Father Coppo had suggested them.⁸¹ Neither of these Irish Salesians was available when Father Coppo asked for them (if, indeed, he suggested their names), but both did come eventually to the U.S.

Diamond had been one of several Irish lads recruited by Archbishop John J. Lynch of Toronto for his diocese and sent to Don Bosco for priestly training, with the option of remaining with him. Like most of the youths, Diamond opted to stay. In 1883 he went off to Patagonia with Father Cagliero, who became vicar apostolic the following year and in 1887 ordained him. Father Diamond spent most of the next eighteen years in Patagonia and the Falkland Islands, with a four-year hiatus in London. The chronicler of Transfiguration records that Father Diamond was of great assistance to Father Coppo, the pastor, in dealing with the English-speaking people and the youngsters of the parish from 1905; there he worked until 1921, when he was sent to Corpus Christi parish in San Francisco. He served as pastor of Corpus Christi until his death. He was “of strong character, frank in speech, austere, sometimes seemingly to excess; but if he was rigid with others, he was no less so with himself.” Yet he was a model in his dealings with the young, a popular preacher, and a great convert-maker.⁸²

Deehan entered the Salesians, like many of his compatriots, through the school at Battersea. As a seminarian he was posted in Turin for a year as Father Rua’s secretary. In 1901 the rector major asked him to go to Jamaica, where the Salesians were opening a new mission field. He was ordained the next year. By early 1904, Fr. Deehan was in San Francisco, and later that year he came to New York. Some years later he was assigned back to the West Coast, where he served in various parishes. He loved to teach catechism, and his preaching was simple, practical, and suited to the congregation; his priestly piety was admirable.⁸³

directories for various years. The St. Brigid’s letterhead that Fr. McSweeney regularly used has “189 “ preprinted; in his Oct. 26 letter he neglected to correct it to 1903, which he did do in a letter he wrote on Nov. 23 (NYAA D-13). As already noted, the Transfiguration chronicle reports Fr. McCarthy’s arrival in 1902 on p. 3.

⁸¹ Rua to Coppo, Oct. 7, 1901; July 16, 1903; and Oct. 10, 1903 (NRP Borg 1).

⁸² Obituary letter by Fr. Thomas DeMatei, San Francisco, undated 1937; *Cronica della...Parrocchia Trasfigurazione*, p. 4. See also *Dizionario biografico dei Salesiani*, p. 110; Dickson, pp. 45-59 passim; and a memoir by his longtime seminary and missionary companion, Fr. Patrick O’Grady (original in the San Francisco province archives). The *Dizionario* errs in stating that Fr. Diamond came to New York in 1903, an error originating, apparently, in Fr. DeMatei’s letter; not only does the house chronicle date his arrival in 1905, but according to the 1905 directory he was still at Punta Arenas, Chile, as of Mar. 1 of that year.

⁸³ Obituary letter by Fr. Alfred Broccardo, Bellflower, Calif., Nov. 7, 1952; various directories.

Father Coppo's efforts to recruit an Irish confrere did not sit well with some of New York's Irish clergy. The influx of Italian priests, often unregulated by ecclesiastical authority, was disturbing enough. But, complained Father McSweeney to the archbishop:

What is more dangerous is the fact that they want to have English speaking priests at their churches, so as to rope in the English speaking people, from whom they can get the money. Father Coppo has an Englishman named McCarthy, with the pretext that he needs him for the Americans of Mott St, who may be said to be non existent now. F. McCarthy is discontented there + is going back to London, soon I am told.

What determined me to write about this now is the fact that this priest told me on saturday that F. Coppo has picked up some Irish priest to take his place and he F. Coppo [*sic*] has just asked me if I would object to this man officiating in our Basement + giving a sermon there in *English* every Sunday. The plea is that the Italian children don't understand Italian. There is abundant provision for all these children in our school + Sunday school, if they would but send them up to it. But some of the priests attending here seem to be helping to keep them + the people Italian, so that their occupation may last. The man, who is stationed here, is a regular family priest [*sic*], not a Salesian, who has with him his mother, sister + a nephew, an eccentric young man, whom he has made sacristan to keep things in the family.

On the whole they are making it unpleasant for me + my assistant, and it would be a relief if Mgr. Edwards, who, Father Coppo tells me is the only one who opposes it, were to withdraw his opposition to the latter's starting a place of his own in Eleventh St, which is in this parish any how.

There is great danger from a big influx of all kinds of priests getting in through Coppo + Cirrigione. Apropos of the latter, he got almost nothing in the baskets last Sunday, except \$100 which Dr Burtzell put into in [*sic*]. The Italians returned the compliment by stealing his new overcoat worth \$50 + his new breviary. One of the Italian priests told me yesterday that Cirrigione has only received \$8.00 in two months from them.⁸⁴

This long complaint emphasizes again the tensions between the Irish and the Italian clergy, and it sheds light on an issue that will be discussed later,

⁸⁴ McSweeney to Farley, New York, Oct. 26, [1903] (NYAA D-13).

The *Cronaca*, part II, p. 4, reports that in November 1901 a Fr. G. Cirrincione preached a mission of eight days with "happy results" to the Italians using the Epiphany church basement. In August 1902 a Fr. Ciro (an aspirant?) left the Salesians; it is doubtful they are the same man.

The 1902 CD lists Fr. Joseph Cirringione as an assistant priest, with separate residence, at St. Philip Neri Church in the Bedford Park section of the Bronx (St. Anthony's Ave. and 202 St.). According to Mary Brown of the Center for Migration Studies, 209 Flagg Place, Staten Island, N.Y. 10304, Fr. Giuseppe Cirringione, a Sicilian, preached at St. Brigid's in the early 1890s. The history of St. Philip Neri parish reports him as the first priest in Bedford Park, even

namely the opposition to the Salesians' setting up their own residence within Saint Brigid's or Immaculate Conception parish.

On the other hand, a letter from Bishop John Farley to Father Rua a year earlier gives us an insight into the esteem that the sons of Don Bosco had won for their Society and their founder. Under the date is an indication that he had been sent a holy card of Don Bosco and Father Francesia's *Vita popolare di Don Bosco*. The letter reads:

In conformity with the wishes indicated to me in your circular letter of last July 30, I enclose testimony for the Holy Father to the effect that the cause of the canonization of Fr. John Bosco ought to proceed. I offer this sincere opinion that so holy an undertaking might have a happy outcome, to the glory of the Church and as a due reward of Don Bosco's virtues.⁸⁵

In the first full year of Salesian administration of Transfiguration parish, 1903, there were 412 Italian baptisms, 16 Irish, and 5 other — all recorded in a single register, except for the one that Father Ferretti performed on January 6. Yet there must have remained a quite substantial non-Italian population, for a parish mission at the beginning of Lent in 1904 was divided: two weeks preached by Irish-American Passionists for the English-speaking parishioners, and two weeks preached by Italian Passionists.⁸⁶

The Salesians immediately faced the problem of parish indebtedness and of convincing their new Italian parishioners to contribute to the church. They poured their energy into organizing every aspect of parish life: societies, recreational activities, catechism classes, and drawing back to the sacraments those whose religious practice had fallen off. In September 1902 they reopened the school, which low enrollment and lack of funds had forced Father McLaughlin to close, bringing in Mother Cabrini's Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart to staff it. Before long the church

before the parish's founder, Fr. Daniel Burke. In the first years of the new century he is said to have founded Immaculate Conception parish in Williamsbridge, the Bronx. The New York Times in December 1903 reported his disappearance and reappearance; he claimed that thugs had kidnapped him to intimidate him into repaying a loan he had taken out to lay the church basement. He claimed that the loansharks were still after him and fled to Sicily, leaving his father in New York. (Brown to Mendl, Staten Island, May 27, 1996). The 1903 CD did list Fr. Cirringione in Williamsbridge at a St. Peter's Chapel for the Italians (no address, listed that one year only); in 1904 he appears in the CD only in the index.

⁸⁵ Farley to Rua, New York, Aug. 18, 1902 (ASC A2590807 [new system]): "In conformità ai desiderii espressimi con lettera circolare in data 30 Luglio u.s. unisco alla presente l'istanza al S. Padre all'effetto di procedere nella causa di canonizzazione del Sac. Giovanni Bosco. Faccio voti sinceri perché si santa impresa abbia felice risultato a gloria della Chiesa ed a premio della virtù di D. Bosco."

⁸⁶ *The Catholic News*, vol. 18, Feb. 23, 1904, p. 18.

was filled at Sunday Masses, “and it was evident that the Lord was blessing their work.”⁸⁷

In order not to abandon the Italians of Saint Brigid’s, they hired Father Michelangelo Mauro to continue their pastoral care, paying also for his apartment; on Sundays the seminarian Ferrazza went from Mott Street to 8th Street to assist him.⁸⁸ The *Cronaca*, to be included in the documents below, shows that the Italians of Saint Brigid were unhappy with this arrangement. So was the pastor, Father McSweeney, whose long letter of complaint to Archbishop Farley has already been quoted. The unnamed “family priest” of that letter is Father Mauro, as becomes clearer in a follow-up letter of one month later: “I have not much complaint to make [against the Salesians]. My displeasure has been, as I stated in my last letter, with a priest secular whom they put in charge, when they moved to Mott St.” In the pastor’s opinion, the Salesians had enough manpower

to take charge of the Lower church and I think it is in the interest of the Italians that they should continue in care of them. They have succeeded in gathering quite a Congregation of them, having now four masses on Sundays and I feel that, if they left, it would cause their dispersion. The secular Italian priests don’t seem to draw them as well.⁸⁹

The Salesian directory for 1903 shows six confreres laboring for the Italians of New York: Father Coppo, the director; Fathers Villani and Zaniewicz; Deacon Ferrazza;⁹⁰ coadjutor Brother Squassoni; and seminarian Brother Raczaszek. Although Father McCarthy is not listed, it is certain that he was there too.⁹¹ Father Zaniewicz, on the other hand, had moved out on his own. Since Don Bosco’s sons were looking after not only Transfiguration but also,

⁸⁷ “...ed era evidente che il Signore benediva l’opera loro” (*Cronica della... Parrocchia Trasfigurazione*, p. 4); *The Catholic News*, vol. 17, May 2, 1903, p. 1; vol. 18, July 16, 1904, p. 18; *Transfiguration Church: a church of immigrants*, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁸ *Cronaca*, part I, pp. 6-7; part II, p. 4; DiGiovanni, p. 170. Although Fr. Mauro appears several times in the *Cronaca*, he is not listed in any of the CDs of the period. He is probably “the Italian priest” whom Fr. McSweeney employed as early as 1893 “to attend to the Italians in the basement church” of St. Brigid, and who “had his mother, sister, and nephew living with him” (DiGiovanni, p. 167); these same personages were living with Fr. Mauro when the Salesians provided rooms for him in 1903 while he attended to St. Brigid’s Italians in their stead (*Cronaca*, part I, p. 9).

⁸⁹ McSweeney to Farley, New York, Nov. 23, 1903 (NYAA D-13).

⁹⁰ Ferrazza was ordained deacon during Easter week (*Cronaca*, part II, p. 5).

⁹¹ Vol. I (Europe) of the 1903 directory indicates that Fr. McCarthy will be found in vol. II (the Americas), whereas he is not. This is probably just one of those secretarial oversights or printer’s errors that occasionally happen. Fr. Rua’s letter of Oct. 24, 1902, fairly certainly indicates that he arrived in New York around that time, and as we have seen, Fr. McSweeney notes his presence at Transfiguration in Oct. 1903. Both the 1904 CD and the 1904 directory list him among the priests at Transfiguration.

through Father Mauro and Brother Ferrazza, the Italians of Saint Brigid Church, and since negotiations were underway for acquiring property and opening a school and house of formation in Newark, New Jersey, additional personnel was necessary.

This was the situation when Father Paolo Albera made his visitation to the Salesians of New York in March of 1903.

IV. The Extraordinary Visitation

1. *Father Paolo Albera in New York*

Father Albera and his secretary, Father Calogero Gusmano, left San Francisco on Sunday, March 1, 1903, and travelled comfortably by train for five days to Chicago. Father Gusmano marvelled at the smooth ride and all the amenities that rail passengers enjoyed in those days, right down to having their shoes shined by the porters overnight. The ride was so smooth, writes the secretary, that they could have said Mass in their compartment — but he was not sure that the Sacred Congregation of Rites would have approved.⁹²

In Chicago they were guests of the Servite community, whose superior, Father Thomas Moreschini, gave them a tour of what was then America's second-biggest city (1,900,000 inhabitants). On Friday they proceeded to Cleveland (population 400,000), where Father Coppo met them, and together they called on Bishop Ignatius F. Horstmann to discuss the possibility of opening a Salesian trade school there. Father Albera liked the prospects, but finding personnel would be difficult.

Bishop Horstmann had written to Father Rua more than a year earlier, offering the Salesians a high school and a juvenile correctional institution, “assuring them that charity would provide abundant means” for the works. The superior chapter replied that it would be at least six years before they could possibly accept.⁹³ This is a constant refrain in the minutes of the supe-

⁹² The last two installments of Fr. Gusmano's series (BS 29 [1905], 201-02, 228-31; Eng. ed. 5 [1906], 82, 102-03), cover their transit through Chicago, Cleveland, Buffalo, New York, London, and Paris. The English edition of the *Salesian Bulletin*, unlike the otherwise more detailed Italian version, informs us that they left San Francisco on Mar. 1 (p. 82). See also Albera to Lazzero, document 2 below.

⁹³ ASC D869 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, vol. 1, p. 199 reverse, lines 21-23, session of Mar. 28, 1902: “Il Vescovo di Cleveland negli Stati Uniti, ci vuol dare un collegio, e una casa di correzione per i giovanetti, asserendo che la carità sarebbe abbondante di mezzi. Il Capitolo fa rispondere che prima che possiamo accettare ci vorranno almeno sei anni.”

Cleveland, a port on Lake Erie, was for a very long time the largest city in Ohio (until surpassed by Columbus during the 1980s) and is the second-oldest of the state's six dioceses.

rior chapter during these years.⁹⁴ But evidently the bishop persisted, or Father Albera is not likely to have called on him.

On Saturday, March 7, Fathers Albera, Coppo, and Gusmano were in Buffalo, whence they hastened on to New York, arriving the next morning at nine o'clock. When they reached Transfiguration by streetcar, it was pouring rain, but a mob of people outside the church was waiting for one Mass to end so that they could attend the next one. The open and generous Catholicism of the faithful impressed Father Gusmano most favorably.

New York seems to have enthralled Father Gusmano: he writes with fervor about the city, its Italians, the Church and its schools, and the Salesians. The two travellers stayed at Transfiguration and visited Saint Brigid's. At the former the parishioners were mostly from Liguria and southern Italy, and in the neighborhood Protestant missionaries were quite active among the immigrants. While the Protestants offered free schooling and other advantages, the Salesians were still struggling to teach the Italians the necessity of supporting the church and its school financially. Because of the immense number of Italians in New York and the scarcity of Italian-speaking priests and religious, Father Albera urged his confreres to promote vocations, specifically by opening a house for adult candidates (Sons of Mary).

One day during his stay, Father Albera crossed the harbor to Newark "to inspect a proposed site for an apostolic school for adult aspirants to the ecclesiastical state."⁹⁵ The property for this site belonged to one Father Morelli, who had offered it to the Salesians more than a year earlier. Father Rua had liked the idea but hesitated to give Father Coppo permission to make the purchase because of lack of financial resources and of personnel. A few weeks before Father Albera arrived, he finally sent written authorization for the purchase.⁹⁶

Father Felice Morelli (1843-1923) had arrived in New York in 1888 as a

In 1903 the diocese covered the northern half of the state and included about 250 parishes. Many German, Slavic, Italian, and Hungarian immigrants had settled there.

Ignatius Frederick Horstmann (1840-1908), a native of Philadelphia, was Cleveland's third bishop (1892-1908). He showed a special care for immigrants and for Catholic education. See John J. DELANEY, *Dictionary of American Catholic Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), p. 264; L.P. CAHILL, "Cleveland, Diocese of," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 3:953.

⁹⁴ See, e.g., p. 204 reverse, lines 50-51, session of Nov. 1, 1902: "Si studia il personale di molte case. Per la penuria di individui si constata la necessita di non aprir nuove case per alcuni anni."

⁹⁵ *Salesian Bulletin* 5 (1906), 103.

⁹⁶ Rua to Coppo, Turin, Feb. 17, 1902 ("la mancanza di mezzi e più ancora la mancanza di personale"), and Jan. 22, 1903 (NRP Borg 1). For more on Fr. Morelli's property, see Albera to Coppo, Turin, June 7, 1903, document 4 below, and also Coppo to Rua, Aug. 4, 1903, in the narrative below.

member of the Scalabrinians. The Scalabrinians were becoming very involved with the Italian immigrants, especially at Saint Joachim and Most Precious Blood parishes. Father Morelli, born at Castelnuovo Pesaro and ordained in 1868, had a history of financial irregularities in Italy and continued that history in New York as pastor of Saint Joachim (1888-1890) and provincial superior (1890-1893), causing a great deal of grief and even scandal to Bishop Scalabrini, Archbishop Corrigan, the Italian community, and others. More positively, he and Bishop Scalabrini were instrumental in bringing Mother Cabrini's Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart to New York. Completing his five-year commitment to the Scalabrinians, he went to Newark, where he became pastor of the Italian parish of Saint Philip Neri (14 Grove Street; the parish is now closed, a victim of continued demographic change). Father Morelli died at New Brunswick, New Jersey.⁹⁷

Father Albera called on the new archbishop of New York, John Farley (promoted the previous September), and on various Salesian Cooperators and religious communities; these had been very generous to the Salesians since 1898 with their financial and moral support. Everyone from the archbishop down received the visitors very warmly. Crowds came to hear Father Albera preach and to entertain him with musical and dramatic presentations.

The visitors and Father Coppo used the subways and elevated trains to tour the city, including Brooklyn. Father Gusmano seems to have been surprised that they could ride all day for a nickel.⁹⁸ As mentioned earlier, he admired the Brooklyn Bridge, devoting a whole column of the *Bollettino salesiano* to describing it.⁹⁹

According to the chronicle of the house, a delegation of Italians from Saint Brigid's Church petitioned Father Albera for the return of the Salesians to care for them pastorally, and the catechist general "promised to speak to the superior chapter so that our community could return and act on its own in the area of Saint Brigid's Church." The delegation let it be known how sorely the Salesians were missed, and "during this whole year [1903] they implored the superiors by letter to allow us to live once more in their midst."¹⁰⁰

Regrettably, Father Gusmano gives few dates. But an attentive reading of his articles informs us that they sailed from New York aboard the *St. Paul*

⁹⁷ See DiGiovanni, pp. 129-48, 176-79, 184-87; CDs 1901, 1903. I also consulted Mary Brown by telephone, Apr. 28, 1995.

⁹⁸ "25 centesimi" (Italian ed., p. 230). The exchange rate was roughly five lire to the dollar (see Coppo to Rua, BS 24 [1900], 283).

⁹⁹ In ASC R30002 Viaggi in America, I found Fr. Gusmano's notes about the Brooklyn Bridge in Quaderno BO500330 "Quasi tutto su U.S.A.," but there was in the notebook practically nothing else connected with the travellers' stay in New York.

¹⁰⁰ *Cronaca*, part I, p. 8; cf. Part II, p. 5. See document 1 below.

on March 18 and reached London on March 26 after a voyage extended by one day because of a rough sea off the English coast.¹⁰¹

2. *Aftermath of Father Albera's Visitation*

The superior chapter's minutes for May 11, 1903, following Father Albera's return to Turin, contain this item: "The bishop of Cleveland would like to have a priest and a coadjutor for an orphanage. The chapter wished to extend its works in the United States, but for the present it lacks personnel."¹⁰² It seems that the good bishop did not give up, for the minutes of October 7, 1903, note: "The bishop of Cleveland would like the Salesians for his mission. We replied that we cannot accept."¹⁰³

At the same October session a request for a priest for the Italians in Texas was also refused. This petition had come the previous month from Bishop Edward Joseph Dunne of Dallas,¹⁰⁴ who reported an estimated 200 Italian families in his diocese, mostly from southern Italy, who would soon be lost without a good priest to give himself to them. The bishop, writing from New York, must already have spoken with Father Coppo, for his letter to Father Rua mentions Monsignor Edwards's intercession with the Salesian superior in New York and Father Coppo's recommendation of another priest in the event that the Salesians are unable to come to his diocese. The bishop promises the Italians' priest lots of hard work with little earthly reward, and treatment comparable to that of the other priests in the diocese.¹⁰⁵

The Italian presence in the heartland of the United States, far from the

¹⁰¹ BS 29 (1905), 198, 230.

¹⁰² ASC D869 *Verballi delle riunioni capitolari*, vol. 1, p. 208, lines 4-5. The minutes refer to a "casa famiglia," which I have rendered as "orphanage"; the precise meaning, however, is not clear. See document 3 below.

¹⁰³ "Il Vescovo di Cleveland vorrebbe i Salesiani per la sua missione. Si risponde che non si può" (Ibid., p. 210 reverse, line 12).

¹⁰⁴ The Dallas diocese, erected in 1890 out of the Galveston-Houston diocese, was huge: 108,000 square miles (slightly smaller than the whole of Italy) extending from the Louisiana border all the way west to El Paso. Bp. Dunne (1848-1910), an Irishman, was its second shepherd (1893-1910); he built many churches and schools, doubled the number of parishes, and almost trebled the number of clergy during his administration. See T.K. GORMAN, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 4:618-19.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 210 reverse, line 17. Dunne to Rua, New York, Sept. 11, 1903 (ASC 38.CA 9807 fol. 3319 E9-10); the letter is in English.

Although most Italian immigrants settled in the large cities of the Northeast (e.g., New York, Boston, Philadelphia), many took jobs in the mines, on railroad construction, and in agriculture all over the country. Thus thousands of Sicilians and other southern Italians wound up in Texas, especially in the Galveston-Houston diocese, in the 1890s and 1900s. Even the Italian government encouraged them to go to Texas, presumably because of its rich soil and warm climate. See Mangione and Morreale, pp. 181-83.

large cities of the east and west coasts, was brought home to the superior chapter again in 1904. We read in the minutes of February 22:

Fr. Cavalli writes from Hartshorne, Indian Territory, that there is there a large settlement of Italians without priests. He is requesting Salesians. He himself asks to become a member of the Congregation and would go to our house in New York for training. Let information be sought from Cardinal Richelmy. The chapter will seek information and decides to accept him as an aspirant according to his request.¹⁰⁶

We have already seen how various secular priests and even at least one religious priest came to live and work with the little community in New York, some of them as aspirants. The house chronicle records that “a certain Fr. Cavallo” came to New York as an aspirant; he joined the community assisting the Italians at Saint Brigid’s toward the end of June 1904. He did not stay long.¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, reinforcements were arriving. In July Father Giovanni Piovano disembarked and took his place at Mott Street, where he would shortly be appointed director in Father Coppo’s place. A native of Druent in the province of Turin, he had been born in 1863, attended school at the Oratory for three years, and known Don Bosco. He entered the diocesan seminary but decided he would like to stay with Don Bosco. After his novitiate (1881-1882) he was sent to Buenos Aires, where he taught school, was ordained, and served as an assistant pastor. He spoke Italian, Spanish, English, and

¹⁰⁶ ASC D869 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, vol. 1, p. 213, lines 47-51: “D. Cavalli scrive da Hartshorne [*sic*] Indian Territory esservi là una grande colonia d’Italiani senza preti. Domanda i Salesiani. Chiede di far parte della Congregazione e entrerebbe a prepararsi nella nostra casa di Nova Yorch [*sic*]. Si chiedano informazioni al Card Richelmy. Il Capitolo chiederà informazione e delibera di accettarlo come aspirante secondo la sua domanda.”

The “Indian Territory” is Oklahoma, which was not admitted to the federal Union as a state until 1907. Hartshorne is a small town in Pittsburg County in the southeastern part of the state; its main industries are coal mining and lumbering. Agostino Richelmy (1850-1923) was archbishop of Turin from 1897 until his death. Perhaps Fr. Cavalli originally came from the Turin archdiocese, and thus the thought of seeking information about him from the cardinal.

¹⁰⁷ *Cronaca*, Part II, pp. 5-6: “Il 28 Giugno [D. Villani] ritornò a Trasfiguration Church [*sic*], lasciando al suo posto un certo D. Cavallo, aspirante. D. Cavallo più tardi, lasciò i Salesiani.”

The CDs indicate that there was a Catholic mission in Hartshorne, Okla., but there is no listing of a Fr. Cavalli between 1903 and 1906. The only Fr. Cavallo appears in 1905 as “G. Cavallo” at the Mt. Carmel Italian Mission in Seattle. It is reasonable to conclude that the superior chapter minutes and the house chronicle are referring to the same priest, and he may well have been G. Cavallo. But, given that some Italian priests seem to have roamed rather freely in, out, and around the country, one cannot be entirely certain.

Repeatedly finding names in assorted documents but not in the CDs led me to draw the conclusion stated in the last sentence. I later found further support in a letter from Fr. McSweeney to Abp. Farley: “In regard to the Italian priests I would like to say a word. They are landing pretty fast and I don’t think they have much scruple about saying mass, without authorization of the archbishop.” See letter of Oct. 26, [1903] (NYAA D-13).

French, and later learned some German and Japanese as well. Between 1890 and 1903 he was director of the Salesian school at Rosario, Argentina. His term as director at Transfiguration was short; when Father Coppo returned from Troy in 1904, Father Piovano was assigned to San Francisco. Later assignments took him back to Italy, to Chile, and to Peru, where he was an esteemed confessor. Poor health led to his return to New York in 1921, seeking medical attention. He continued to show his zeal and competence as both confessor and professor and to give example of priestly piety among the students of theology at New Rochelle in the remaining fifteen months of his life. He died January 9, 1923.¹⁰⁸

An unexpected development delighted Father Coppo and his growing community a little later in the summer. On August 4, 1903, Father Coppo had written a ten-page, one-paragraph (!) letter to Father Rua to inform him that he and Monsignor Edwards, “our very close friend,” were about to set out for Troy to inspect the former archdiocesan seminary, which they intended for a novitiate and “studentate” (a house where, after the novitiate, seminarians would continue their studies and their formation before beginning full-time apostolic work), if the rector major should like that. He expresses his gratitude to God that the Salesians have not yet bought Father Morelli’s parcel of land, the one that Father Albera had inspected in Newark, because the site is not healthy during the summer, they would have had to build on it, and they would not have been able to accept Archbishop Farley’s offer of the use of the old seminary.¹⁰⁹

Father Coppo summarizes the building’s history and recounts how one day he had expressed to Monsignor Edwards his hope that the sons of the Italian immigrants would be able to become missionaries to their own people, and the monsignor had liked the idea and proposed to the archbishop that he lease the seminary to the Salesians as their novitiate and aspirantate. The archbishop, a close friend of the Salesians, had written to the bishop of Albany,¹¹⁰ in whose diocese Troy is situated, to introduce the Salesians and obtain his permission for them to establish themselves there. Later in the letter Father Coppo advises Father Rua about some details of the letter that must be written to the bishop.

He asks the rector major for another Italian priest, “the seminarian Bassi,

¹⁰⁸ Personnel files of the New Rochelle province; obituary letter by Fr. Robert Wiczorek, director of New Rochelle, Jan. 10, 1923.

¹⁰⁹ Coppo to Rua, New York, Aug. 4, 1903 (ASC A4390272 in the new system; fol. 3717 A8-B5).

¹¹⁰ Thomas M. Burke (1840-1915), a native of Ireland, was the fourth bishop of Albany. He governed that see from 1894 until his death.

our first novice,¹¹¹ just professed at London, and a good coadjutor”; these will be sufficient personnel for the autumn of 1903. There are already four or five youths ready to enter the new school and become Salesians.

We can judge Father Rua’s response to this letter not only by the fact that Archbishop Farley’s offer was accepted and a boarding school-novitiate was opened in the old seminary, but also from reviewing the 1904 directory and seeing what personnel came in the fall of 1903. We have already seen that, when Fr. Albera visited in March, there were seven confreres in one house in New York. By the next year these have multiplied to two houses in New York City and one in Troy, and fifteen Salesians.

At Transfiguration Church were Fathers Giovanni Piovano (director and pastor), Giuseppe Villani (prefect), Michael McCarthy, Alfred Pauc, and (nominally) Joseph Zaniewicz; coadjutor Brother Pietro Anselmi, and seminarian Brother Bassi.

Father Pauc, a native of Paris, was born in 1874, made his profession at age twenty, and was ordained at Lille in 1902. The legislation against religious compelled him to leave his native country, and after a short sojourn in Turin, he came to New York. He was at Mott Street only a year before being sent on to Troy, where again his assignment lasted only a year. In 1905 he was transferred to San Francisco; he performed valiant services there after the 1906 earthquake and ensuing fire. Between 1913 and 1925 he was back in New York, first at Transfiguration and then at Mary Help of Christians. Then he returned to California, where he spent the rest of his long life doing both school and parish work, especially as a much-sought confessor of both seminarians and priests. He was remarked for his “eternal cheerfulness” and his charm. After his death in 1964, his director wrote of him: “He was no empire builder.... But he left something [more lasting]. For Father Pauc left the work of his priestly zeal and example indelibly carved in the souls of all the confreres who knew him.”¹¹²

Pietro Anselmi was a perpetually professed confrere at the Salesian

¹¹¹ Francesco Bassi is listed in the 1903 directory as a novice at Battersea, London. He had been listed as one at Burwash the year before. Why does Fr. Coppo call him “our first novice” (*nostro primo novizio*)? Had he been sent from New York? There is no mention of him in the chronicles. But he was at Transfiguration parish in 1904 and the following two years at Troy (directories). He must have left the Society at the expiration of his triennial vows in 1906. A letter from Fr. Robert Hutcheson (see below) to Fr. Coppo from Canadian, Tex., Oct. 4, 1921, seems to imply that the writer and “Fr. Bossi” acted together in leaving the Salesians — or possibly in seeking to know God’s will afterwards (personnel files of the New Rochelle province).

¹¹² Obituary letter, undated, by Fr. Michael Ribotta, director of the community at Richmond, Calif; *Missionari salesiani: I rimpatriati e i defunti al 31 dicembre 1977* (Rome: Centro Studi di Storia delle Missioni Salesiane, 1978).

school of Macerata, Italy, by 1897, where he remained until missioned to New York. Except for the 1904-1905 school year at Troy, he spent the years from his arrival until 1910 at Mott Street. Then he moved uptown to Saint Brigid's, which soon developed into the new Italian parish of Mary Help of Christians. There he remained until 1921, when apparently he left the Society.¹¹³

The house chronicle of Transfiguration, which is more a laconic history than a chronicle, informs us:

In 1904 the church was improved through restoration and [re]decoration; they worked on the structure of the rectory at 31 Mott Street, likewise.

To help with such great expenses, at the end of November that same year they thought of holding a lottery, which was very successful and bore good monetary fruit.

At the head of every movement and every development that the church experienced we always find Fr. Coppo, helped successively in special manner by the Rev. Filomeno Ferrara from 1903 to 1905 and the Rev. Francesco Garassino from 1905 to 1910 in ministering to the Italians, and for the English-speaking people and the youngsters of the parish, from 1905 on the Rev. Patrick Diamond was always of very powerful assistance.¹¹⁴

Under successive Salesian pastors and their clerical and lay assistants, through two world wars, the Great Depression, and the gradual change in the ethnic character of the neighborhood, Transfiguration parish continued to flourish.

Father Giovanni Ferrazza went to Troy on August 17, 1903, in charge of the first group of students, who numbered sixteen when classes began in September.¹¹⁵ After personnel for the school arrived from Italy on December 5, he returned to Transfiguration and resumed his pastoral care of the Italians at Saint Brigid's. Evidently as a result of Father Albera's intercession, on February 8, 1904, the Salesians returned to live among the Italians at Saint Brigid's Church. Of this more will be said below. Father Ferrazza was the only confrere there, residing nearby with Father Michelangelo Mauro and that priest's relatives at 299 East 8th Street.¹¹⁶

Father Coppo had gone to Troy as director, and he was assisted by Father Hector Xhaard, coadjutor Brothers Giovanni De Piante and Faustino Squassoni, and seminarian Brothers Giuseppe Andreoli, Filippo Garbellini,

¹¹³ See the directories for the various years. Although he belonged to the New York/New Rochelle province for eighteen years, there is no dossier on him in the personnel files.

¹¹⁴ *Cronica della...Parrocchia Trasfigurazione*, p. 4. The text is in Italian.

¹¹⁵ 1904 CD, p. 115.

¹¹⁶ *Cronaca*, part II, p. 5; part I, p. 9. The texts are given in the documentation below.

and Robert Hutcheson. All but Father Coppo and Brother Squassoni were new arrivals.

Father Xhaard (1880-1939) spent only the two years immediately following his ordination in the United States, as confessor of the community at Troy (1903-1905). He came from the diocese of Liège, Belgium, made his perpetual profession in 1897, and was ordained April 13, 1903. In 1905 he returned to his native country, where he filled a variety of administrative positions in several Salesian houses until 1931, except for two years as confessor at the house of studies at Valsalice (Turin). One who surveys the directories is struck by his frequent changes of community (eight changes in twenty-six years), not to mention additional changes of responsibilities; e.g., although he was four times appointed director, he served a total of only eight years. In 1931 he left the Belgian province for Algeria, part of the subprovince (*visitoria*) of the French African colonies, where he spent the rest of his life.¹¹⁷

Giovanni De Piante (1854-1929) may have been an interesting personage: beginning in 1865, when he was but eleven, he served eighteen months as a bersagliere; this was at the time of Italy's third war with Austria, after which Venetia, including De Piante's province of Udine, was reclaimed. He completed schooling as far as the third year of ginnasio and then became a farmer (*contadino*); he was laboring in that capacity for the Salesians at Sabino Magliano in 1879. He moved to Borgo San Martino as a novice in 1883, professed in 1885, and served as provisioner in several houses in northern Italy until being sent to America. He arrived in New York on December 1, 1903, and he served as provisioner successively at the houses of Troy, Hawthorne, Cold Spring, and New Rochelle. He returned to Italy in 1922 and died at Chieri.¹¹⁸

Giuseppe Andreoli began his novitiate at Ivrea in 1900 and professed triennial vows there the next year. After two years at the Foglizzo studentate, he took ship to New York. He completed his period of triennial vows at Troy, and for the next three years (1904-1907) is listed in the directories as a novice (*ascritto*) again at Troy. Then he disappears.¹¹⁹

Filippo Garbellini made his novitiate in the Roman province at Genzano during 1902-1903; his master of novices was the future missionary bishop-martyr, Father Luigi Versiglia. Apparently he came to America immediately upon professing triennial vows. He spent the school years 1903-1906 at Troy; when his vows expired he left the Society.¹²⁰

Robert Hutcheson's story is a sad one. He hailed from County Down in

¹¹⁷ See the directories and *Missionari salesiani*.

¹¹⁸ Personnel files of the New Rochelle province; *Missionari salesiani*.

¹¹⁹ See the directories.

¹²⁰ See the directories.

Ireland, where he was born in 1879. He went to Battersea as an aspirant in 1897, began his novitiate at Burwash in August 1898, and made his perpetual profession at Cape Town in October 1899. He spent time at Alexandria (Egypt), Ivrea, and Turin before coming over to Troy in 1903. Two years later he was dispensed from vows and, with some assistance from Father Coppo — probably in the form of recommendations¹²¹ — went to Montreal to study for the priesthood for the diocese of Dallas; he was ordained in Montreal in July 1905. From then to 1921 he was a parish priest in the huge Texas diocese. He kept in touch with Father Coppo, by 1908 showing some regret at having left the Salesians. Like Bishop Dunne, he testified to the increasing number of Italians in Texas. But around 1921 he became involved in a scandal whose notoriety precluded his continuation in the diocese of Dallas. He wrote to Father Coppo and then to Father Emanuele Manassero, who had succeeded Father Coppo as provincial, seeking to return to the Salesians; Bishop Joseph Lynch of Dallas also urged this course of action. But Father Hutcheson was not entirely open with Father Manassero and, besides, after being accepted for a trial period, made another hasty departure that he soon repented of. But, having learned the full story from newspapers, third parties, and at length Father Hutcheson himself, Father Manassero refused to readmit him.¹²²

Calls for Salesians and their particular charism continued to come from American bishops. For example, at this time Archbishop Alexander Christie of Portland, Oregon,¹²³ offered Father Borghino a 300-acre agricultural school

¹²¹ Albera to Coppo, Turin, Mar. 18, 1905 (NRP Borg 6).

¹²² The Hutcheson dossier in the New Rochelle province personnel files contains two versions of his curriculum vitae (the Congregation's official form), news clippings, telegrams, and many letters from 1906 to 1923 from Fr. Hutcheson, the bishops of Dallas and Seattle, and Fr. Manassero.

Fr. Hutcheson speaks at some length of the Italians in Texas in a Feb. 12, 1906, letter from Denison, Tex., to Fr. Coppo (in Italian). A letter of May 24, 1908, also from Denison (in English), congratulates Fr. Coppo on his "election" as provincial, recalls the festivities of Mary Help of Christians that he used to know, and opines that had Fr. Coppo been provincial 4 years earlier, he might be celebrating the feast with the Salesians. The next letter in the dossier comes more than 13 years later (to Coppo from Canadian, Tex., Oct. 4, 1921, in English). Fr. Hutcheson had written to and seen Fr. Coppo in 1914, wishing then, he suggests, to return to the Salesians. Now he admits frankly that he erred in leaving the Salesians so hastily many years earlier: "I was too young, inexperienced + imprudent to know what was for the good of my soul." He also implies that he and "Fr. Bossi (R.I.P)" [*sic*] left together. The majority of the documents in the dossier are from the next 2 years; the last is a letter from Fr. Hutcheson to Fr. Manassero, New York, Dec. 10, 1923.

¹²³ Alexander Christie (1848-1925), a native of Vermont, was archbishop of Oregon City from 1899 to his death. He was transferred there from Vancouver Island, B.C., where he had been bishop less than a year. His quarter-century episcopate was one of marked growth in the archdiocese, which comprised the western third of Oregon. He was a staunch proponent and defender of Catholic schools. The Portland archdiocese was erected originally at Oregon City

for poor and abandoned youngsters. Father Borghino liked the idea and told Father Rua that he would need five or six confreres in order to be able to accept the offer.¹²⁴ Although this prospect was destined never to materialize, it lingered more than two years.¹²⁵

3. *Return to Saint Brigid's Parish*

We have seen that the Italians of Saint Brigid's petitioned Father Albera for the return of the Salesians as their pastors, that he promised to take the matter up in Turin, and that the immigrants followed up with letters "during the whole year."¹²⁶ These letters have not yet surfaced in the Salesian Central Archives, nor is there any record in the minutes that the issue was discussed by the superior chapter.

More precisely, the objective seems to have been that the Salesians should re-establish a residence near Saint Brigid's. Father Ferrazza, as we have seen, was already coming every Sunday from Transfiguration to assist Father Mauro, whose salary and rent the Salesians were providing so that he could be at the daily service of Saint Brigid's Italians.

But something was developing during the summer and early fall of 1903. Father Borghino, the provincial, wrote to Father Rua on November 18 from Troy:

I thought I had finished [my letter], but Fr. Coppo has just written with the news that the archbishop of New York has withdrawn his permission for us to open the new house of St. Brigid in the face of the opposition of the neighboring pastors.

It doesn't look like firmness and stability are the principal virtues of the North American clergy, does it? With extraordinary ease they give today in order to take away tomorrow; there's no need, then, to trust very much in their promises and what they give orally.

Even the apostolic delegate, to whom I've already had the fortune of paying my respects several times in California as well as here, has often told me what I see for myself: "Pay attention, dear Father. Make them respect you. Don't trust the American bishops: today they need you and call for you, but tomorrow they no longer need you, and if the house isn't your own, they send you on your way."

in 1846; although Abp. Francis Blanchet relocated the see to Portland in 1862, the name was not changed until 1928. See F.M. CAMPBELL, "Portland, Archdiocese of," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 11:602-05; Delaney, pp. 101-02.

¹²⁴ Borghino to Rua, San Francisco, Sept. 13, 1903, and Troy, Nov. 18, 1903 (ACS S. 319[72] U.S.A.).

¹²⁵ Coppo to Barberis, New York, Apr. 6, 1906 (*ibid.*).

¹²⁶ See note 100 above and the corresponding text.

Evidently upset, the provincial then voiced some reservations that he had about the new arrangements in Troy, whence he was writing.¹²⁷

Father Borghino's letter reveals several things. The most evident fact is some strain in relations, if not outright prejudice, between the predominantly Irish clergy of America and the Italian immigrants and their clergy. This was remarked on in part II, section 3, above. But the letter seems to show that the difficulties worked both ways. The apostolic delegate from 1902 to 1911 was Archbishop Diomedeo Falconio, OFM (1842-1917), who had been ordained in the U.S. in 1866, had been a seminary rector, and was a naturalized citizen. If Father Borghino reports his sentiments accurately, his long experience in America had not been easy for him, and we may suspect that cultural differences and prejudices were at work within the clergy as well as between the Irish clergy and the immigrant laity.

Second, the tone of the letter suggests that the Salesians had already decided to re-establish themselves at Saint Brigid's. Father Borghino speaks of "the" new house, not "a" new one, as if it were almost a fact already; and he seems disappointed, if not bitter, about the latest development. Father Rua was eager to keep the Salesians at Saint Brigid's, provided only that such an arrangement not displease Archbishop Farley, Monsignor Edwards, or the pastor.¹²⁸ This determination only affirmed the sentiments of the superior chapter when that body approved the acceptance of Transfiguration parish: "...the works [should] be maintained where we first settled in the city with great advantage to our compatriots."¹²⁹

Third, it is apparent in the letter that Archbishop Farley must already have given his approval for the Salesians to return to Saint Brigid's, for now it is alleged that he is withdrawing it. In the absence of any other documentation, it is impossible to say more.

Fourth, it is alleged that the neighboring pastors objected to the Sale-

¹²⁷ Borghino to Rua, Troy, N.Y., Nov. 18, 1903 (ACS S.319[72] U.S.A.), p. [6]: "Credevo d'aver finito, ma il P^e Coppo scrisse adesso con la notizia che il Vescovo di New York ritirò il permesso per aprire la nuova casa di S^{ta} Brigida vista l'opposizione dei Parroci vicini. Si vede proprio che la fermezza e la stabilità non è la virtù principale del clero Norteamericano? Danno oggi per prendere poi domani con una facilità straordinaria, non bisogna dunque fidarsi troppo delle promesse e donazioni a viva voce. Lo stesso Delegato Apostolico, a cui ebbi la sorte di ossequiare già varie volte in California e qui, mi dice sempre che mi vede: Stii attento, Padre mio, si faccia dare la proprietà; non si fidi dei Vescovi Americani; oggi han bisogno di loro e li chiamano, domani non ne hanno più bisogno e se le case non sono loro li caceranno via."

¹²⁸ Rua to Coppo, Turin, Feb. 19, 1904 (NRP Borg 1). Note that this letter was written more than a week after Fr. Ferrazza moved in with Fr. Mauro, re-establishing the Salesian residence at St. Brigid's.

¹²⁹ Minutes of the session of Dec. 23, 1901, cited already in note 70 and the corresponding narrative.

sians' return. This is puzzling, given the influence wielded by Monsignor John Edwards, one of those neighbors and the Salesians' staunchest supporter. Yet there is additional testimony to his opposition — for reasons never made clear — to their purchasing a house to be a permanent residence in the area near Saint Brigid, an opposition suddenly removed later without explanation (but with some speculation on Father Coppo's part).¹³⁰ Perhaps the monsignor was working behind the scenes to overcome Irish clerical resistance and thought it imprudent for the Salesians to commit themselves prematurely. Or perhaps his concern was financial.

In a letter to Archbishop Farley on November 23, the pastor of Saint Brigid's Church begins with what might have been the real issue for Monsignor Edwards, who was not only a local pastor but also one of the three vicars general of the archdiocese: "Father Coppo was here yesterday evening and he says that there is no danger of his involving the diocese in debt, as he can get enough of money from his Order, in case of necessity."¹³¹ This assertion probably would have surprised Father Rua and the other superiors. Whether the money in question was for purchasing a rectory or a site for an Italian church is not clear at this point. But we recall the archdiocesan policy that no national parishes were to be created until they had shown a certain stability, which implies some financial firmness.

If there was local clerical opposition, it was not coming from Father McSweeney. In that November 23 letter he quickly passes from finances to pastoral concerns. He had already found fault with Father Mauro but not with the Salesians.¹³² This he reaffirmed, endorsing the Salesian presence within his parish. The Salesians were offering four Italian Masses every Sunday, drawing 2,000 Italians from all five parishes of the neighborhood—only about one-fifth of the "seething multitude," in his estimation. He believes that the Salesians finally have sufficient manpower to take care of "the Basement church" by themselves or to "start a mission in Eleventh St," and "they can live by themselves, as before, in the neighborhood and keep an orderly

¹³⁰ See, e.g., Coppo to Rua, New York, Jan. 25, 1906 (ASC 38.CA 9807 fol. 3319 E11-3320 A6), document 5 below. Of Msgr. Edwards's influence, Fr. Coppo writes: "But when the first steps were taken to search out a suitable place for purchase, the archdiocesan authorities, under the influence of Monsignor Edwards, dissuaded us from it..." (pp. 4-5). Fr. Coppo proffers these reasons for the prelate's about-face: "The continuous increase in the number of Italians in that part of the city, the impossibility of tending with any effect to the thousands of their children without some kind of festive oratory, the convenience of taking the Salesians away from an abode before which passed at all hours persons of every sort were surely the principal reasons that led the Monsignor to change his mind" (pp. 5-6). See also McSweeney to Farley, New York, Oct. 26 [1903] (NYAA D-13).

¹³¹ McSweeney to Farley, New York, Nov. 23, 1903 (NYAA D-13).

¹³² See note 84 and the letter of Oct. 26, [1903].

house.”¹³³ On the other hand, “My displeasure has been, as I stated in my last letter, with a priest secular whom they put in charge, when they moved to Mott St.” If the Salesians leave, a single secular priest “could not provide [the Italians] with the four masses + two Italian priests would be too much to endure.” Moreover, he finds that the Italians themselves do not care as much for the seculars, and he fears they would stop coming to church.

The chronicle gives no hint of any local problems, only that the Salesians were waiting for permission from their superiors. Yet there must have been some substance to what Father Coppo had written to Father Borghino, for it was more than two months before the Salesians did, in fact, set up again among their countrymen at Saint Brigid’s.¹³⁴

Regardless of the sentiments of the local pastors, Father Coppo and, indeed, the entire American province were soon looking for a building they could buy near Saint Brigid’s so as to consolidate their foothold in that burgeoning Italian neighborhood and the birthplace, so to say, of the Salesian work in the East. Another factor was the lack of privacy and a certain exposure to the “world” entailed by their life in a common tenement:

...we had to limit ourselves to renting an apartment in a tenement where perhaps two hundred people lodge, persons of every race and every kind of belief...an abode before which passed at all hours persons of every sort...¹³⁵

The acquisition of a house, much less a building, would require the approval not only of the provincial and his council (of whom Father Coppo was one) but also of the rector major and his chapter (council); in this the Americans counted on the support of Father Albera.

They also needed the approval of the archdiocese, which was impossible in the face of opposition from Monsignor Edwards (and other pastors?). Suddenly that prelate’s opposition vanished, and he became the “enthusiastic patron” of the Salesians’ permanent establishment in the neighborhood and obtained Archbishop Farley’s permission early in 1905.¹³⁶

Meanwhile they hunted for a suitable site. Early in 1905 they found a four-story building that seemed apt for their purposes. It was located at 431 East 12th Street, about five blocks away from Saint Brigid’s (and two blocks from Monsignor Edwards’s Immaculate Conception Church), and it had two empty lots adjacent to it. By May they had begun proceedings toward acquiring

¹³³ A reference to the Salesians’ apartment at 315 E. 12th St. before they moved to Mott St.

¹³⁴ See *Cronaca*, Part II, p. 5, and Part I, p. 9 (document 1 below).

¹³⁵ Coppo to Rua, Jan. 25, 1906, pp. 5-6, in document 5 below.

¹³⁶ *Cronaca*, part I, p. 10; part II, p. 6; Coppo to Rua, Jan. 25, 1906, pp. 5-6.

ing the lots and building, which were owned by Louis Walter. Although they did not have Turin's approval yet, they moved into the building in June.¹³⁷

Later in the autumn the young province (canonically erected January 20, 1902) held its first provincial chapter, which endorsed the purchase of the building.¹³⁸ A flurry of letters went to Father Rua, and several came back.

On December 19, 1905, Don Bosco's successor informed Father Coppo of his receipt of letters from Fathers Borghino and Ferrazza and of his own request for clarifications.¹³⁹ He had, in fact, written to the American provincial that he wanted more information about the site, its size, its structure (*conformazione*), its distance from Saint Brigid's Church, the means available for its purchase and, if necessary, to build. Would the building be large enough to house a small boarding school for both academic and trade students? He was inclined to postpone action, but perhaps the archdiocese would help buy land for the future church.¹⁴⁰

Father Borghino delegated the task of clarification to Father Coppo, who wrote a long letter to Father Rua, dated January 25, 1906. He recapitulated the situation for the rector major and his chapter, alluding to Father Albera's opinion and knowledge of the case:

You well know that our first mission in New York was opened in St. Brigid's parish among the thousands of Italians who had made their homes there for a long time. With neither house nor church there, we had to rent a small house and operate in the basement of St. Brigid's Church. In 1902 the archdiocese entrusted to us the Church of the Transfiguration with its rectory, and we moved there, leaving the rented house we had occupied until then.

But we saw very quickly the necessity of leaving some priest to continue to tend to the thousands of Italians of St. Brigid's parish, staying among them even overnight, for from 29 Mott St., where we are, to St. Brigid's Church is a distance of several kilometers. So we had either once again to rent a house in the middle of that ghetto, or leave to others the care of that first field of our activity in this great city. The Very Rev. Fr. Albera, when he passed through here, insisted that everything be done to keep that charge and to try to buy, if possible, a house and a place to build a church there. Our Provincial, too, was always of the same opinion.

.....

¹³⁷ *Cronaca*, part I, pp. 10-11; part II, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Coppo to Rua, Jan. 25, 1906, pp. 1, 6-7. No record of a 1905 provincial chapter can be found in the New Rochelle or San Francisco province archives. It is of course possible that Fr. Coppo meant the provincial council (*consiglio*) rather than the provincial chapter (*capitolo*).

¹³⁹ Rua to Coppo, Turin, XII-19-1905 (NRP Borg 1).

¹⁴⁰ Rua to Borghino, Turin, XII-13-1905 (NRP Borg 10). The archdiocese did indeed eventually help with the purchase of the land on which the Church of Mary Help of Christians was built.

[Following the archbishop's approval] Fr. Provincial came at once from Troy and approved the purchase right away, writing at once about it to Turin; the provincial chapter too, which assembled soon after, was of the mind that it was absolutely appropriate to buy [the house] as soon as possible, to avoid the danger that this opportunity be lost and the possibility vanish forever of our having a settled residence in that eminently Italian neighborhood.

...Fr. Provincial from S. Francisco is asking me to send any information myself that can better clarify the matter. Although I am very busy these days with the newspaper and the feast of St. Francis,¹⁴¹ I hasten to obey him as best I can, begging you to ask Fr. Albera and Fr. Gusmano, who on this subject can give whatever explanations time does not allow me to give in writing.¹⁴²

The necessary permission came, and the purchase of the East 12th Street building was completed on June 15, 1906, at a price of \$23,250 (\$5,250 in cash and the rest as a mortgage).¹⁴³

Meanwhile, the validity and even the urgency of founding a distinctly Italian parish in the Immaculate Conception-Saint Brigid's neighborhood was intensifying. In February 1906 Monsignor McSweeney and Father Ferrazza jointly sent to Archbishop Farley the 1905 "spiritual and financial report" for the "Italian mission conducted by the Salesian Fathers" in Saint Brigid's basement church, in both English and Italian.¹⁴⁴

The report shows that two priests (from November, three priests) lived in a rented tenement at 299 East 8th Street, ministering to a population of "about 20,000." They offered four low Masses and one high Mass every Sunday, "with Vespers on every Feast Day — all of which is according to the latest pontifical prescriptions" (presumably a reference to Pope Pius X's 1903 decree on church music). An average of 2,000 persons attended Mass on Sundays and feasts, but on "major solemnities, more than 5000." Eight parish societies were listed: a "parochial committee" for taking up the collections, a mutual aid society, the altar boys, the Salesian Cooperators, and others both male and female. "The mission has no hall for meetings nor schools [*sic*] for the youth," but about 1,000 children were enrolled in area parochial schools. Another 200 attended Sunday or Monday catechism lessons. Father Coppo's

¹⁴¹ The feast of St. Francis de Sales, the namesake of the Salesian Society, was celebrated on Jan. 29 in the pre-Vatican II calendar. It was a major feast of the Society prior to the canonization of Don Bosco, whose feast was placed on Jan. 31 and thus overshadowed St. Francis thereafter.

¹⁴² Coppo to Rua, Jan. 25, 1906, pp. 2-4, 6-8. For Italian text, see document 5.

¹⁴³ *Cronaca*, part I, p. 11; part II, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁴ McSweeney to Farley, with McSweeney-Ferrazza report, New York, Feb. 3, 1906 (NYAA D-13).

Italian weekly newspaper was sold at the church door: 10,400 copies during 1905.¹⁴⁵ There were 852 baptisms, 287 weddings (for which 23 dispensations were obtained from the chancery), 6,125 communions,¹⁴⁶ and “4 brought to Church.” An unhappy statistic, not unusual for the time and the conditions in which the immigrants lived, is that infant deaths (79) outnumbered adult deaths (63). In addition, 9 families received monthly assistance (financial, one presumes), passage back to Italy was paid for 18 individuals, 15 orphans and paupers were placed in public institutions, and recommendations for employment, placement, or public assistance were written for 65 persons.

For the year the mission had an income of \$2,610, three-fourths of which (\$1,927) came from the Sunday collections. Expenses totalled \$2,563; the five largest sums were for rent of the apartment (\$564), subsidy “for the Novitiate in Troy” (\$480), church and worship (\$424), aid to the poor (\$389), and reimbursement to the parish for utilities and subsidy for the school (\$302). The mission’s net income was \$47. Although the priests managed their personal expenses from their stole fees and even had a surplus to send to the provincial, this was hardly a sound financial base for founding a parish.

The pastor’s cover letter also includes a paragraph that sounds like it could have been written today, albeit of New York’s public schools rather than the parochial ones, and which shows — whether he meant it to or not — how much the Italian youths of the area needed the Salesians’ charismatic ministry, if only Don Bosco’s sons could have devoted their energies just to the young:

Lately we have been acquiring more knowledge of these people [the Italians] + it is not consoling. There is a class of them, who cannot well be admitted to our school, as they seem to be in need of regulation by the police authorities. Within a month I had to expel three boys for coming one with a loaded revolver, another with a stiletto + a third for stabbing a pupil with a sharp pencil tearing his cheek.¹⁴⁷

With or without a sound local financial base, the Salesians moved forward. Even before the deal for the acquisition of the property at 431 East 12th Street was finalized, they initiated another purchase. In May 1906 they contracted with “a certain [Mr.] Krekler of Brooklyn” to buy the house and lot at 429 East 12th Street for \$25,500. The financing is not as clearly explained as

¹⁴⁵ This figure averages to 200 copies a week, which may not seem like many among 2,000 Mass-goers (and 5,000 on the greater feasts). But one must remember that the majority of southern Italians were illiterate, and that in any case families were very large and one newspaper per family would suffice.

¹⁴⁶ This figure may be unusually high for the period. Pius X’s decree *Sacra tridentina synodus* urging more frequent communion was issued only in 1905, but Don Bosco and the Salesians had been promoting frequent communion for more than 50 years already.

¹⁴⁷ McSweeney to Farley, Feb. 3, 1906.

for the previous purchase; the chronicle notes that sixteen families lived in the apartment house, paying (a total of) \$190 a month in rent;¹⁴⁸ perhaps the Salesians collected that for a time.

Following the purchase of no. 429, the building at no. 431 was converted into a chapel, to the great joy of the Italian community. The chronicle exults: “Farewell, Saint Brigid’s basement!”¹⁴⁹ Monsignor Edwards blessed the chapel of Mary Help of Christians on September 15, 1906, and henceforth the basement of Saint Brigid’s was used only for great feasts, when the assembly of the faithful could not fit into the chapel.¹⁵⁰ The future parish of Mary Help of Christians had arrived at its permanent location. The church would eventually be built across the street on the site of the old cemetery where Father McSweeney already in 1898 had proposed erecting a temporary chapel for the Italians. Another building would be bought next to the church site, at 440 East 12th Street, to serve as the rectory. The combined buildings at 429-431 for generations since have served as the Salesian Sisters’ convent.

V. Conclusion

The Salesian presence in the United States in 1903 consisted of four parishes populated mainly by immigrants. Three were on the West Coast, one on the East Coast. The province’s headquarters, like the bulk of its work and manpower, was in San Francisco. As a result of Father Paolo Albera’s extraordinary visitation, the weight of the Salesian presence began to shift to the East Coast, and by 1905 so did the headquarters. When a second province was created in the United States (1926), it would, ironically, be centered in San Francisco, the starting point of Salesian work in North America (1897) and the original provincial house (1902). For the rest of the century the Eastern Province would be the larger in numbers of works and confreres and, arguably, the more important, in view of its houses of formation, *Salesian Bulletin*, and publishing house for both provinces and the premier mission procure of the entire Congregation.

As both Father Coppo and Father Rua knew, the Salesians would not flourish in North America unless they could attract vocations and had a place to train them. Father Albera supported Father Coppo’s plans by inspecting the proposed site in Newark. Although that particular site soon was rejected, it

¹⁴⁸ *Cronaca*, part II, p. 7.

¹⁴⁹ “Addio basamento di Santa Brigida!” (*Cronaca*, part I, p. 11).

¹⁵⁰ *Cronaca*, part I, pp. 12-13; part II, p. 7.

was because a better offer came: the old seminary in Troy, where a boarding school and house of formation opened in the late summer of 1903. The house and school of Troy would be transferred in 1908 to Hawthorne, New York, which is only about 25 miles from Manhattan, in contrast to Troy's 150-mile distance. In December 1917, after the main building at Hawthorne burned to the ground, the school was relocated, again, to a newly acquired estate in New Rochelle, New York — “just 45 minutes from Broadway” by train, according to a hit tune by George M. Cohan. Thus the New Rochelle boarding school, novitiate, and province headquarters directly descended from the Troy operation.

The Salesians began their work in New York among the Italian immigrants at Saint Brigid's Church (1898), which they almost, but not quite, abandoned when Archbishop Corrigan offered them Transfiguration parish. The Salesians were eager to maintain and, indeed, to strengthen their presence at the first locale, and the Italians of that parish strongly petitioned Father Albera to intercede with the other superiors that it might so happen. The surviving evidence points to one conclusion only: that he followed through when he had returned to Turin. Late in the winter of 1904 the second Salesian community in New York City was founded. This Italian mission at Saint Brigid's developed into Mary Help of Christians parish, which still thrives on East 12th Street, though the neighborhood retains only a few Italian-Americans; it has become mostly Hispanic with a smattering of other ethnic groups. But it is considered today the motherhouse of the Eastern Province, rooted as it is in the beginnings in Saint Brigid's basement. The maintenance of this root turned out to be providential, because in 1949 the Salesians lost the root's first offshoot — Transfiguration parish — when the New York archdiocese turned it over to the Maryknoll priests and brothers, who had just been expelled from China; the parish, like most of 1900's Little Italy, had become predominantly Chinese by then.

This expansion in New York City and Troy could not have happened without personnel. Father Albera must have sensed the potential for Salesian work among the scores of thousands of Italians in the Northeast, for immediately after his visitation reinforcements began to pour in from Italy and elsewhere so that the apostolate of Don Bosco's sons could expand even before producing native vocations. The seven Salesians of March 1903 had more than doubled to fifteen a year later, and the numbers continued to grow, even though the superiors were turning down numerous appeals for new works like those from the bishops of Cleveland, Dallas, and Portland because personnel was too scarce. The personnel coming to New York included not only Italians but also Irishmen like Fathers Diamond and Deehan and the seminarian

Hutcheson. (The English Salesian Father Charles Buss was sent to San Francisco, as well.) We must assume that Father Albera lent support to Father Coppo's contention that the Salesians had to reach out beyond the immigrant community.

In 1911 Father Coppo was appointed provincial of the considerably expanded United States province. The rector major who made the appointment, no doubt recalling his ten days in New York as Father Coppo's guest, was Father Paolo Albera. Since Father Coppo made periodic trips back to Italy and wrote with some regularity to various superiors, one cannot claim that Father Albera's experience during his visitation was the decisive factor in the appointment. On the other hand, ten days of close contact gave the future superior general an invaluable insight into Father Coppo's leadership qualities — qualities later recognized by the highest authorities of the Catholic Church, when Father Coppo was appointed vicar apostolic of Kimberly, Australia.

Father Paolo Albera's visitation in March 1903 to the Salesian community at Transfiguration parish on Mott Street in Manhattan's Little Italy was truly a significant event for the growth of Salesian work in the United States.

DOCUMENTS

1

Chronicle of Mary Help of Christians Church

ARCHIVE FILES: Mary Help of Christians Church - 440 East 12th Street - New York, NY 10009- Photocopy in New Rochelle Province Archive: NY, NY. MHCP. FOL 1. The Chronicle is comprised of Part I: 57 + iii pp., handwritten, entitled *Cronaca della Casa Salesiana e Chiesa di Maria Ausiliatrice, 1898-1939*; Part II: 18 pp. typed, 1898-1916, plus 13 pp. handwritten, 1916-1938, entitled *Cronaca della Casa di Santa Brigida in New York City*.

AUTHOR: From the time of his arrival in December 1900, Fr. Giuseppe Villani, prefect of the community, was charged with keeping the chronicle (*Cronaca*, part II, p. 3).

CONTENT: There may be two parts because the first community, which settled at Transfiguration Church in 1902, later divided. The group that returned to St. Brigid in 1904 eventually established Mary Help of Christians parish, whence the *Cronaca* comes. But then it is not clear why there is a double chronicle after the division. Part II of the Chronicle, which is labelled a "rough copy" in handwriting, in pencil, on the first page, seems to be the basis for Part I.

In Part II, the following entries are pertinent to Fr. Albera's visit:

p. 5

[1903]

* D. Albera, di passaggio, sull' insistenza d'un Comitato, promette di parlare al capitolo affinché i Salesiani ritornino ad abitare anche nella Parrocchia di st. Brigida.

Agosto Ai Primi di questo mese Sua Ecc. l'Arcivescovo, cede ai Salesiani l'uso del Seminario in Troy. D. Coppo vi fece la prima visita. 5

17 Agosto D. Ferrazza, con primo gruppo di giovani, si porta a Troy.

18 Agosto I Salesiani vi celebrano la prima Messa.

* La vera casa Salesiana, tutto questo tempo, era a Mott St. Alla 8 St. si veniva di là a celebrare alla Domenica. In questo mese si introdusse la Messa delle 9 pei ragazzi e ragazze, con grande successo. Concorso regolare. 10

5 Dicembre Giunge dall'Italia il personale per Troy, e D. Ferrazza ritorna qui, abitando però a Trasfiguration Church.

1904 1904 1904

8 Febbraio - Dopo mesi di dubbio, ad insistenza della popolazione, i Superiori di Torino e il Sg. Provinciale avevano dato il permesso di alloggiare a St. Brigida, D. 15

2 This is the second entry for 1903; neither it nor the first (concerning the timetable) is dated. – If this committee presented some kind of a document to Fr. Albera, there is no copy of it in the New Rochelle archives, nor has one been found so far in the Salesian Central Archives.

12 The chronicler has amalgamated the Italian *Trasfigurazione* with the English *Transfiguration*.
15 Fr. Michele Borghino, first provincial of the U.S. province (1902-08), resident in San Francisco until 1904, when he moved to Troy (see the 1905 directory). He was born at Vigone (Torino) on Nov. 22, 1855, went to the South American missions, and died at Turin on Nov. 14, 1929. See *Dizionario biografico dei Salesiani*, p. 49; MB 16:368 (Eng. ed. 16:289-90); Ceria, *Annali*, 2:157.

Ferrazza fu destinato a questa Cappellania, e, col Cav. Merlino e l'aspirante Michele Peirone, alloggiò con Padre Mauro al No. 299 e 8 St. (Primo Piano) (8 Febbraio).

Domenica delle Palme - Circa questo tempo D. Mauro, non essendo Salesiano, lasciò posto a D. Villani, e il 28 Giugno, questi ritorno [*sic*] a Trasfiguration Church, |
 20 lasciando al suo posto un certo D. Cavallo, aspirante. Si prese pure un domestico a | p. 6
 pagamento. D. Cavallo più tardi, lasciò i Salesiani.

2 *Novembre* Giunsero parecchi confratelli dall'Italia, fra cui D. Natale Graziano che fu destinato qui.

In Part I, the following entries are pertinent to Fr. Albera's visit:

[1902]

Per non dover chiudere il Basamento di Santa Brigida alle 8 strade, quando andammo ad abitare a Mott street, lasciammo alle 8 strade, e precisamente | al primo p. 7
 piano del No. 299, un certo Don Mauro Michelangelo da Bancina, affinché contin-
 5 nuasse a dir Messa nel basamento di Santa Brigida e attendesse all'amministrazione
 dei Sacramenti. Noi gli pagavamo il salario e l'affitto. Alla Domenica uno di noi, da
 Mott st, andava ad aiutarlo.

Questo stato di cose durò fino all'8 Febbraio 1904, quando finalmente ci si per-
 mise di staccarci dalla comunità di Mott street e di formare di nuovo la nostra a parte.

10 Perciò dal 1° Maggio 1902 al 8 Febbraio 1904, vi fu un'unica comunità Sale-
 siana in N.Y. che abitava presso la nuova chiesa della Trasfigurazione a Mott. st.
 (nuova perché dataci di recente; la chiesa però è vecchia).

La nostra opera nel Basamento di Santa Brigida soffersse un po' per questo, ma i
 Superiori vollero che la nostra Comunità vivesse insieme a quella di Mott street (no-
 15 nostante noi fossimo stati i primi ad arrivare a N. York) perché là c'era una Chiesa,
 mentre qui solo un basamento, e per salvaguardare lo spirito religioso. Fu per noi
 dunque, se non per la popolazione di questo quartiere, una benedizione.

E con questo si chiude l'anno 1902.

p. 8

[1903]

20 Nel 1903 vi furono tre avvenimenti d'importanza.

1° La visita del Rev^{mo} D. Paolo Albera, del capitolo Superiore, il quale, ad istanza d'un comitato, promise di parlare al Capitolo, affinché la nostra comunità ritornasse a far da se nei pressi della chiesa di Santa Brigida. Questo nostro quartiere

17 The 1905 directory (2:56) lists Michele Perone as a coadjutor novice at Troy. He did not profess vows.

20 See nn. 106-07 above and the corresponding text.

22 Born in the province of Alessandria in 1862, Natale Graziano attended the Salesian school of St. John the Evangelist in Turin from 1887 to 1890. He entered the novitiate at Foglizzo in 1890 and professed perpetual vows in 1891. After ordination at Ivrea in 1897, he was prefect there for two years. He directed the school at Canelli in Piedmont from 1899 to 1904. It was there that Fr. Scagliola was sent when he returned to Italy in 1902; perhaps the repatriate priest inspired his director to offer himself for New York. Fr. Graziano remained as an assistant pastor among the St. Brigid Italians until he returned to Piedmont in 1910. He died in 1930. See the directories and *Missionari salesiani*.

italiano sentiva grandemente la nostra assenza, e durante tutto quest'anno scongiurano con lettere, i Superiori che ci permettessero di vivere di nuovo in mezzo a loro. 25

2° Il 2^{do} avvenimento importante fu la 1^a Ordinazione Sacerdotale in New York, d'un Salesiano. Il 6 Giugno 1903 il Diacono Ferrazza fu ordinato Sacerdote da Mons. Farley nella Cattedrale di New York. Aveva ricevuto il Suddiaconato e il Diaconato nella Chiesa Salesiana della Trasfigurazione. Cantò la prima Messa nel nostro Basamento di S. Brigida. 30

p. 9 Il terzo avvenimento fu l'apertura della Scuola Salesiana in Troy, N.Y. | L'Arcivescovo diede questa casa ai Salesiani ai primi d'Agosto di quest'anno 1903, e questi vi presero possesso il 17 Agosto con a capo il Neo-Sacerdote Don Ferrazza. La casa prima era un seminario. 30

Durante tutto quest'anno la nostra comunità continuò a vivere con quella di Mott street. D. Ferrazza (nuovamente tra noi) veniva solo la Domenica a celebrare la Messa nel nostro basamento e ad aiutare Don Mauro. Questo Sacerdote (non Salesiano) attese tutto l'anno ai bisogni spirituali di questo nostro quartiere Italiano ed abitò tutto il tempo presso il nostro basamento-cappella. Viveva con lui la madre, la sorella e un nipote. 40

[1904]

1904 Finalmente, ad insistenza della popolazione, I Superiori ci permisero di formare di nuovo la nostra comunità propria e così l'8 Febraio si alloggiò con Padre Mauro al N. 299 8 strade 1° Piano. Più tardi Don Mauro, essendo un prete Secolare, lasciò il posto esclusivamente a noi. 45

p. 10 E così potemmo attendere al bene della popolazione con più profitto. Da questo punto la casa di Mott st. | e la nostra furono sempre due comunità distinte. La nostra, per tutto il 1904 constò del Direttore (D. Ferrazza), due altri confratelli Preti e un servo. Nel Novembre di quest'anno D. Natale Graziano venne dall'Italia a stare con noi.

Letter from Father Albera to Father Giuseppe Lazzero

ARCHIVE FILE: ASC BO472807 (Box F 135) S.27131 *Albera*

G.M.G.

S. Francisco di California
li 25 Febb. 1903

Carissimo D. Lazzero

- 5 Ho sullo scrittoio due tue carissime lettere a cui dovrei rispondere. Eppure questa mattina, subito dopo messa, prendo la penna per altro fine, quella cioè di augurarti un buon onomastico. Credo che la mia lettera ti giungerà a tempo. Essa ti assicur[er]à una volta di più che il ricordo di te ci è sempre fisso nella mente, che sovente il tuo nome ci ritorna sul labbro, che sempre ti raccomandiamo al Signore nelle nostre povere preghiere. Però nel giorno di S. Giuseppe noi faremo qualche cosa di più, offriremo tutte le nostre pratiche di pietà al S. Cuore perché ti | conservi ancora molti anni e ti dia abbastanza di salute per continuare quel bene che s[t]ai facendo agli Americani specialmente colle tue lettere. Quante volte abbiamo udito ripeterci che tu non dimentichi i tuoi amici, soprat[t]utto certi confratelli coadiutori che da altri forse non ricevono mai una riga. p. 2
- 15 Anche a costo di darti lavoro più che non consenta la tua malandata salute, io raccomandai a questi tutti i tuoi cari amici, capi d'arte, a scriverti, assicurandoli che da te sempre riceverebbero risposta. Tu mi perdonerai questa libertà che il tuo buon

3 Fr. Joseph Lazzero (1837-1910) was born at Pino Torinese and came to the Oratory when he was already 20 years old. In 1859 he was one of the seminarians who joined Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Congregation, but he made his first vows only in 1862, together with Albera, his junior by 8 years. He was ordained in 1865 and made his perpetual profession 5 years later. Don Bosco appointed him to the superior chapter in 1874 with responsibility for the schools of arts and trades; he remained at that post till 1898, when poor health compelled him to step aside. He suffered from illness for the last 13 years of his life, which he spent in retirement mostly at Mathi, esteemed by superiors and confreres alike. See *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani*, p. 165; Eugenio CERIA, *Profili dei capitolari salesiani* (Colle Don Bosco: LDC, 1951), pp. 163-72.

6 The feast of St. Joseph, Mar. 19.

12 The scarcity of letters in various archives is probably due more to the failure of confreres and prelates alike to save them for posterity rather than to failure to write. But see the next sentence.

15 If the coadjutor brothers in America had experiences at all like those of the brothers in England in these years (see Dickson, pp. 126-27), they had a very difficult time of it: unable to practice the trades and crafts in which they were trained and, instead, compelled to act as sacristans, cooks, and housekeepers. While one certainly does notice that the coadjutors are almost never mentioned in the American correspondence of these years, there are no indications that they were made to wear cassocks, as they were in England, or that their superiors did not care for them (as the brothers felt in England; see Dickson, p. 167). But the coadjutors probably were more susceptible to homesickness and other kinds of discouragement than the priests, who travelled about the country giving missions and visited various Italian communities within New York (and, one assumes, also in the San Francisco area) to preach and administer the sacraments. We do not know that the brothers were even allowed to teach catechism.

p. 3 cuore ed il tuo zelo pel bene delle anime, mi | ha ispirato. Fra le cose che ho imparato qui, vi è pure questa: che molti si scoraggiavano per mancanza d'una buona parola per parte dei superiori. Anche noi abbiamo provato ciò che voglia dire, in questi lontani paesi, ricevere una lettera di un amico, d'un superiore. 20

Tu puoi farti veramente ammirabile in quest'opera di carità verso me, verso di D. Gusmano. Grazie mille!

Domenica 1° Marzo partenza per New York, poi partenza per Liverpool e poi...
Si Deus dederit, un giorno non lontano partenza per Torino, poi per Mathi! 25

p. 4 Potremo rivederci, riabbracciarci dopo una separazione assai lunga ed assai penosa. Dio ti conservi in salute e benedica ed aiuti anche il tuo

Affmo amico
Sac P. Albera

P.S. Mille affettuosi saluti a D. Leveratto, a Crosazzo ad Aragno, Bernasconi e Mondone. A tutti raccomanda di pregare un poco pel nostro viaggio. 30

26 Between the lines, one senses that Fr. Albera is eager to get home. The present author has wondered whether the relative lack of documentation (Fr. Gusmano's notes, letters from either priest) for the weeks the pair spent in the U.S. was not due at least in part to a general weariness after more than two years of travel. They had left Turin in August 1900, and in the years since had travelled the length and breadth of South America and then through the Antilles and Mexico to California.

– A village near Turin; sometimes spelled *Mati*. Don Bosco had purchased a paper mill there in 1877 to supply his three printing presses. In 1903 the community consisted of two priests besides Fr. Lazzero, who was designated the confessor, seven professed coadjutors, and one coadjutor novice. The Salesians sold the mill prior to World War I but remained as its operators into the '20s; a small community remained there serving chaplaincies until the mid-'30s, and from then until the war years a single priest-chaplain resided there. See Mario RUBERI, *Don Bosco: Uomo e santo* (Turin: Egizia, 1988), pp. 110-13; various directories. A very much enlarged, modern mill still functions on the site as part of the Finnish Ahlstrom corporation. The room where Don Bosco stayed during his visits and the former community chapel have been preserved (the chapel is still used occasionally), and the plant management graciously provided an English-speaking guide for me during my visit in November 1995.

30 Fr. Giuseppe Leveratto was the director at Mathi; he died in 1909 at Genoa at age 63. Bro. Luigi Crosazzo was one of the shop foremen; he died in 1926 at Mathi at age 64. Bros. Giulio Aragno, Antonio Bernasconi, and Bartolomeo Mondone were on the staff. Aragno died at Mathi in 1920 at age 55; Bernasconi died in Turin in 1952 at age 74; Mondone (1824-1907) died in Turin.

Minutes of the Superior Chapter - Fr. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, secretary

ARCHIVE FILE: ASC D869 Verbali delle riunioni capitolari, vol. 1 14 Dicembre 1883 - 23 Dicembre 1904

Session of May 11, 1903, p. 208, lines 4-5

Il Vescovo di Cleveland vorrebbe un prete e un coadiutore per una casa famiglia. Il Capitolo desiderava estendersi negli Stati Uniti dell’America del Nord, ma in questo momento non ha personale.

Session of May 25, 1903, p. 208, lines 26-28

D. Albera propone la compra di un terreno a New Arch per 50,000 lire per fabbricarvi quivi una casetta salubre ai Salesiani che ora abitano un lungo umido, malsano, senza luce.

Il Direttore saprà industriarsi senza che il Capitolo debba sottostare a spese. Il Capitolo approva.

1 I.e., Newark, the largest city in New Jersey. It has port access from New York harbor. Many Italians had settled there. As we saw in recounting Fr. Albera’s visit above, he had visited the site. It is the site that Fr. Albera’s June 7 letter to Fr. Coppo mentions (see below).

– The first digit is extremely difficult to read in Fr. Lemoyne’s script, and reading a “5” is an educated guess by the author and the archival staff. 50,000 lire was equivalent to \$10,000 (see note 98 above).

Letter from Father Albera to Father Coppo

ARCHIVE FILE: NR.PROV.BORG.FOL 6

In Fr. Gusmano’s hand with additions and corrections by Fr. Albera

(Letterhead of the Motherhouse)
Torino, Via Cottolengo, N. 32

Torino 7 Giugno [1]903

Carissimo D. Coppo

5 Credo avrai ricevuto quanto mi domandavi per Ferrazza – il capitolo assente io non aveva creduto bene – far un’eccezione – ritornato feci presenti le vostre condizioni e vi mandai la dimissoria a te direttamente e credo ti sia giunta in tempo.

3 Fr. Ferrazza was ordained a priest at New York the day before this letter was written.

In quanto alla casa di New Ark non puoi credere quante volte ho tentato di trattarne il Capitolo Superiore a prendere una decisione; ma queste feste non han lasciato far nulla – ora D. Rua è fuori; tuttavia la casa non si può a meno che accettare ed io ti autorizzo a ricevere il terreno che ti cede D. Morelli e metterti all’opera. Forse quando riceverai questa mia vi sarà a New York D. Borghino – combinate con lui il piano ecc ecc. 10

Mi rincresce che D. Bertolino non stia bene e molto dippiù però che sia andato a S. Francisco – temo che non aiuterà molto quei confratelli – pazienza.

Non dubitavo punto che D. Orlandi se ne andasse e D. Sbrocca non potrà, se sarà mai accettato – tu potrai farglielo capire quando e come ti parrà più opportuno.

Imbrosiani può accettarlo come aspirante; ma parlandogli chiaro e faciendogli [sic] capire che dovrà aiutare in casa in tutto quello che sarà necessario. *Mi pare che anche tu già eri di questo parere: entri disposto a tutto; si metterà allo studio se parrà conveniente. Intanto cominciate a pensare al noviziato.* 15

p. 2 Credi pure, carissimo D. Coppo, che penso agli Stati Uniti – più di quanto puoi immaginarti; ma non si capisce da lontano la scarsezza di personale che vi è presso il Capitolo. Avrai saputo della strage [sic] che fa la febbre gialla tra i confratelli del 20

6 New Ark: New York in Fr. Gusmano’s hand, with “Yo” overwritten in Fr. Albera’s hand by an “A.”

7 Probably the celebration of Mary Help of Christians at the Oratory.

9 This *terreno*, as we saw in Fr. Coppo’s letter of Aug. 4, 1903, to Fr. Rua, is the same one mentioned by Fr. Gusmano in BS 29 (1905):229-30; Eng. ed. 5 (May 1906):103, which Fr. Albera visited in Newark (*New-Arc*, Ital. p. 229) and which the superior chapter discussed at its May 25 session. It was to be for founding a house for Salesian candidates (Sons of Mary). The arrangement with Abp. Farley for the archdiocese’s former seminary at Troy superseded Fr. Morelli’s offer, for the reasons cited by Fr. Coppo (see n. 109 and corresponding text, above).

13 Fr. Aristides Orlandi must have been an aspirant who had recently left the community. (As mentioned in the narrative, the first aspirant was Fr. Paolino Sapienza [1899-1901].) Evidently Fr. Orlandi was still assisting at the parish, however: Transfiguration’s baptismal register records his first baptism there on Jan. 6, 1903, and his last on Nov. 11, 1903. No Fr. Orlandi appears in any of the CDs between 1901 and 1905.

– Fr. Sbrocca must have been a current aspirant. The CD for 1903 shows that in 1902 Frs. Vincent Arienzo and John Sbrocca were associate pastors with Fr. Coppo at Transfiguration. Fr. Sbrocca appears in the 1902 CD as a priest of the Scranton, Pennsylvania, diocese living in the town of Dunmore (p. 720). He celebrated baptisms at Transfiguration between Sept. 4, 1902, and Aug. 29, 1903. The 1904 CD indexes him for New York but carries no specific listing in that archdiocese; he is not in 1905’s CD.

Fr. Vincent Arienzo was previously the chaplain of the works of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart at West Park (Ulster County), N.Y. — a convent, novitiate, and orphanage (CDs 1901-02). After the 1903 CD he disappears. He performed his first baptism at Transfiguration on Sept. 25, 1902, and his last one on Jan. 24, 1903.

15 The *Cronaca* has many passing references to houseguests and aspirants. Nothing more can be discovered concerning most of them. Imbrosiani is not mentioned.

16-18 My Italics. This passage, at the bottom of p. 1, is in Fr. Albera’s script.

22 According to the Salesian necrology, *Salesiani defunti dal 1864 al 1986* (Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1986), between Feb. 3 and May 5 — three months, actually — two priests and six seminarians died in Brazil, ranging in age from 22 to 32. Moreover, between Feb. 3 and May 17 another ten Salesians aged 17 to 35 died in Europe or South America: four priests, one coadjutor brother, and five seminarian brothers, plus two coadjutors in their 50s in Italy. A study of the mortality rates among the first generations of Salesians would be interesting.

Brasile – ne son morti già otto colla sottana in due mesi ed i migliori ed i più giovani. Sia benedetto il nome del Signore.

25 Salutami tutti e sappimi dire qualche cosa di quanto farete per la casa di New York.

Addio, mio caro e credimi

Tuo affmo
Sac P. Albera

P.S. Farò quanto potrò perché ti si mandi aiuto.

29 As noted in the narrative, additional personnel arrived from Italy toward the end of 1903.

5

Letter from Fr. Ernesto Coppo to Fr. Michele Rua

ARCHIVE FILE: ACS 38 CA9807 fol. 3319 E11-12 to 3320 A1-6

Church of the Transfiguration
Salesian Fathers of Don Bosco
29 Mott Street
New York City

New York, 25 Genn. 1906

Rev.^{mo} Sig. D. Rua,

Ieri ho ricevuto la sua gentilissima ultima, ed oggi approffito del primo momento libero per risponderle. Anzitutto ho rilevato che la S.V. Rev.^{ma} non aveva ricevuto né la lettera del nostro Sig. Ispettore né quella del nostro capitolo ispettoriale
5 colle quali le si dava notizia che tutti, compreso per il primo il Sig. Ispettore, sono del parere che sia convenientissima la compera della casa per la nostra parrocchia di Santa Brigida. In appresso compresi che era nato un | leggero equivoco in seguito
10 alla seconda lettera scrittale dal nostro D. Ferrazza. Credo pertanto conveniente cercare di darle subito alcune dilucidazioni perché la S.V. Rev.^{ma} ed il Capitolo Maggiore possano meglio comprendere la situazione e prendere quelle deliberazioni che l'urgenza del fatto richiede. p. 2

La S.V. ben conosce che la prima nostra missione di New York venne aperta nella parrocchia di S^{ta} Brigida fra le migliaia d'Italiani che da lungo tempo vi avevano posto la loro sede. Non avendo colà né casa né chiesa, noi dovemmo affittare una casetta e funzionare nel sottosuolo (Basement) della Chiesa di S^{ta} Brigida. |
15 Nel 1902 la Diocesi ci affidò la Chiesa della Trasfigurazione colla canonica annessa, e noi vi emigrammo lasciando la casa tenuta fino a quel tempo in affitto. Se non che, ben presto si vide la necessità di lasciare qualche sacerdote che continuasse ad p. 3

10-11 I.e., the superior chapter.

attendere alle migliaia d'Italiani della parrocchia di S^a Brigida restando fra loro
 anche durante la notte, perché dal No. 29 Mott St., dove stiamo noi, alla chiesa di S^a
 Brigida vi sono vari chilometri di distanza. 20

p. 4 Si im|poneva perciò la necessità o di affittare nuovamente una casa nel centro
 di quella numerosissima colonia, o di lasciare ad altri la cura di quel primo campo
 della nostra azione in questa metropoli. Il Rev.^{mo} Sig. D. Albera quando passò di qui 25

insistette perché si facesse di tutto per conservare quel posto e si cercasse di far ac-
 quisto, se possibile, d'una casa e di un luogo per fabbricarvi la chiesa: dello stesso
 parere fu sempre anche il nostro Sig. Ispettore; ma quando si fecero i primi passi per

p. 5 iscrivere un luogo conveniente alla compera, l'autorità diocesana, dietro suggerimen-
 to di Monsignor | Edwards, ce ne dissuase, e noi dovemmo limitarci ad affittare 30
 un appartamento in un palazzo dove alloggiano forse un duecento persone di tutte
 le razze e di ogni sorta di sette.

Così si tirò avanti alla meglio fino al mio ritorno dall'Italia, quando lo stesso
 Mgr Edwards che si era sempre mostrato contrario alla compera di un locale in quel
 distretto, ne diventò entusiastico patrocinatore. L'aumento continuo degli Italiani in 35

p. 6 quella parte della città, l'impossibilità di attende|re con qualche efficacia alle mi-
 gliaia dei loro ragazzi senza una specie di oratorio festivo, la convenienza di togliere
 i Salesiani da un abituro davanti al quale passano ad ogni istante persone di ogni fatta
 furono certamente le precipue ragioni che indussero quel Monsignore a mutare il suo
 parere. 40

Mgr Edwards ottenne senz'altro dall'Arcivescovo il permesso desiderato; io ne
 scrissi alla S.V. Rev.^{ma} ed al Sig. Ispettore. Questo venne subito da Troy ed approvò
 primamente la compra scrivendone subito a Torino: anche il capitolo ispettoriale che

p. 7 si radunò poco dopo fu d'avviso che conve|nisse assolutamente comprare al più
 presto, per evitare il pericolo che, perduta quest'opportunità, svanisse per sempre la
 possibilità di avere una stabile residenza in quel quartiere eminentemente italiano. 45

Passò molto tempo, e finalmente da Torino venne domanda di maggiori infor-
 mazioni. Dopo già incominciata questa lettera, il Sig. Ispettore da S. Francisco mi
 prega di mandare io stesso quelle informazioni che possono meglio dilucidare l'af-
 fare. Io, benché occupatissimo in questi giorni, per il giornale e per la festa di S. 50

p. 8 Francesco, mi affretto ad obbedirlo alla meglio pregando la S.V. Rev.^{ma} | di interpel-
 lare il Sig. D. Albera ed il Sig. D. Gusmano i quali potranno dare sul proposito quelle
 spiegazioni che il tempo non permette a me di dare per iscritto.

A facilitare ai sullodati due Rev.^{mi} Signori il ricordo della posizione delle nostre
 due missioni in questa città ed a porgere al capitolo un mezzo di comprendere più fa-
 cilmente la convenienza di permetterci questa compra, oso servirmi di uno schizzo
 che accludo in questa stessa interminabile lettera. Non fui mai né calligrafo né dise-
 gnatore; perciò mi appello alla loro nota indulgenza per un benigno compatimento, 55

33 Fr. Coppo left for Italy on May 10, 1905, and returned in November (*Cronaca*, part I, p. 10; part II, p. 6).

56-57 Unfortunately, the sketch is not with the letter in the archives. The letter is "interminable" perhaps to its author, who admits being extremely busy. To the modern reader it is so only when he strains to make out the sometimes difficult handwriting, a failing of which Fr. Coppo was apparently aware, for he alludes to it immediately in the next sentence; otherwise the modern reader is most interested in the development of the Salesian work on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

se *brevis esse laborans obscurus fio*... Gradisca cordialissimi rispetti, e mi creda suo

60

Dev^{mo} in G.C.
Sac. Ernesto Coppo

P.S. Ci fu chi disse che la più conveniente sede per il M. Rev. Sig. Ispettore D. M. Borghino sarebbe la casa di Oakland dove egli potrebbe trar profitto della lingua portoghese, e sarebbe lontano da molti pericoli di soffrire e di far soffrire. Che ne dice V.S. [?]

59 Latin: By my brief labors I make myself unintelligible.

6

Letter from Father Albera to Father Giovanni Focacci

ARCHIVE FILE: NR.PROV.BORG.FOL 6A

This short letter sheds light on the arrangements between the Salesians and others who came to live with them, including aspirants to the Salesian life.

G.M.G.

Torino lì 12 Nov. 1903

Carissimo D. Focacci,

5 Se tuo fratello va a New York a proprie spese, volontieri io gli darò una lettera perché sia accettato in prova coi Salesiani di quella città. Del lavoro colà come sacristano, come domestico ed anche come giardiniere od agricoltore in Troy, certo ne troverà. La prova sarà più o meno lunga ed io faccio voti perché sia coronata da un esito felice.

S'intende, i Salesiani di New York non restano per nulla legati. Lo terranno, lo occuperanno senza che egli esiga retribuzione, potranno rimandarlo qualora non si regolasse bene o vedessero che non fa bene nelle loro case. Ecco ciò che possiamo fare per tuo fratello. Quando avrete preso una decisione, mi scriverai. Addio. Prega per me

Tuo affmo amico
Sac P. Albera

2 Fr. Giovanni Focacci, catechist at the house in Parma. He was born on May 24, 1875, at Ambozasco (Genoa) and attended the Salesian school at San Pier d'Arena before making his novitiate at Foglizzo in 1892-93. He studied philosophy and did practical training at Valsalice, studied theology at Parma, and was ordained a priest in 1899. He came to the U.S. in 1904, probably one of the *parecchi confratelli* arriving from Italy on November 2 (*Cronaca*, part II, p. 6), and was assigned to Troy as catechist and master of novices. Subsequently he filled a variety of positions in many houses of the province. He died on April 5, 1952, at Paterson, N.J. His obituary letter by Fr. Modesto Valenti (April 14, 1952) contains this tribute: *Sempre ed ovunque un vero e zelante Sacerdote Salesiano, il nostro carissimo Confratello seppe guadagnarsi l'affetto di tutti coloro che lo conobbero*. See Focacci file, personnel archives of the New Rochelle province.

3 Fr. Focacci's brother is not mentioned in the *Cronaca*.