

## Saint Andrew Avellino Parish: The First Century

It started early in the last century. Woodrow Wilson was president. The Wright Brothers had made their first flight. The Panama Canal was being built and the Catholics in our community were very tired. Why?

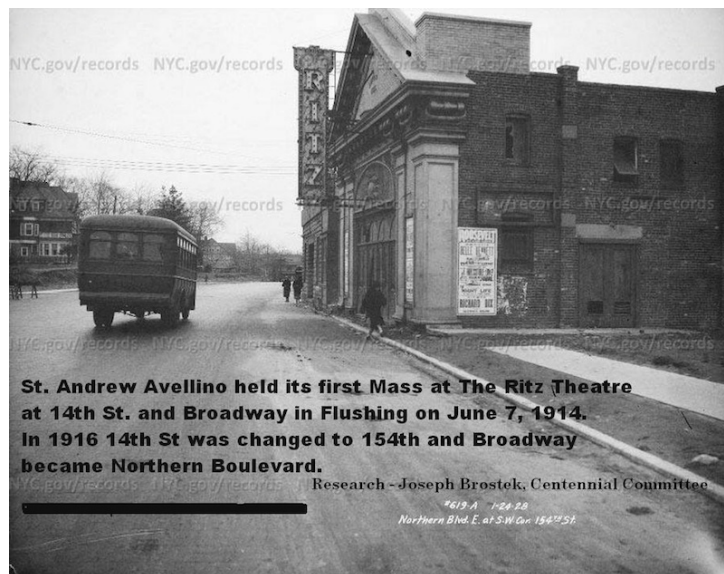
They were tired from having to walk to St. Michael's in downtown Flushing, which was the nearest Catholic Church. They had to walk because cars were few and far between and the trolley from downtown Flushing was not very reliable.

In 1912, in the midst of a rapidly growing local population, a group of laymen under the leadership of Joseph Swick petitioned Charles McDonnell, the Bishop of the Long Island Diocese, to establish a new parish in "Upper Flushing". It was a tough struggle. The diocese stated that there were not enough priests; but the committee continued its efforts and kept raising funds. (The Annual Card Party traces its roots back to these early efforts.)

Finally in May of 1914 their request was granted and Fr. Edward F. McGoldrick was named first pastor with St. Andrew Avellino as patron saint. When selecting a patron for the parish, the Bishop, who was very concerned about the number of priests who had suffered heart attacks, chose the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian Saint, Andrew Avellino who is the patron of victims of heart attacks. Note: Andrew was not named after the town of Avellino; his family name was Avellino. We are the only St. Andrew Avellino parish in the United States.

And so began a century of highlights. Following are some of them.

❖ On June 7, 1914, the first mass of the parish was held in the Ritz Theatre at 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway. A home-made wooden altar and a small organ were carried to the Ritz every Sunday morning. In 1916 local street names were changed and 14<sup>th</sup> became 154<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> became 155<sup>th</sup>, etc., and Broadway became Northern Boulevard. Note: The old name is why our neighborhood is called Broadway-Flushing. The Ritz Theatre, which was owned by Bernard Egan, one of the original committee, was later renamed The Murray Hill which is now long gone.



*The first parish mass was held in a theatre on Broadway on June 7, 1914.*



*Bishop McDonnell dedicated the first church on June 4, 1916.  
It was white with oak trim and could accommodate 567 people.*

✦ June 4, 1916 – Bishop McDonnell dedicated a small wooden church at what is now the site of the rectory. Its capacity was 567. Early plans had called for the original church to be located at Sanford and 157<sup>th</sup> Street. However, Father McGoldrick foresaw the emergence of Northern Boulevard as a major thoroughfare and thus the church is where it is today.

✦ 1919 – First rectory was built at 157<sup>th</sup> and Northern next to the wooden church.

✦ Easter processions were always a highlight of the spring season.

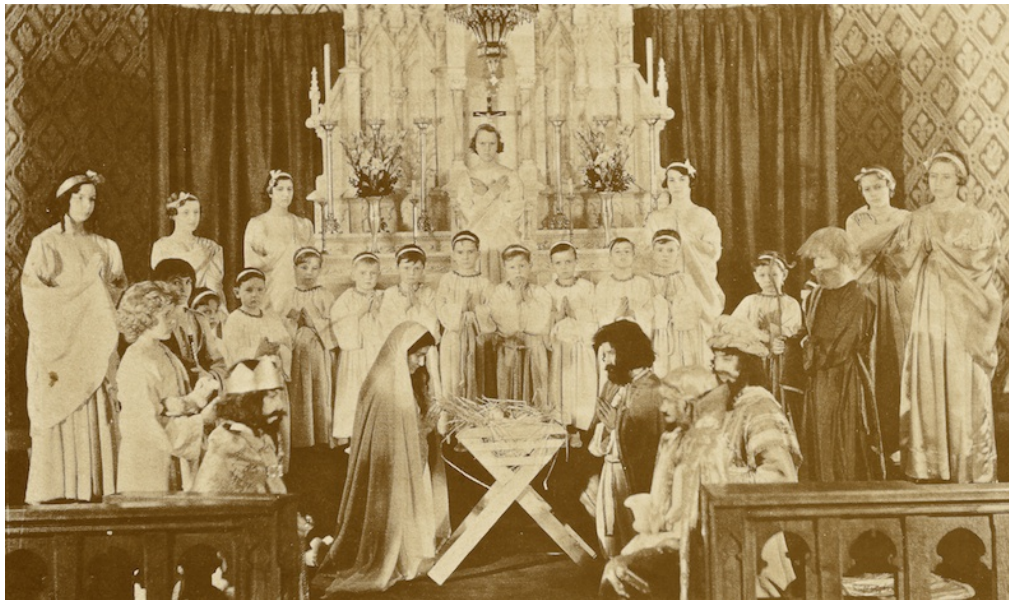


*Father McGoldrick and Easter Procession*

✦ 1924 – Cornerstone was blessed for the original school.

✦ Sept. 25, 1925 – the school opened with Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs from Ohio. The first principal was Mother M. Bernardine Lynam O.P. Also in 1925, the Mothers' Club was established. It was one of the first such clubs in the entire country.

- ❖ 1927 – A Christmas pageant in the old church was representative of the many good things happening in the young parish. There was never a shortage of volunteers who wanted to be angels.



*Scene from Christmas pageant in old church around 1927.*

- ❖ 1928 – The Dominican Sisters moved into new convent next to the school after living in the Swick house which is still on 159<sup>th</sup> Street near Northern.

- ❖ June 26, 1928 – The school had its first graduation class of 22 students. Not only did **The Daily Star of Queens** publish their names, it also printed their grades! (Which were very good!)

- ❖ Sept. 30, 1930 – Fr. McGoldrick passed away. In recognition of his concern for education, the McGoldrick Library was named in his honor. This was very unusual since public libraries normally have geographic designations. McGoldrick is now one of the busiest branches in the borough. It is well used by children from St. Andrew's school.



*Where it all began – Swick Home – 159<sup>th</sup> St. first meeting to establish new parish held here in 1912. Later used as first convent.*

- ❖ Oct. 18, 1930 – Msgr. Francis J. Oechsler was named 2<sup>nd</sup> pastor. As transportation improved – the subway had reached to Main Street in 1928 -- and home ownership flourished in the neighborhood, so too did the parish under his leadership.

❖ 1931 saw the beginning of many of St. Andrew's organizations including: The Rosary Confraternity, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Boy Scout Troop 89 and The Andean Dramatic Society which later became The Andean Players. They used to be called The State Street Players because 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue was once called State Street.

❖ First published in 1932, **The Monthly Andean** would last for over seventy years.

❖ 1933 – School was expanded adding 8 classrooms, an auditorium (that replaced the “basketball room”) and a conference room.



*Monsignor Oechsler enjoying a visit with Cardinal Spellman.*

❖ 1934 – The 20th Anniversary was celebrated with a church building fund-raiser at the Keith Theatre in downtown Flushing. The official drive to replace the overcrowded wooden church was launched in 1937 with the establishment of “**The St. Andrew's Times**” as “The Official Bulletin of the Builders' Society of the Church of Saint Andrew Avellino.” Vol. 1, Number 1 was issued in May at a dinner honoring Msgr. Oechsler.

A front page article “Plans for the Future” stated: “Flushing is to have a new church. The news will be greeted with great rejoicing. The need for a new church has been apparent for some time...the first small church was on a quite tree-lined street. But time marches on, and now Northern Boulevard is a main highway of a great metropolis.”

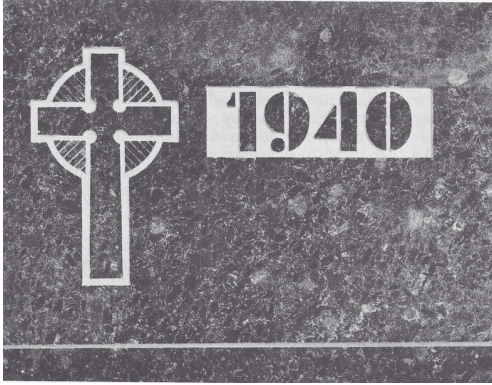
In a “Message from the Pastor”, Msgr. Oechsler wrote: “The crowning achievement of the devout Christian is the erection of a beautiful building for the worship of God.” There were letters of solid support and approval in the paper. One parishioner wrote: “The cross on the new church will be a beacon of hope to our children. The shadow of the church will throw a mantle of protection over our homes.”

❖ With the opening of the New York World's Fair in 1939 and the Midtown Tunnel the following year, housing boomed and many new parishioners joined Saint Andrew's.

❖ Oct. 17, 1939 – Excavation for the new church was begun. As a mark of continuity, the 1915 cornerstone from the wooden church was dislodged and installed in the wall behind the current altar. The old cornerstone is visible from the courtyard. It contains a parchment which records the first 25 years of the parish.



*The 1915 cornerstone is visible from the courtyard.  
A great piece of history.*



*Cornerstone Ceremonies for the new church were held on June 9, 1940.*

❖ June 9, 1940 – New church cornerstone was blessed. Soft earth encountered while digging the foundation made it necessary to go much deeper than planned. The resulting large basement became Andean Hall. Also in 1940, the Ushers Society was formed.

❖ Dec. 15, 1940 – New church was dedicated by Archbishop Thomas Molloy. Over the years it was known by many as “The Little Cathedral on the Boulevard”. It was built with reinforced concrete, limestone and tapestry brick – much of it through the generous donations of the Ronzoni family. When it came to the statues in the church, St. Andrew’s was ahead of its time because color was used instead of the usual white marble. This provided a more life-like appearance. A rear door to the Tabernacle was provided so a celebrant would not be interrupted in case of an emergency call for the Blessed Sacrament. The organ, built by Casavant Brothers, was acknowledged to be one of the finest instruments made. The art world has recognized St. Andrew’s as an outstanding example of American Art Deco Architecture.



*The new church was dedicated by Archbishop Molloy on December 15, 1940. In later years, many would refer to it as “The Little Cathedral on the Boulevard.”*

❖ In 1941 the Queens Chamber of Commerce awarded a citation to St. Andrew’s which read in part: “The new Church, occupying a commanding site on Flushing’s most important thoroughfare is of modified Lombardic architecture. Reaching above all neighboring buildings is the distinguished campanile, surmounted with a crucifixion group of rare beauty.”

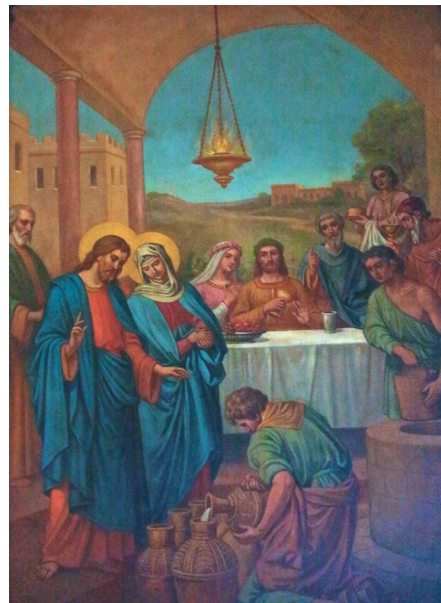


*Choir boys receiving Confirmation in June of 1941*

❖ World War II impacted St. Andrew's as it did the entire country and the world. Many parishioners volunteered to serve in the armed forces – and many did not return. The children of the school collected mountains of scrap metal and rubber for the war effort. **The New York Times** of October 2, 1942 reported: "The 800 boys and girls of the school of St. Andrew Avellino in Flushing have established what is believed to be a record in the collection of scrap." Trucks had already picked up 40,000 pounds and there was more waiting in the school yard. The **Times** continued: "Sister Clementine, head of the Dominican Sisters who conduct the school, said the record was achieved by encouraging the children to make display posters, which they took home to their parents, who rounded up the scrap." Savings bonds and stamps were also in great demand. The SAA Sodality of Our Lady created a monthly newspaper called **The Home Front** which was sent to those in service to help them stay in touch with home.

❖ After the war, St. Andrew's was able to focus on the physical structure of the parish. In February of 1950 the old church was demolished to make way for the rectory which opened in 1954. Also in 1950, Monsignor Oechsler brought artists and artisans from Rome to enhance the decoration of the church. This included the painting of the murals of miracles and parables.

❖ 1954 – After 13 years of living in temporary quarters, our priests moved into the permanent new rectory on the site of the old church.



*Monsignor Oechsler brought artists from Rome to paint the murals in the church.*

- ❖ 1955 – Athletic Association was formed. Thousands of children have played on its teams – winning hundreds of trophies and championships along the way. Many of these children have gone on to enjoy sports in high schools and colleges.



*The Arts have always been an important part of St. Andrew's School. Here is Sister Dolores directing a 1957 St. Patrick's Day Concert in Andean Hall.*

- ❖ Jan. 6, 1961 – Ground was broken for an expansion of the school. On Sept. 17, 1962 the addition was completed. This, plus the modernization of the original school, doubled the capacity and added the cafeteria and gym-auditorium.

- ❖ 1964 – Parish's 50th Anniversary was celebrated with a week of ceremonies including a Solemn High Mass by Bishop Bryan J. McEntegart.

- ❖ Msgr. Oechsler passed away on Sep.6, 1966, after 36 years as pastor. An editorial in **The Brooklyn Tablet** stated: "Flushing was changed by Monsignor Oechsler's 36 years of service. His pastorate has left an indelible impression." Msgr. Francis X. Fitzgibbon succeeded him. The School Board was formed. Eucharistic ministers, lay lectors and deacons became part of the congregation demonstrating the emerging role of the laity as foretold in the Second Vatican Council. English would replace Latin in the Mass.



*Monsignor Fitzgibbon continually spoke out on issues of social justice and international peace.*



*Ok fellows, get out your wallets – it's Sweepstakes time. (1967)  
The first Card Party in 1914 netted \$100.*



*St. Andrew's students paid absolutely perfect attention in 1968.  
(see anyone you know?)*



*St. Andrew's own Bishop John Snyder, SAAS '38,  
with Carol and Jeanne Brostek at 1973 Confirmation.*

✦ 1971 – Also following the directives of the Second Vatican Council, a new altar was installed facing the people.

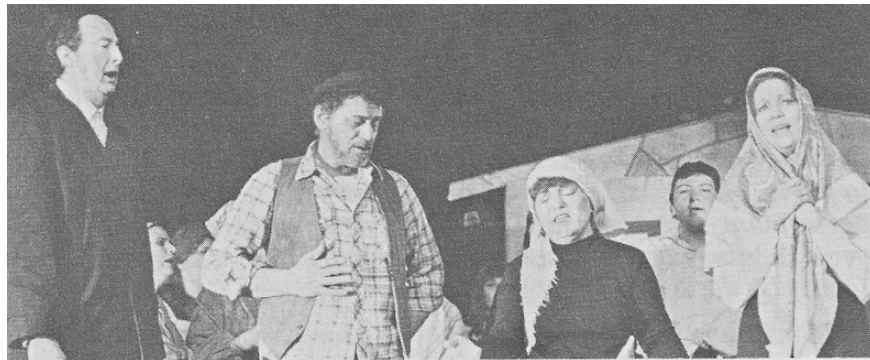
✦ 1973 – Parishioners responded immediately to restore and clean the church after a large fire severely damaged the Sacristy.

- ❖ 1976 – Msgr. Lawrence J. McAlister became 4<sup>th</sup> pastor when Msgr. Fitzgibbon retired.
- ❖ 1979 – Refurbished organ and chimes were dedicated after a very successful fund drive.
- ❖ 1981 – School gym was named in honor of John Coster and Robert Ehrhardt for their many years of service running athletic programs for the children of the community.



*Monsignor McAlister greets Bishop Mugavero during one of his many visits to St. Andrew Avellino Parish.*

- ❖ 1982 – The Homeless Shelter was established. One popular parish activity at the time was the Picnic and Fun Run at Bowne Park – which featured “Marathon Runner” Father Joseph Holcomb.



*The Andrean Players have been staging great performances for many decades. The 1983 production of “Fiddler on the Roof” brought down the house!*

- ❖ The SAA Friendship Club was established in the late eighties.
- ❖ 1989 – The 75th Diamond Jubilee was celebrated with a 6 month series of events including the Ordination and first mass of parishioner Father John Costello, SAAS ’77, the Annual Card Party (they used to play cards) & Dance, a Reception at Terrace on the Park and a Feast Day Convocation.
- ❖ 1993 – Msgr. James P. Grace was appointed 5<sup>th</sup> pastor following retirement of Msgr. McAlister.
- ❖ 1994 – Organist Charles Harmon retired after 53 years of beautiful music. Thousands have sung in his choirs. Also during that year, the beautiful “Tree of Life” to benefit the school was installed in the church vestibule.



*Mr. Charles Harmon with First Choir in 1941.*



*Monsignors McAlister and Grace  
at 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration on June 6, 2004*

✦ 2006 – The sound of bells was restored in the church belfry. The Broadway-Flushing community was added to the National Register of Historic Places by U.S. Department of the Interior and the NYS Registrar.

✦ 2007 – St. Andrew Avellino School Alumni Assn. was established. Membership is now over 3,000.

✦ From 1996 to 1997, there were church alterations which included opening access to the altar by removing the railings and the creation of the baptismal font and pool in the center of the church. For three months, during the renovations, masses were held in Andrean Hall.

✦ 1999 – St. Andrew's bid farewell to the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs after over 70 years of service.

✦ June 6, 2004 – Parish celebrated 90th Anniversary with a special mass and reception while looking forward to the centennial.



*This plaque was presented to the parish by the Broadway-Flushing Homeowners Assn. in recognition of its great importance to the community.*

- ❖ 2009 – Msgr. Grace passed away on March 3rd and was succeeded by Fr. Joseph T. Holcomb as 6th pastor on November 28<sup>th</sup>.



*Bishop DiMarzio presiding at the installation of Father Joseph T. Holcomb as the sixth pastor of St. Andrew Avellino Parish on Nov. 28, 2009.*

- ❖ 2010 – The first ever Capital Campaign was launched following an extensive inventory of parish facilities. Sorely needed renovations and repairs were undertaken for all buildings. The church's beautiful murals were cleaned and lighting and sound systems updated. The mass in Spanish was introduced.

- ❖ 2011 – Mary's Garden was created in front of the church surrounding the statue of the Blessed Mother on Northern Blvd. New efficient insulated windows were installed in the school. The convent was renovated and reopened for sisters from several religious orders. The sisters not only live in the convent and go to their daily occupations, but have also become a vibrant part of our parish community. Also in 2011, a five year landscaping plan was initiated.



*The old Baptistry was converted into a beautiful Saints Chapel in 2012.*

- ❖ 2012 - The Sacristy & the Nuns' Chapel were renovated, repainted and had the roofs replaced. Confessionals in the church were restored. The old baptistry was converted into the new Saints' Chapel. Our Weekly Bulletin was expanded and updated with color photos. Sidewalks were repaired and building renovations continued. Computers and telephone systems were also updated. On-Line Giving was introduced as a great help to the parish (and the giver).

- ❖ 2013 – An advanced website was launched as the parish continued to lead in technology. (Podcasts of homilies would be added in 2014.)

✦ On June 9, 2013, the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year opened with a glorious mass celebrated by Bishop Guy Sansaricq. The year included a courtyard Bar-B-Q, Oktoberfest, Bishop Paul Sanchez celebrating the Feast of St. Andrew Avellino, the 99<sup>th</sup> Annual Dinner Dance, a Multicultural Sunday, a Wine & Cheese Party, a Pilgrimage to Naples and Rome led by Father Holcomb, Brooklyn Church Visitations, a Ministry Fair, "A Taste of Flushing" Reception, a Religious Convocation, a concert in the church and closing ceremonies on Sunday, June 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 with Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio followed by a spectacular Dinner Dance at the North Hills Country Club.


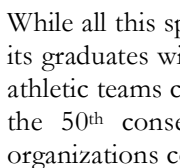


*Bishop DiMarzio celebrating the Centennial closing mass on June 1, 2014.*



*Highlights from the Centennial Closing mass and Gala Dinner Dance on June 1, 2014.*





While all this special Centennial Year activity was taking place, the school continued to gather awards with its graduates winning prizes and scholarships, the 18th Annual Christmas Lessons & Carols was held, our athletic teams captured more trophies, the shelter entered its 34<sup>th</sup> year, The Andrean Players performed for the 50<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, a “Chair Lift” initiative was introduced and the many ministries and organizations continued their fine work. What a year!

And what a century! St. Andrew Avellino has seen countless thousands of baptisms, first communions, confirmations, weddings and funerals. The parish school and parish religious education programs have educated tens of thousands of children. The parish has been the home to an extraordinary number of vocations: priests, nuns, brothers, deacons – and a bishop.

St. Andrew Avellino’s founding was a “grass roots” effort. It was a small group of lay people who made it happen. It will now take the continued efforts of loyal parishioners to keep St. Andrew’s alive and well! We now enter the next century with justifiable pride and enthusiasm but it will take **your** time, talent and treasure to fulfill the promise – think about it. Yes – **really** think about it.

**Footnote:** This Commemorative Book you are reading was produced to salute the Centennial.



At this point it is appropriate to acknowledge the many loyal parishioners and friends who volunteered to produce previous Saint Andrew Avellino Histories:

*The 50<sup>th</sup>* – John A. Crohn, Marie C. Duff and William H. Carden

*The 70<sup>th</sup>* – Jack Holden

*The 75<sup>th</sup>* – Walter Cadette, Joseph and Carol Brostek, Sr. Patricia Heiser, C.S.J., Amelia Abella, Monsignor Edward Bottino, Mary Conway, Joseph Courtade, Sr. Kiernan Quinn, Marguerite Scott and Vincent Seyfried.

Joe Brostek,  
*Proud Parishioner and “Centennial Historian”*

*Special thanks to Lynn Scott for layout and design assistance and to the many photographers who have been taking pictures for 100 years.*

