

Work opened 157 years ago in Piedmont

Missionaries in mountains served near today's Olympics

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1 The Mole Antoneliana, left, Torino's most famous landmark, is backdropped by the mountains where the 2006 Winter Games are being held. *Credit: AP Photo/Massimo Pinca*

The people of the world have turned their attention to Torino, Italy, and the high mountains of the Piedmont area where the spectacular ski races of the 2006 Winter Olympics are held.

It is an area of stunning mountain scenery and an area rich in early Church history.

More than 157 years ago, Elder Lorenzo Snow, then a newly appointed apostle, and a few missionaries began work in this area of northern Italy.

Elder Snow received his call during the October 1849 general conference when President Brigham Young assigned apostles John Taylor to France, Erastus Snow to Scandinavia, Franklin D. Richards to Great Britain and Lorenzo Snow to Italy. The charge was to establish a mission in Italy "wherever the Spirit should direct."

Joseph Toronto, a native of Sicily, was called to accompany Elder Snow. They left Salt Lake Valley on Oct. 19, 1849. By June, accompanied by



another companion, T.B.H. Stenhouse, they reached La Tour, Italy, now known as Torre Pellice, a village situated in a mountain valley near Torino, also known as Turin.

Laboring among the Waldenses, a Protestant religious group of French origin living in the area, the missionaries participated in the healing of a 3-year-old through prayer and administration.

The family poured thanks upon Elder Snow, who took no credit, but simply replied, "The God of Heaven has done this for you." The work had begun. They were later joined by another missionary, Jabez Woodward.

It is interesting that religious freedom came to these Waldensian people only a year before the missionaries arrived. The king of Sardinia granted freedom on Feb. 7, 1848. The timing of the mission was perfect.

Elder Snow said, "The country in which I now find myself bears a striking resemblance to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Piedmont is situated at the foot of the alps."

Climbing a prominent peak near the village, and after song and prayer these missionaries dedicated the land to the preaching of the gospel. After the prayer Elder Snow organized the Church in Italy. The peak where they met was named "Mount Brigham" and the large rock where they gathered "Rock of Prophecy."

"The Church now organized will increase and multiply and continue its existence in Italy till that portion of Israel, dwelling in these countries, shall have heard and received the fulness of the gospel," Elder Snow said. (Quotes from Italian Mission Record, Sept. 19, 1850.)

The mission work went forward in earnest. At a meeting on Sunday, Oct. 27, 1850, after three hours of proclaiming the gospel, one man, Jean Antoine Bose, requested baptism. The work continued slowly and with some opposition. On Feb. 24, 1851, Elder Woodard baptized two young men in the Angrogna River, one being John Daniel Malan Jr.

"The veil over Italy has burst," Elder Woodard said, "and yet, at that instant, I knew not what I was saying. I stood paralyzed with the magnificent view which opened on every side; then, with a prayer of Israel's God, we entered the stream."

The next day, 10 people were baptized, all members of the John Daniel Malan family. "Ours was the first family baptized in Italy," wrote Madeline Malan. "Our father met Elder Woodard at La Tour in January 1851, and invited him home, then sent invitations to all our village neighbors to come hear his message. He came again next evening and preached to the same audience. When he was through speaking our oldest brother, John D., applied for baptism, went to the river, broke the ice and was baptized."

The eldest sister, Mary C., was in France and was baptized when she returned in 1853. Bartholomew Malan, the youngest, was not yet 8 years old. He was baptized May 16, 1856.

Soon three branches of the Church were organized, the first being in Angrogne, home of the Malan family. John D. Malan was president of that branch. The mission report by Thomas Margetts, on July 23, 1853, stated: "We walked some few miles along the side of the mountain to Elder Malan's, the president of the branch in Angrogne. This brother and his family are all good saints and are all well grounded in the principles of the gospel, being always ready with their

means, what little they have, to help roll on the work of God."

The other branches were St. Germain and St. Bartholomew. Missionaries baptized a total of 221 people in the region between 1850 and 1854.

The work rolled slowly forward. With local opposition to the faith, and with encouragement from Utah, more and more members were immigrating to Salt Lake City. Three main groups left Italy, the first in 1854, which included the Pons, Cardon and Bertoch families. The Malan family led the second group, leaving March 7, 1855. Joining them were David Roman and son, age 4, John Bertoch, John James Bonnett and others. The third group on Nov. 28, 1855, consisted of the Beus, Stelle, Roshon, Lazald families and several individuals. By 1857, only one branch remained with a membership of 18.

With conversions slowing, the missionaries shifted their efforts to Switzerland. By 1862, all active proselytizing in the country stopped, with the mission officially closed in 1867.

Today, prominent families with genealogy connections of Italy include Combe, Chatelain, Barker, Stalle, Richa, Harrop, Toronto and a score of others.

In 1990, one family of the Church lived in Torre Pellice, the Gianni and Bruna Berzano D'Amore family that included their daughter, Cinzia, 15, and son, Elsy, 14. Active members of the Torino Branch, Brother D'Amore served as branch clerk. The family traveled 30 miles to attend Church meetings.

Descendants of these early members of the Church from Piedmont have not been forgotten. The Piedmont Project commenced in the late 1960s with a professional genealogist searching parish records.

As work progressed, it became apparent that the combined effort was too massive and individual families made arrangements to continue the work.



2 A 1990s photo shows local members Gianni and Bruna D'Amore, and children, Cinzia, then 15, and Elsy, 14, standing near the mountain where Italy was dedicated for missionary work in 1850.

Credit: Photo by J Malan Heslop

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