

# *Search For Yesterday*

## **A History of Levy County, Florida**



### **Chapter Twenty-Eight**



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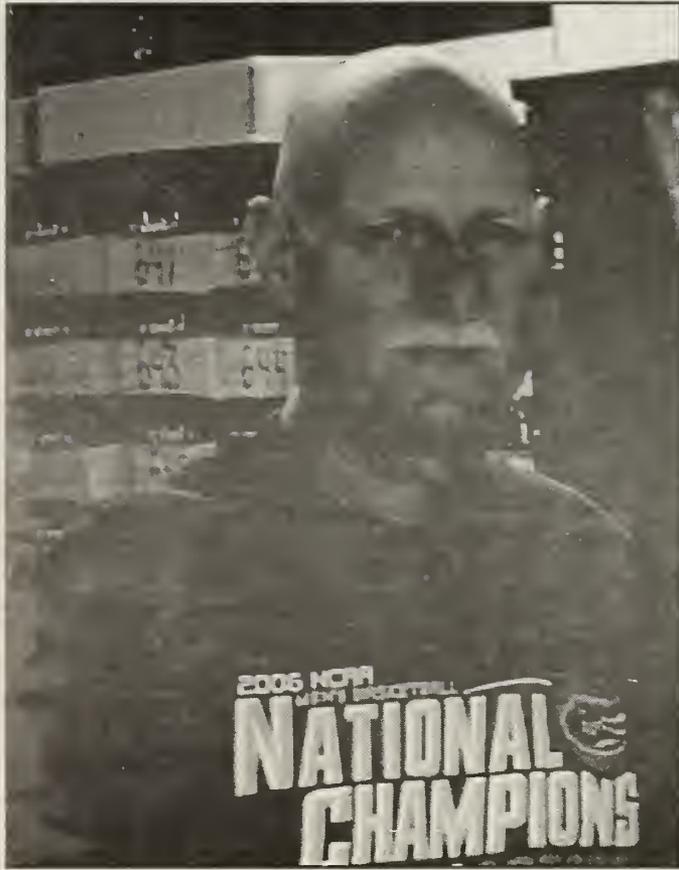
**Bronson, Florida**

***A Bicentennial Publication***

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## DEDICATION

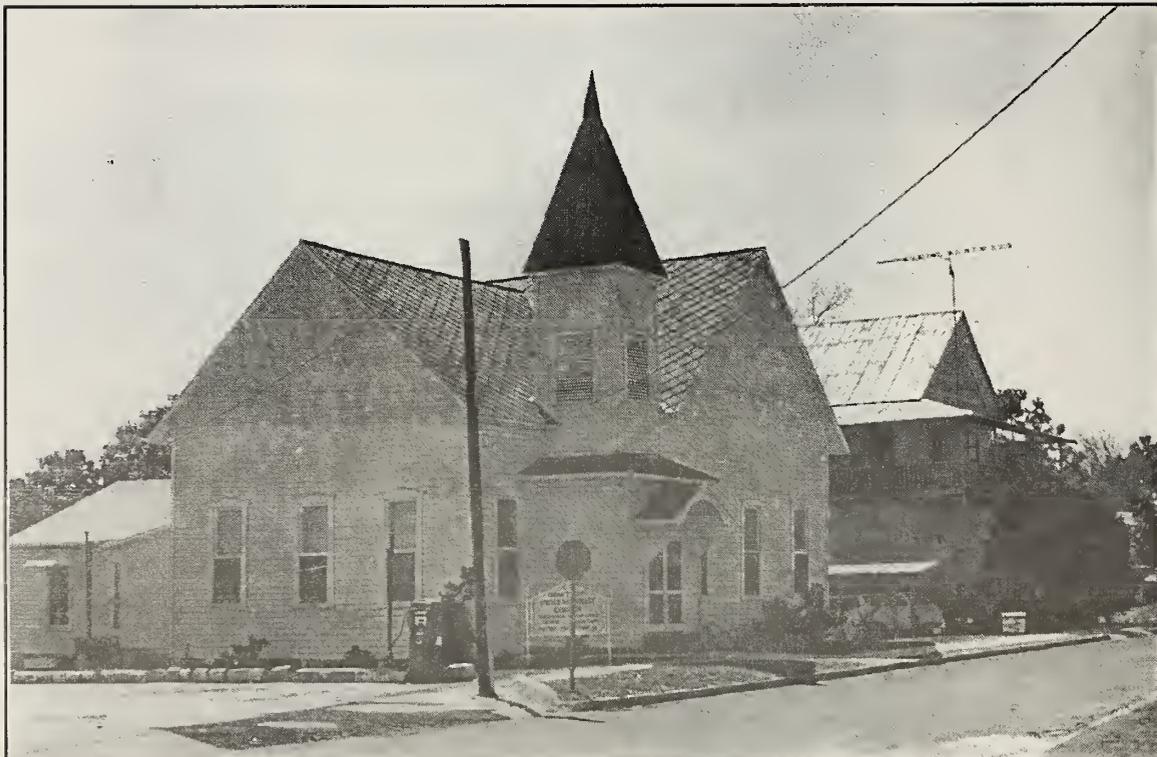


Chapter 28 of Search for Yesterday is dedicated to Mr. Russel Comeaux. Though Russel is not a native of Levy County, being from Louisiana, his wife, Shirley is a member of the Meeks family. This is one of the old pioneer families of the Ellzey area.

Russel has been a part of the Archives Committee since it was resumed several years ago, and serves as treasurer. He is always ready to help in any way, and is greatly appreciated.

THANKS RUSSEL

## CEDAR KEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



The church's history is a long record of Christians working for the good of God through hardship and some adversity. Dedication to God and church over time has brought us to the point today where we cherish our past while looking forward into a bright future.

Methodist work started in the islands of Cedar Key before any records exist. First mention of a Cedar Key Methodist Church appeared in the Florida Conference minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South Tampa District, in 1855-1856. There's no mention of a church building. The many ministers that have served show that there's been worship among the Methodists from 1855 to now.

First mention of a church building was in a book written by an early circuit rider, Reverend Jeremiah Rast, titled Life Sketches – Striking Incidents and Sermons. He tells of his work in Cedar Key and other areas. Chapter four describes his move to Florida from South Carolina and about his admission, on trial, into the Florida Conference. He was appointed to the Cedar Key Mission during 1857-1858. Conference records indicate that he was the third appointed pastor to the mission. He states in his book, "...a house of worship was built on Cedar Key." Since he'd only been on the circuit one year, this dates the first church built in 1857-1858. It's quite possible that it was built on Atsenie Otie.

Reverend Rast's accounts of life as a circuit rider in this area shows just how hard life could be in those times. The mission included all of Levy County, and also encompassed parts of Marion and Alachua Counties. There were around twenty-seven preaching stops along the circuit. The preacher would reside with Methodist families along the route, not having a home of his own.

Reverend Rast says that he did encounter difficulty in getting to Cedar Key sometimes: "I learned from him that it was difficult for the preacher to get to Cedar Key as it was six miles to number four, then six miles by water and rowboat to Cedar Key." The reference to "number four" is the number of one of the channel crossings before getting to Cedar Key. He states that on his first visit "the cars were not running to the Key yet, the road was then being graded. Through the kindness of the mail carrier, carrying mail from Micanopy to Cedar Key on horseback to number four, and from there to the Key in a row boat, he invited me to go with him. In this way I got to the appointment."

This is the way Reverend Rast recounts his first visit to the Key: “We (the mail carrier and him) rode off together; a man overtook us, and when we arrived at the landing there were six men to go in the little boat. It was loaded to its utmost capacity; we had hitched our horses, found the tide just right, and went over to the Key.”

“The mail carrier was to deliver the mail and come back on the return tide, but they found something stronger to drink than water and they got the young man drinking; the tide left them and they did not get back until the next day.”

Evidence of how early Methodists worshiped is stated thusly: “We had a demonstration of the power of God. Sister Worthington, a member of our church, had been sick for some time and was not expected to live, requested that services be held at her house for her benefit. We met and held prayer service; the Holy Spirit came down, Brother Worthington was reclaimed and he was baptized with the Holy Ghost; strength was imparted to her; she rose, sat up in her bed and shouted for joy, slapping her emaciated hands until they were blistered. Her face shown as if it had been the face of an angel. She said, ‘I feel well.’

“It was the turning point; she improved that hour. I believe she was healed though it was not claimed as such, and I have not the least doubt that men and women have been healed in answer to fervent believing prayer.”

Brother Rast ended the Conference year as preacher on the Cedar Key mission by stating: “...My year’s work came to a close and I received salary, all told, ninety-five dollars.”

We’re also lucky to have the diary of another early Methodist. Miss Eliza Hern wrote The Diary of Eliza Hern, Way Key, East Florida, 1867-1869, which gives us a later view into the life of the mission at Cedar Key. Miss Hern lived on the island of Cedar Key that was then known as Way Key. She was school teacher for Way Key and she was a faithful Methodist.

There are a couple of themes that recur in her diary. She mentions that the Cedar Key Mission had trouble getting and keeping a pastor. In March 1887, she writes, “We are deprived of hearing the Gospel preached. We have been living here for seven months and have not had a preacher sent us yet.” Shortly after that, a minister was sent, and her hopes for the church are written: “...the minister is going to stay some time. I hope he may have the means of doing some good as the place is given over to wickedness.”

The mission’s fortunes increased for awhile. Miss Hern reports that 150 were converted in that year (1887). Mr. Andrews (their superintendent) organized and led a Sabbath School.

Around that time, Miss Hern’s second major wish for the Methodist Church in Cedar Key was that it have its own church building. There might have been a church on the other island, Atsenie Otie, but not on Way Key. Maybe the church that Reverend Rath mentioned as being built in 1857 had been lost to fire or other damage. Whatever the reason, there wasn’t a Methodist Church on Way Key and Miss Hern wrote: “We have enough timber given to make a church. All we lack is the work to be done.” This was reported August 1, 1867. She again stated her wish in a diary entry dated May 3, 1868: “I hope that they will build a church here.” Then again, January 16, 1869, she writes: “O what a delight it would be to have a fine church here and regular Sabbath preaching.”

By that time, the Methodist Church on Way Key had apparently waned quite a bit. Regular services weren’t being held, nor was a preacher making regular visits to the island. Miss Hern reports: “I hope the Methodists will come preach to us. I love my church the best. O how I have missed the good preaching. We have need of a missionary preacher here as much as China or other heathen countries. The minister, Mr. Rogers, that was sent last year, would not stay. The people offered to pay him to stay, but he was frightened at the predicament here and he went back to Georgia.”

All news wasn’t bad. The Methodists received a regular appointment soon, and the preaching began again once a month, on the first Sunday. Soon it is noted that the Methodist minister had gone to visit with the HERNs at their home. He had brought news that he planned on preaching twice a month.

The Methodists had been having services in a community church building during this time. This was a place used by all the churches in town as their meeting house. This didn't sit well with Miss Hern, who wasn't tolerant of other churches. Eventually, they lost the use of this building. Miss Hern never mentions a church building being built in her lifetime.

The Cedar Key United Methodist Church, our present church, was built around 1889. Local church records of ours are incomplete for this era. A survey map in 1888 of Cedar Key doesn't include the Methodist Church, but the map of 1890 does. Our church was damaged heavily in the 1896 tidal wave. It was rebuilt with the help of the Bronson Methodist Church. Again, it sustained much damage in the 1950 hurricane, when the old parsonage was destroyed. Most of the local church records were lost. Our church was repaired and the present parsonage purchased. Our Fellowship Hall was dedicated and enlarged in January of 1979. Improvements such as central air conditioning for the sanctuary, new carpeting, new pews, and other furniture refinished were completed in 1985.

#### EARLY PASTORS OF THE CEDAR KEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:

1856	W. G. Poynts, Benjamin J. Johnson
1857	Jeremiah Rast
1858	W. Davies
1859	William Williams
1860	Jeremiah J. Snow
1861	No record
1862	No record
1863	No record
1864	No record
1865	No record
1866	E. J. Knight, J. Penny
1867	Robert H. Rogers

#### EARLY MEMBERS OF THE CEDAR KEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:

1888:	1909:
W. R. Hodges	Ruth B. Boothby
Mollie Stapleton	Annie Brush
Nellie Stapleton	H. W. Crevasse
	Mattie Hodges
1891:	
Sarah J. Stapleton	1910:
Robert T. Stapleton	Joe A. Boothby
1892:	1911:
Robert Young	Cora Andrews
	Mollie Boothby
1893:	Emma Depew
Harry Rogers	Tyler Hodges
	Rosa Stapleton
1898:	Philip Stapleton
Leona Kirrhaine	Carl Stapleton
	Esther Tooke
1903:	Samuel White
Alba Kirrhaine	
May (H. B.) Rogers	

## CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH KEY OF CEDAR



1876-1916

The actual history of Christ Church was said to have begun with a visit to Cedar Key by Bishop John Freeman Young in 1868, but the following quote from Dr. Edgar Legare Pennington's article in the Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Church in Florida: 1763-1892*, seems to embody the first reference to Cedar Key as far as Christ Church is concerned: "Bishop Elliot (of Georgia) presided over the Diocesan Convention of 1846, held in Tallahassee...the theme of the Bishop's address was the Church's opportunity... 'It behooves us to be active in our efforts to plant the Church wherever circumstances may seem to open the door for services.' He felt that Cedar Key, at the mouth of the Suwanee River, was destined 'to grow into importance as a commercial depot.'"

Cedar Key, located on an island about three miles from the mainland of Florida, was at one time a very lively port and the southern terminal of the only railroad existing in Florida. There were several hotels that were built to accommodate the hundreds of railroad and steamship passengers en route to South Florida and Europe.

There's no record of attempts to establish the Church in Cedar Key until 1868 when Bishop Young held services there. In an address to the convention that year in Monticello, Bishop Young mentions: "March 6<sup>th</sup>, we left Tampa and arrived at Cedar Key the next morning. I had originally intended to continue on in this steamer to Pensacola, but...decided to postpone my visit to the western parishes of the Diocese... The second Sunday in Lent, I officiated at Cedar Key, preaching and baptizing one adult in the morning, and preaching again and confirming two in the evening. I found that, although the present reduced population numbers some hundreds, the people are entirely destitute of any religious services. Several itinerants have been sent there, but have left, in each case, after a few weeks sojourn, from the manifest indisposition of the people to attend upon their preaching, or contribute to their support. Instead of the indifference which I anticipated from what I had heard, my visit was greeted with a manifestation of interest that I have not seen exceeded anywhere. The congregations were intelligent, attentive, and reverent, and at night no half of those who came could find room inside the building in which we worshiped. And it is worthy of remark that among those who stood outside to the end, were men who in a residence of years have never been known to go near a place of worship, and who, while the service was in progress, conferred together and proposed to a churchman to unite for the erection of

a church building at once, as an inducement to me to provide them with a clergyman, who should give them at least a part of his time. The general demonstrations of gratitude for my visit and desire for our services, were so unexpected and encouraging, that I postponed my intended departure on the following day, in order to visit the entire population of the town in their own houses. My personal intercourse with the people abundantly confirmed the conviction, that Sunday's demonstrations had forced upon me, that no time should be lost in occupying this ground. I have requested the Rev. Mrs. Perry of Gainesville to visit them and hold services as often as possible."

During that summer, the Rev. B. P. C. Perry, who had been called in January to take over the newly organized parish of Holy Trinity in Gainesville, began services once a month in a little building that was located back of the Gulf House. These services were continued until the fall of 1869. In the winter of 1869-1870, Rev. Mr. Van Linge and his family spent time at Cedar Key. He held services in on Second Street near the Cedar Mills, with part of it used as a Chapel and the rest as a residence. He left in the spring of 1870. The Rev. Mr. Perry resumed his services at that time and continued until some time in 1871. From this time until 1873, occasionally some Episcopal clergyman, who was passing through, would have services. During 1873 and 1874, the Rev. Me. E. W. Meany, who was rector of the Church in Gainesville, held services occasionally. The Rev. Samuel Dubarrow of Philadelphia recorded one baptism in the Chapel at Cedar Key in 1875 while visiting Florida. At the start of 1875, the Rev. John W. Leek became rector in Gainesville and occasional services for the people at Cedar Key were held.

When the building that was being used as the Union Church and school was sold at a sheriff's sale in 1876, it was bought by the mission. It was repaired and furnished for Church services. At this time, the Rev. O. P. Thakara (serving the Church at Fernandina) looked after the interests of the expanding mission.

The Rev. Charles A. Gilert became the rector of Holy Trinity Church in Gainesville in February of 1877. He immediately started holding services once a month at Cedar Key. In the summer of 1877, the Church congregation were called by him to meet to organize a Parish. The minutes of this meeting are with the few surviving records of the early years of Christ Church. When the meeting was held on August 19<sup>th</sup> in the "house of worship," eighteen names were signed to the document. Upon motion of Colonel E. J. Lutterloh, it was resolved to organize a Parish of the Episcopal Church at Cedar Key to be known as the Parish of Christ Church. The secretary, David Lang, records that R. M. Dozier and W. B. Lewis were elected Wardens. C. B. Rogers, E. C. Champlain, and E. J. Lutterloh were elected Vestrymen. The Rev. Mr. Gilbert served as Rector until 1878 when he was called to Key West. The Rev. Mr. Meany became Rector of the Parish in Gainesville in February, 1879, and made arrangements with the Church at Cedar Key for half of his time to be given on alternate Sundays. This arrangement continued until 1882.

In 1880, the Rev. Mr. Meany reported "Christ Church having 17 families; individuals not thus included were 12, a total of 78 persons; communicants numbered 20; Sunday School scholars 30; teachers 5." That same year, Bishop Young said this about the Church work at Cedar Key: "Returning from Key West, I stopped at Cedar Key to officiate on Friday evening, April 2nd. After a sermon by the Rector, I confirmed thirteen. I was surprised at the changed aspect of the congregation since my last visit there. The Church edifice, which was built as a union church, but has come into our possession, has been repaired and materially improved, and from the excellent attendance upon our services, and the exceptionally willing spirit of the people in giving of their substance to sustain them."

Like other southern states, Florida went through a period of financial depression in the years following the reconstruction period after the Civil War, and yet during these years, along with the Church as a whole, Christ Church showed a steady gain. The devoted Churchmen in those hard days can be thanked by present day members for the Church's presence on the island today.

Bishop Young consecrated Christ Church on May 15, 1882—the fourth Sunday after Easter. Besides the Rector, the Rev. Mr. Meany, the Rev. Mr. Rodifer was present and assisted in the ceremony. Mr. Meany noted in his report for that year, that the congregation had increased to 114. A clipping from an unidentified newspaper states that Mr. Meany left for New Mexico due to his health in December 1882. "In his departure the Church loses one of the most learned, faithful, and devoted of her clergy."

The Rev. William Willson became Rector of Christ Church in December of 1882, devoting his whole

time to it and to outlying missions. By Easter 1882, he had established regular services at St. Paul's Mission in Rosewood and at Bronson. He later began the work that became the Church of the Ascension at Clearwater Harbor, some ninety miles away by boat. Bishop Young called Rev. Willson a "true missionary," and under his ministry the Church reached out and touched more souls than ever before. The Rev. Mr. Willson, besides being a missionary, made many improvements in the Church building. He started keeping records of the work of the Church. These records and notes he made of the earlier work done have been of enormous help in the writing of this history.

During the first year of Rev. William Willson's ministry, the Church building was moved onto lots bought for it on the corner of Fifth and D Streets. The Church was situated on one of the highest parts of the island, overlooking the Gulf. Along the front and side of the Church ran white shell streets shaded by live oak and sweet bay trees. A commodious chancel and robing room were added in 1883. "At Rosewood, a plain building was secured and fitted up for a Church." Mr. Willson reported in 1885 that: "a rectory, worth \$800, was completed and all the Church property has been neatly and substantially fenced at but a trifle of money outlay by the Parish." In the report from 1886, he notes that the value of the Church property had increased to over \$3000 exclusive of the rectory. Congregations had reached 140, with 48 communicants, 70 Sunday School pupils and 6 teachers by 1886.

In 1886, Bishop Young died. He was succeeded by the Rt. Rev. Edwin Gardner Weed. When Mr. Willson retired due to ill health in 1889, Bishop Weed sent the Rev. C. W. Arnold to take his place. He was succeeded in 1891 by the Rev. Francis R. Holman. The population of Cedar Key had decreased considerably by this time. The cedar mills had exhausted the timber. They were moving away and the development of railway systems further south had hampered port shipping. There were but 10 Church families left by 1895 and in the next year Mr. Holman recorded only 7 remaining. In 1896, a severe hurricane and tidal wave swept Cedar Key, causing much property damage and starting a horrific fire. Before long, many people moved away and the Church found itself unable to support a full time minister. Mr. Holman moved to Starke where he served both churches until he resigned in 1905. He contributed much to the growth of both these parishes, in spite of ill health. Since he was especially fond of children, on Easter Mondays it was his custom to gather them on the rectory lawn for an Easter egg hunt. The coveted golden egg was almost always hidden about his person.

The Church was without regular services at times after this. Rev. F. S. Hyatt was in charge part of the time between 1905 and 1907 and was succeeded by the Rev. Mr. Charles Hedrick. Hedrick was followed in 1911 by Rev. Henry Harris, who was the Rector in Gainesville. Mr. Harris was followed by Rev. W. R. Creasy in 1913, a missionary from Idaho. In 1915, the Rev. A. O. Worthing took over the services.

In 1916, a terrible fire burned several blocks in the north end of town and the Church and rectory were totally destroyed. Church furniture was saved, however, and services were held in a vacant store belonging to Mr. J. B. Lutterloh, the treasurer. From 1917 to 1918, the Rev. Mr. Fryer was rector of Christ Church. Services were held only intermittently after his departure. Bishop Weed made regular visits, preaching and baptising some whose grandparents he had confirmed in their youth. A deacon, Ancill Curry, visited Cedar Key and held some services. Archdeacon David Holt then followed, holding one service each month. He was succeeded in 1920 by Rev. A. E. Dunaham, who also had charge of St. Mark's in Starke.

In 1925, with help from Bishop Weed, work began on a new Church building on the same site of the one that had burned down. The exterior was completed with the limited funds on hand, and then used for services.



On his first visit to Cedar Key in spring 1925, the Rt. Rev. Frank A. Juhan, preached and baptized several people in that new building. The Bishop called a vestry meeting and money was pledged to secure a rector. In February 1926, he sent the Rev. Russell S. Carleton to St. Mark's, Starke and Christ Church in Cedar Key. He was asked to give half his time to each parish. The interior of the Church was completed under Mr. Carleton's direction, and partly by his own efforts and the vestry's. Choir stalls were made; a vested choir was trained by

the organist. A branch of the Woman's Auxiliary was organized to further the work of the parish. The Sunday School continued under the leadership of Miss Jennie Hayden and the teachers she trained. She also kept a private school (along parochial school lines) never neglecting the teachings of the Church and Christian life.

Mr. Carleton accepted a call to Monticello in 1929 and the Rev. Melville E. Johnson continued with services until he moved to the southern Diocese. After that, the Rev. William S. Stoney, from Holy Trinity in Gainesville, took over the care of Cedar Key, in addition to his other obligations. He continued until he left for Morganton, North Carolina. After his departure, Christ Church was without regular services at times. During these years, many students from the Seminary at Suwanee and the University of Florida held services at Christ Church during vacations. Among these were Ben McGinness; Frank Dearing; Alfred Mathews; Howard Mueller; Robert Baxter; the Rev. Merritt Williams; and many others. Mr. Mueller, during his 2 summers here, built the stone wall around the Church property with the help of the boys of the parish.

In 1936, the Rev. (now Ven.) Fred G. Yerkes came to Christ Church. During his ten years of ministry at Cedar Key, much was added to the Church, both spiritually and materially. The congregation and Church School increased; the Woman's Auxiliary was reorganized and a vestry appointed (both of which were active in the parish); all due to regular services each Sunday. A friend in Gainesville gave the Church a new processional cross and candlesticks. The Woman's Auxiliary made and hung a dossal in the chancel, completed the altar hangings, made vestments for the choir and also kept them in repair. The Auxiliary also raised funds to keep the Church property in good condition and assumed much more of the financial obligations of Christ Church. The addition of a Parish House filled a long-felt want. Mrs. White donated a dwelling she owned and it was moved to the lot adjoining the Church. It was remodeled with very little cash outlay due to efforts of Mr. Yerkes, Mr. Boothby, and other very loyal Church members. A Church in South Florida gave a pipe organ to the Rector and it was installed in Christ Church by Francis Yerkes, his brother. There was a Boy Scout Troop which met in the parish house which was sponsored by the Church. Led by the Rector, they were a wonderful influence for good in parish work. In 1940, Mr. J. B. Hunt came to help with the young people's organizations and assist at Christ Church.

In 1941, the mission field in the charge of Mr. Yerkes extended from the St. John's River to the Gulf of Mexico. It had become too large for one priest to serve. The Rev. Cornelius Tarplee was sent by Bishop Juhan to take the southern half which included Christ Church. The next year, Mr. Tarplee was called to Charles Town in West Virginia, and Mr. Yerkes again assumed responsibility for the island church.

Miss Jennie Hayden died and deeded a dwelling near her home to the Church to replace the one that had been destroyed by fire in 1917, during Mr. Yerkes' tenure. Because it wasn't located conveniently near the Church, however, Mr. Yerkes and the vestry sold it and bought a house directly behind the Church. The Andrews family (as a memorial to Dr. and Mrs. George Andrews) gave another gift to the Church of lights for the body of the Church.

Bishop Juhan sent the Rev. Robert Cowling (newly ordained to the diaconate) to Christ Church in the summer of 1950. Rev. Robert Cowling was the first minister to take up residence on Cedar Key in many years. To have a resident priest proved to be a huge incentive to the growth of the mission. However, Mr. Cowling had not been on the island three months before another horrific hurricane struck the town and the Church was once again destroyed. The front and the side walls were blown over into the street with only the rear wall, altar, and chancel furnishings left in place. These were moved to the living room of the rectory. A short time later, Archdeacon Yerkes arrived in the area. A Communion Service was held on the spot and the people of Christ Church gave thanks to God for having been spared in the hurricane. Bishop Juhan arrived a few days later and took pictures of the Church. These pictures were later sent to other Churches in the Diocese and published in newspapers throughout Florida. A Sunday was set aside for collections to help in rebuilding the Church. Many Church members came to the aid of Christ Church in this time of need in a very generous manner. The Parish House (which had also been damaged) was repaired with some lumber from the wrecked Church.

Bishop Juhan arranged for a loan from the Diocese and engaged an architect to draw up plans for the third Christ Church. It would be, as the Bishop said, "fireproof and storm proof." The new building was to be in Spanish mission style having the altar at the eastern end instead of at the north end as it was in the two older Church buildings. The building committee appointed by Mr. Cowling were Messrs.: William H. Hale (Chairman), Joseph A. Boothby, John Sutton, Charles W. Crevasse, and Daniel A. Andrews, Jr.. Some

former members who were young men of Christ Church were living in Gainesville and working in masonry construction. These young men volunteered to build without charge the concrete block walls of the new Church. Among the young men were Coburn and Stonewall Raines, Sam Goswick, and Lloyd Stevens. This was an enormous contribution to the work on the Church and they gave several weekends to the work. During these “rebuilding” days, the workers were treated to meals at the Island Hotel at the invitation of the Episcopal Churchwomen. The Hotel, at that time, was being operated by Mr. and Mrs. Loyal C. Gibbs and Mrs. Gibbs (Bessie) was President of the Churchwomen. In 1952, the new Church building was completed except for a few furnishings, and on Sunday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, was presented by Mr. Cowling to Bishop Juhan. Church people and clergy were present from all parts of the Diocese for this moment in the life of Christ Church.

In 1953, a communion set of silver with glass cruets, a brass cross, two communion candlesticks and candle holders of brass, and two brass vases were presented to the Church and blessed by Mr. Cowling as memorial to Miss Hayden. These were given as a generous gift of Miss Hayden’s nephew and niece, Ernest Champlain and Mrs. Anne C. Reynolds, whose father was one of the original vestrymen at Christ Church.

After five years of service to Cedar Key, Mr. Cowling accepted a call to Milton, Florida. The Bishop sent the Reverend Harry Babbitt to Christ Church and St. Barnabas, Williston. The Cedar Key church was still using some of its hurricane-damaged pews. When it was learned that a Methodist Church in a nearby town had some pews for sale, Mr. Babbitt and the vestry decided to purchase them. Money for the pews was given by members of the Church. They dedicated the pews to persons of inspiration and blessed memory. Choir stalls were bought and kneelers were built for the new pews. The Churchwomen gave a new dorsal curtain, the floor was laid with vinyl tile, and used carpets from Trinity Church in Gainesville were used as runners. Old metal amounting to thousands of pounds was donated by almost every fisherman and merchant in Cedar Key. From this metal, a bronze cross was cast and was placed on the belfry in memory of Mrs. Elizabeth Andrews. For many years, she was president of the Churchwomen of Christ Church. A light was placed below the cross and it became a symbol of the light which illumines the lives of the faithful. All the bricks from the foundation of the old Church were given to St. Barnabas, Williston. In return, Christ Church received mortar for walks around the Church and Parish House. Will McLeod planted grass and set out shrubs; he lived nearby and cared diligently for them.

In April 1958, Mr. Babbitt accepted a call to Port St. Joe in West Florida. Two months later, the recently installed Diocesan Bishop of Florida, the Rt. Rev. Edward Hamilton West, sent the Rev. John M. Haynes to take over the work at Williston and Cedar Key. Also in 1958, Mrs. Anne C. Reynolds brought the altar, communion rail, baptismal font, and overhead lights to Christ Church from Essex, Connecticut. They had been removed from a renovated Church there. The lovely altar and communion rail were installed at Cedar Key and the font and lights were given to the Church at Williston.

For several years after the new Church was built, a large debt was carried by the small congregation at Cedar Key due to the expense of furnishing the new house of worship and building costs. Mr. Ernest Champlain died in Jacksonville in 1959 and bequeathed to Christ Church a number of shares of stock. This gift was very gratefully received by the Church and the Vestry. Mr. Haynes sold the stock in order to pay off the Church’s debt.

The Boy Scout Troop, through the leadership and interest of Mr. Haynes, was reactivated and the Parish House became a popular gathering place for the young boys in town. Mr. Jack Watson, one of Cedar Key’s young men, was a student at the Theological Seminary at Suwanee during Mr. Haynes’ stay at Cedar Key. A visit to see Mr. Watson and the Suwanee was made possible for some of the members by Mr. Haynes. He took them with him when he visited the school which he himself had graduated from and from whence many past ministers at Christ Church had come. It was truly an unforgettable experience for those who were able to go. Senator Will Shands of Holy Trinity in Gainesville made a gift of a used air conditioning and heating system. This system was installed at his expense and proved to be a most welcome addition to the Church.

Mr. Haynes, after 3 ½ years of devoted service to Christ Church, accepted a call at the Church in Live Oak. The Rev. C. J. Ryley, a retired Anglican clergyman who was visiting in the States, came to Christ Church to serve as locum tenens until a full-time minister could be found. In June 1962, the Rev. Henry Hoyt (graduating from the Seminary in Austin, Texas) came to the Church after being ordained to the diaconate. St. Barnabas in Williston had at this time bought a rectory and Bishop West requested that Mr. Hoyt spend half his

time in Williston. This arrangement, he felt, would make for a more sustained growth in St. Barnabas which hadn't kept pace with Christ Church in the past. Both Churches benefited from Mr. Hoyt's presence. In 1963, during Mr. Hoyt's tenure at Cedar Key, William Henry Hale died. For some thirty years, he had been the Senior Warden or Treasurer for the Church. His family gave, in his memory, two brass collection plates to replace the wooden plates that had belonged to the first Christ Church. Another important occurrence during Mr. Hoyt's stay was when one of the members of Christ Church, Jack Lee Watson, was presented as a priest to the Diocese, "as a symbol of the spiritual vitality of which Christ Church may truly be proud—blessed as it is by the good God," in the words of Mr. Yerkes who had much to do with the decision of this upstanding young man to devote his life to the service of God.

Mr. Hoyt, after 2 ½ years of service to Christ Church, accepted a call to Port St. Joe in January of 1965. Cedar Key was again without a resident Episcopal minister. Bishop West sent the Rev. A. F. Traverse, a retired minister, to replace and to take the services at Cedar Key and Williston. William McLemore graduated in May 1965 from Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria and was assigned to Christ Church in Cedar Key. Instead of serving Williston as in the past, however, Mr. McLemore became Vicar of Holy Cross in Cross City and Protestant Chaplain at the Air Force Station near the same city. Subsequently, the Lower Suwannee River Valley Regional Ministry was established and the Church's work in the three county area was centered in the city of Old Town.

Mr. McLemore enjoyed working with young people in Cedar Key, activating the Episcopal Young Churchmen and providing regular youth activity for the community that was sponsored by this group. "Youth-Nite" became a popular gathering place for teenagers of the island for dances and games. Mrs. Verna Derby served as hostess for this program. Formation of the Mission Advisory Council (which included people from all areas of parish life and who worked with the Mission Board to conduct the business of the Church) enhanced the administration of Christ Church. During the first two years of Mr. McLemore's stay, several gifts were received and blessed. These were 2 hymn boards. One was given by the E. Y. C. in memory of Walter Carroll who was killed in Vietnam. The other was given by the Sunday School in honor of all their teachers, past and present. A member of the Johnson family gave a handsome pulpit in memory of Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Johnson, lifelong members of Christ Church.

During these years of changing ministrations, the devotion of the Church School teachers can't be minimized. The school never ceased to be a source of strength and support to the mission and owes a great deal to the devoted services of people like Miss Jennie Hayden, Miss Lillie Schlemmer, Misses Hattie and Nellie Whitman, Mrs. Myra Coburn, and Mrs. Verona Watson. These and many others have freely given of their talents and time so that the teachings of the Church might be taught to their pupils.

March 10, 1968! The work of the Episcopal Church on the historical island of Cedar Key marks its 100<sup>th</sup> year. No history could possibly account for the deep devotion and often times unnoticed gifts of the thousands of persons who have been part of the worship and life of Christ Church in this island community of Cedar Key. This Church, having been richly endowed by the spiritual labors of so many devoted Christians, looks forward to many more years of fruitful service in the strong and sure hope that the faith of those who 100 years ago had a vision of the Church on this island may be fulfilled. Let us serve with thankful hearts.

FOWLERS BLUFF BAPTIST CHURCH  
March 30, 2006  
Brief History of Church by Bro. Eddie Hatch



Twenty-seven years ago this month, March 3, 1979, a small group of people under the leadership of Bro. Bob Blair began mission services in a trailer at the present location, corner of CR 347 & NW 152<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, under the auspices of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church of Chiefland. In 1981, 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist of Chiefland officially dropped support, but did help in times of need.

From 1979 until 1982, membership was small and few from the bluff supported the mission work. It was an up and down struggle financially and spiritually.

The church was formally organized in April 1982, accepted into Harmony Baptist Association, and ground was broken for a permanent building with Bro. Cecil Lundy of Hardeetown Baptist officiating. The members voted in March of 1984 to remove themselves from the Harmony Baptist Association. In June of 1984, Bro. Blair resigned as pastor.

The present church building was built over a period of two years by the members of the congregation with the help of men from other local churches and was completed and dedicated in August 1984.

Once again, the church struggled financially and spiritually. The church pulpit was filled by Charlie Bogler and many others, like Bro. Victor Shipley, until July 1987 when Robert Yepson was called as pastor, but in August of 1987 he resigned. Again the church pulpit was filled by various local persons until March 1988 when Bro. Royce Hanshew was called as pastor. He pastored until December 1992 when he left to go to Scrub Creek. In January 1993, under the leadership of Bro. Austin McElroy, a retired Baptist pastor who had moved back to the community of his birth, was called as new pastor. The church, under his leadership, petitioned and was again accepted into the Harmony Baptist Association. Bro. McElroy served the church until his death in October 1995. Bro. Eddie Hatch was called as pastor and is still pastoring as of March 2006.

Attendance at Fowlers Bluff Baptist has averaged from 10 in its beginning to 35 at present in morning worship services.

## HISTORY OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF WILLISTON, FLORIDA



The First Baptist Church of Williston, Florida was organized September 27, 1858 with 14 charter members. It was located on a pretty little island near the center of Stafford's Pond Prairie, about six miles southwest of Williston, and was known as Stafford's Pond Baptist Church. The small building was constructed of logs. The first pastor was Rev. Daniel Edwards.

In the year 1867, the church was moved to a more central location known as Button Woods, about two miles southwest of Williston. This was a frame building. The Woman's Society was organized in 1881 and at the time, the church was moved to Williston. There were fourteen members in the society.

In 1891, it was decided to move the church to Williston. Mr. J. Lee Willis, a member, gave the church a deed to two acres of land, which was a part of the present City Park where the old city generator is located. The church building was placed on what is now lot nine and lot ten in block four of the Epperson Addition to Williston. The church faced west about halfway on the property (north to south) with a small lake with clear water used for baptismal services down behind the church. The first services were held in the building November 30, 1891 and at that time the name of the church was changed from Stafford's Pond to the First Baptist Church of Williston. Rev. A. M. Geiger was the first minister ordained by the church and afterwards became pastor.

Soon after the removal of the church to Williston, about fifty of the members withdrew due to the long distance they traveled by horse & buggy, and organized the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church of Murrison. In a few years, about fifty more withdrew and organized the church at Montbrook which they named the



Stafford's Pond Baptist Church, taking the name of the original organization. The withdrawal of the members necessary to constitute these two churches reduced the membership of this church to less than seventy-five members, but the membership steadily grew from year to year. In 1913, it became necessary to build a new church building. Mr. John B. Epperson, a member, gave two lots for the new structure. These were lots two and three in block one, Noble Survey, located at the SE corner of Noble Avenue and Willis Street. A ground-breaking service was held in 1913 and the first service in the new red brick structure was held on March 8, 1914. The pastor at that time was Rev. W. D. Entzinger.

A pastorium was purchased by the church October 15, 1919 on the west one-half of lots two and three in block 33 of Noble Survey. Many improvements were made during the time the church owned this property. It was used for Music and Youth Directors after the new pastorium located at 632 NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street was purchased in 1971 from Jim Statham. The old home was sold in July of 1978.

One of the greatest revivals held in the church was during the ministry of Rev. E. Allen Burnette. There were sixty-seven additions to the church of which fifty-one were by baptism. About this time, the WMS organized a Sunbeam Band which was very successful. In September 1921, the Girl's Auxiliary was organized and a little later the Young Woman's Auxiliary and the Royal Ambassadors were added. Our church has been very missionary minded and was recognized (in 1958) by the Florida Baptist Convention for giving 35% of receipts to world missions through the Cooperative Program. In 1939, a frame building was erected south of the church, financed by the Woman's Missionary and built by Mr. J. H. Howe and was first used as WMS assembly rooms and Junior Department. Later, this building was known and used as the Nursery, and then church office, before being removed in 1968.

The church purchased lots six and seven in block one, Noble Survey, from the City of Williston in 1944 with room for growth in mind. The church adopted the unified budget system in January, 1949 under the leadership of Rev. J. A. McKeithan, who was pastor at that time.

The enrollment of the church and Sunday School grew and there was urgent need for an Educational Building. Mr. B. L. Neal, Chairman of the Building Committee, supervised the work free of charge. The building was completed and opened on June 19, 1949. The building has two assembly rooms, a church office and twenty-three Sunday School rooms. This building became known as the Neal Building. There was approximately 5200 square feet of floor space in this building.

In July 1953, lots one and four, block one of Noble Survey, with the home thereon, were purchased from Mr. C. E. Scarborough, Jr. This building was known as the Fellowship Building. It was modified to make seven Sunday School rooms. October 19, 1960 lots five and eight, block one of the Noble Survey were purchased with house for educational use. The building was removed in 1968.

Ground-breaking ceremonies for a new 6500 square foot Educational Building was held November 6, 1966 during the pastorate of Rev. M. D. Durrance and classes began in the new facility April 23, 1967. A Minister of Youth and Music was added to the church staff.

The potential for growth was again recognized and in June of 1972, lots six, seven and eight of block twenty-four of the J. B. Epperson Addition were purchased by the church. This property was located across the street from the Church. In October of the same year, lot three, west 90 feet of lot four and west 28.4 of lot 2, block 24 of the J. B. Epperson Addition (known as the Foy property) was purchased. In December of 1972, a Bus Ministry began with 183 average number of riders. December 19, 1973, under the leadership of Rev. Ray Newcomb, the church was incorporated. The name of the corporation was First Baptist Church of Williston, Inc.

In September 1975, a home located at 430 NE 1<sup>st</sup> Place was purchased by the church for use by the Assistant Pastor who had been added to the church staff.



The church again was in need of more space for Sunday School and it was decided to build a Family Life Center. In October of 1975, Open House and Homecoming was held. Much of the work for this gymnasium-sized structure (18,500 square feet of floor space) was done by the membership of the church. The new Sunday School rooms surrounding the gymnasium floor were occupied and the building was utilized for youth and family activities including skating for all ages. In September 1977, the city granted the church authority to close SE Third Street which divided the church property between Noble Avenue and First Avenue. This was accomplished for safety of church bus loading area. In April and June of 1977, lots nine through twelve were purchased behind the educational building to allow for more parking space and the buildings were removed for that purpose during the next year. In December of 1977, five lots in Volusia County were given to the church, which were sold in August of 1982. In May of 1980, four lots in Oak Ridge Estates of Levy County were given to the church and were sold in February of 1990. In December of 1983, two lots were donated to the church in Williston Highlands Golf and Country Club Estates, which were sold in August of 1984.

On October 7, 1984, ground-breaking for a new Sanctuary was held while Rev. Travis Hudson was

pastor. The first service was held in the new sanctuary on September 29, 1985 and the building was dedicated on October 13, 1985. The building has 17,000 total square feet and seats 750 people.

The old brick sanctuary was dismantled on April 10, 1989, after the congregation encircled it in an emotional service led by Rev. Travis Hudson and Rev. Edwin Douglas. The service included prayer, interspersed with testimonies and personal witnessing of what the church had meant to families within the congregation.

Rev. Travis Hudson left his position as Pastor near the end of 1989. He was followed by Rev. John Jerrard who came about in April 1990 and remained until October 1995. He was followed by Rev. Tony Clubb who came to the church in June 1997 and remains as Pastor today. Vacancies between these pastors were filled by various interim pastors. The church is thriving today.

HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC CHURCH  
Williston, Florida



It was one hundred years ago that the first Baptist mission in Levy County was established at Ebenezer. You can verify that in Ruth Viller's colorful account of the event on page 65 of "Romantic and Historic Levy County." I mention this because our seeds of formation so greatly resemble theirs in the basic facts that we were small in number, had no visible place of worship and our preacher had to be a circuit rider. Of course, theirs did it on horseback and ours had the horses under the hood.

Prior to 1968, Catholics wishing to practice their faith had to commute to either Gainesville or Ocala. Our children received instructions on Saturdays in Ocala at Blessed Trinity. The pastor of Blessed Trinity was sent to Williston to look into the number of Catholics in the area to determine the need for a mission here. We gathered 26 souls at Knauff's Chapel for our first Liturgy here.

Right around this time, Florida's diocesan boundaries underwent a re-division and Levy County was assigned to the St. Augustine Diocese. Our Bishop, Paul Tanner, directed the pastor, Fr. Richard Altenbaugh, from St. Madeline Sophie Parish in High Springs, to Williston to tend the small flock here. Humbly we began to celebrate Mass at the Williston Woman's Clubhouse. After three months or so, our compassionate Christian neighbors at St. Barnabas Episcopal offered to share their lovely facilities with us. They generously did so for the next three years. By then, we had grown large enough in numbers as to necessitate our starting a place of our own.

Ten acres were purchased 2 ½ miles west of Williston on Highway 27 Alternate where we reside today. Ground-breaking took place on December 13, 1970. Bishop Tanner blessed the church and dedicated it to the "Holy Family," a name chosen by the members themselves, in June of 1971. Lucy Seckinger, a friend, baked a cake in the exact replica of the church to be presented to the Bishop. We were on our way.

Fr. Altenbaugh was probably the first priest to play the Williston Highlands Golf and Country Club course. I believe a plaque he gave them still graces the walls of the dining area today.

In 1975, our first resident priest was assigned to us. Fr. John Gillespie assumed spiritual directorship just as we were given the status of parish. A mission was now added at Inglis. Shortly thereafter, another was added at Chiefland causing us to be referred to in St. Augustine as Tri-County Church of Levy County with the

parish seat at Williston. Fr. John will always be remembered for his inspiring, spell-binding homilies to both young and old alike.

Years passed; we grew. When Fr. Patrick Foley arrived, we had about 125 families on the roster. With Fr. Pat, as we affectionately called him, you never knew what you were going to find on a given Sunday. He would turn everything around in that church so much that you didn't know if you were coming in or going out. He felt a need to change something so strongly that it evolved into the redesigning of the interior with a forty foot extension plus the addition of a social hall. He felt a need three years later to hire our first Nun, Sister Caroline Kearney.

Sister Caroline came to us from the order of Sisters of Mercy, whose motherhouse is located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Sister originally was hired to organize the Religious education Department, but her duties became so diversified that she could not give you a "typical day" of her routine if she tried. She served the community for five years covering much of rural Levy County. Before all this took place, however, Fr. Pat felt that we should celebrate the fact that we had accomplished ten years as a parish (June 14, 1981). All past pastors were invited to a special "Homecoming." Fr. Altenbaugh made a grand entrance over the church grounds by plane, dipping his wings in salutation before landing at the Williston Airport. Many a fond memory is conjured up over that day's events.

In 1982, Fr. Pat called in a professional photographer and had our first pictorial directory compiled. We plan to update with a new directory at the end of 1988.

Today, we count over 250 families on the registry. Our members have woven themselves into the very tapestry of Williston life. We are represented in nearly every philanthropic and civic organization known here.

Oak View Care Center had been one of our primary and longest ongoing recipients of the love and caring of our members. Our priests have attended to their spiritual needs and laity members to their lonely hours, by regular monthly birthday/bingo parties, gifts, visits, and prayers. A weekly rosary/prayer service is conducted by Jim Clark. Betsy Hall has inspired dedicated continuation in this ministry for years.

Of all the projects the Ladies Guild have undertaken over the years, none has given them more pleasure than providing a Mass kit and set of homemade vestments for Fr. Michael Dubriel, the first priest ordained from our own parish.

Some of those parishioners who were among the founding families still active today, you may know: James and Kay Clark, Walter and Marguerite Collins, Bill and Suzanne Dees, Pat Germani, Bob and Helen Poupard.

Our ministry goes beyond the walls of our parish. Through interaction with 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ecumenical Services, indigents are aided. By way of special grants, food clothing, rent, etc., has been provided. Burned out victims have been replenished. The list goes on as do the needs.

Our present Pastor, Fr. Nicholas Glisson, came to our parish in August of 1987. We look forward to our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration beginning in 1990 and we pray that God will continue to provide us with a vision of the mission he has for us in Williston.

God has been good to us. May He grant us the grace to continue to be of service to our fellow men and women. We strive to know, love and serve Him by what we do in His name.

## MORRISTON BAPTIST CHURCH



In the 1890's, when people began moving to Morriston for employment in the rock mines, saw mill and other industries, the need developed for a place of worship. The nearest Baptist Church was Pleasant Hill and Montbrook. Travel was slow and difficult—mostly on foot. Thus, Morriston Baptist Church was organized in 1900. Mrs. Estelle Polk, Mrs. Francis Crevasse and Mrs. Bulah B. Curry were appointed the first trustees. (Levy County deed book T, page 5544, dated 27 Feb. 1900) Lumber was obtained from Mr. Joe Butler, a local saw mill operator. Mr. Henry Nettles was in charge of construction, assisted by Mr. C. C. Callaway and others. Charter members were Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Polk, Mrs. Francis Crevasse, Mr. and Mrs. John Curry, Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Priest, Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Blich, Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Peterson, Mr. Tom Beal and Mr. Munroe Harris.

Pastors to date were: Rev. Bill Perry, Rev. Deveneau (1901), Rev. Compton, Rev. Porter, Rev. W. B. Plumber, Rev. S. W. Sheffield (1907-1908), Rev. A. L. Presco (1909-1910), Rev. C. Moore (1915-1916), Rev. Saunders (1917), Rev. Harris Martin (1922-1925), Rev. Bugg (1927), Rev. Norris (1928), Rev. O'Bryan (1928-1931), Rev. G. McHerndon (1931), Rev. H. B. McElroy (1932), Rev. G. A. Martin (1933-1934), Rev. Ray Walden (1935-1939), Rev. Billy Wolfe (1940-1941), Rev. Winters (1942), Rev. Lerch (1944), Rev. Vining (1945), Rev. L. L. Batts (1945-1951), Rev. W. E. Johnson (1951-1955), Rev. J. H. Davis (1956-1960), Rev. Henry Powell (1960-1976), Rev. P. G. Stafford (1964-1969), Rev. Dan Stroud (1969-1971), Rev. McDonald (1971), Rev. E. M. Marachman (1971-1978), Rev. Wayne Fredrick (1979), Rev. Elden Luffman (1980-1985), Rev. E. M. Marchman (1985-1987), Supply Pastor Rev. P. G. Stafford (1988), Rev. Ed Jenkins (1989-1990), Rev. Wade Dawson (1990-1997), Supply Pastor Rev. Herbert Goodroe (1997-1998), Rev. Keith Stewart May 2005-present.

The present church building was begun in August 1948. Despite a five-year building plan, the \$18,000 block structure was paid for just one year after completion. Some contributions included turkey, cows, chickens and hogs. One prize pig was auctioned six times at \$125 each time. The new church was dedicated on Oct. 9, 1949. Rev. L. L. Batts was the pastor. Trustees: J. J. Andrews, E. E. Cribbs, and T. J. Wynn. Building Committee: E. E. Cribbs, T. J. Andrews, Finance Committee: T. R. Barber, F. M. Mills, Mrs. E. E. Cribbs, Miss Gussie Priest, Mrs. Leola and Mrs. Bertah Stone.

In the early 70s carpet, pews, church furniture and a piano were donated. Mr. Don Wheatley also added the foyer during the period. Mr. Levon Andrews built the Parsonage in 1961 while Rev. Henry Powell was pastor. The total cost was \$10,000. The Fellowship Hall was completed in 1979 while Dr. E. M. Marcham was pastor.

Deacons Past: W. R. House, G. W. Gohagan, Sol Folks, Leon Douglas, Gus Stevens, A. G. McDonald, J. C. Brown, T. J. Andrews, D. P. Hartley, B. N. Messer, Arch Fant, Wilbur Griffin, N. R. Ritch, Howard Jones, E. F. Cribs, Rudolph Rehberg, Mike Smith, George Wynn and F. M. Mills

Deacons Present: Ben Fant-chairman, Kelly Culbertson, T. R. Barber, Gary Bennett, Cecil Banton, Kenneth Cash, James Cason, Theron Corbett, Art Johnston, Herbert Rehberg and Walt Weeks.

Our W.M.U. has been very active in our church for many years. There are references to the organization in the church records as far back as 1949. Some of the projects sponsored by the W.M.U. are: Monthly singing group Oakview Nursing Home, Church wide Thanksgiving dinner, maintain food closet and distribute food as needed during year, distribution of boxed for needy in the community at Thanksgiving and Christmas and also for shut-ins, goody bags for patients at nursing home at Valentine's Day, Easter and Christmas, money sent to Osaage Indians in South Dakota, provide corsages on Mother's Day for oldest mother, youngest mother and mother with most children present at Mother's Day Sunday Service, honored fathers on Father's Day, participated and supported Samaritan's Purse at Christmas, collecting boxes and items to send to needy children in foreign lands and the United States at Christmas.

The Morriston Church of Christ  
Church History  
Submitted by Dennis Hoar



The year was 1908, the place was Morristown, Florida, a small community located in the Levy County district, about 7 miles south of Williston, approximately 25 miles west of Ocala. The main road running north and south through this town was State Road 41. Trains were a major means of transportation in those days; turpentine was an important commodity being harvested from this area. It was in a remote corner of the region that people came together to serve the Lord, in a little known Church called the "Bethany Church of Christ".

It was in those early days on a road that ran westerly from S/R 41 that was then called "Hunters Trail" known today as County Road 326 West, that this gathering place was situated. About 1 mile west on this "Hunters Trail" set back off the road about 200 yards was the First of three Churches. Over the next 100 years they would be home to the congregation of believers that were attempting to serve the Lord as faithful as they did in the first century churches mentioned in the Bible.

The property was originally owned by Reed Clary, who gave the first parcel to the "Church." The first of many preachers to work with the saints there at Morriston was "Brother" Richard Sanders. It was while Bro. Sanders was there that the name of the Church was changed to the Morriston Church of Christ.

Some of the families that worshipped at this location were the Clary's, the Pedrick's, the Watson's and the Brook's. There are still descendents of these families serving the Lord today at the present Church building.

It was shortly after a two week Gospel Meeting that Satan set about trying to discourage the followers of the Lord when a fire broke out and the building was destroyed; however, his attempts failed then and have failed on many other occasions over the years.

Sometime prior to 1914 a second Church building was erected west of the first building, again on property owned, and given to the Church by Reed Clary.



As the years went by World War I broke out and once again Satan tried to get His foot in the door to destroy the efforts being put forth from this congregation, but once again he failed. By 1919 the Church was once again flourishing. The preacher at that time was "Brother" H. L. Shoulders. Some of the other family members who worshipped there at this time were, the Clary families, the Brewington family, the Mikell families, the Guest families, and the Brooks families, just to name a few.

As the Church grew there were many others from outside of the community that desired to join themselves to the "Body of Christ." When they were baptized it was in a small pond located on the Klinge property just down the road from the church building, at a place called, "Sandy Bottom."

There were many men who came to the Church to preach over the years. Among them were S. W. Colson, T. F. Folks, Jessie Martin, F. L. Price, Cleve Moore, George Roberts, Brother Prevat, Brother Crawford and Will Harrison.

Around 1949 the Church of Christ in Williston was established by some of the members who were formally serving in Morriston, after many attempt to start a new work they found success, and by July of 1949 a group of about thirty met at the Williston congregation.

It was around 1976 that a third building was built, which became the Morriston Church of Christ, this building stands today, still located on ("Hunters Trail") C/R 326 west about 1 mile from S/R 41 in Morriston.

The building that served, as the Second Church building was later sold and moved, it serves as a family home and is located west of Williston, on the way to Bronson, just off of State Road 27.

Today many of those same family members worship at the present building, where Dennis Hoar is the current preacher.

## WILLISON CHURCH OF GOD



Reverend J. W. Murray organized the Church of God of Williston May 5, 1918. He was the District Overseer at the time, in the community of Raleigh. Charter members include: J. D. Baldree, M. E. Baldree, M. M. Hatch, J. P. Hatch, L. W. Hood, Alex Jerrell, Rentz Jerrell, Lena Lewis, Doris Lewis, Orian Smith, Leuna Smith, L. L. Swan, H. W. Swan, James Tindall, Lonnie Tindall, Florrie Tindall, Irene Tindall, Mamie Tindall, Inah Tindall, Minnie Tindall, W. J. Tindall, B. D. Tindall, May Tindall, Mary Thomas, Bazil Tyner, Nettie Smith, Donnie Bennifield, Leonard Douglas, Perman Swan, W. A. Bennifield, Lessie Tindall, Fred Sherouse, J. C. Huggins, Sallie Townsend, F. M. Hatch and M. J. McCall.

The first congregation met in the old Union building in Raleigh, but soon purchased a large tent lighted by oil lamps. On June 23, 1919, the church decided to move the services to the Verbena Dale schoolhouse, a frame structure located just off Alternate Highway 27 west of Williston. Around July 1923, a frame building was erected on land donated by Orian Smith. The church was located on Highway 121 south and officially named

the Shiloh Church of God. The building was built out of rough lumber with wooden shutters for windows instead of glass panes. Enough logs were donated to provide the lumber to build the church as the members sawed the logs "on halves" which meant that they kept half of the logs for their own use and donated the remaining half to the church building.

In 1938-39, a second frame building was erected at 305 S.E. 4<sup>th</sup> street (Yessler Street) in Williston. This structure was 30 ft. by 50 ft. with a small wing for Sunday school rooms. When this building was occupied the name "Shiloh" was dropped.

In 1968-69, during the tenure of Pastor Tommy Futrell, a two-story building was built behind the church. The lower level was a kitchen and dining area and the upper level was divided into four Sunday school rooms. In addition, during Pastor Futrell's tenure, L. W. Carlisle, Slater Sapp, Stiles Hopping and other men of the church erected a barbecue pit on a covered concrete slab behind the new building. Barbecue chicken dinners were sold monthly to supplement the church finances or special projects.

In 1974, ground was broken for the present building at 225 S.E. 4<sup>th</sup> Street. This structure is built with 4-inch split-faced beige block. It has sanctuary area 40 ft. by 90 ft. with a seating capacity of 350 with classrooms, church office and pastor's study. It was occupied on April 12, 1975 with the official dedication of the building in June by State Overseer Ralph Williams. In November 1996, a multi-purpose building was completed and dedicated as an educational facility with ten classrooms, a large kitchen and dining area.

Some dedicated pastors have truly blessed the Williston Church of God. We do not have an exhaustive list due to fire destroying earlier records but we do know that the following men served the church as pastors: C. M. Padgett, C. L. Harris, C. T. Anderson, P. W. Chesser, Jim Bradley, W. A. Sullivan, J. M. Baldree, Kyle Bryan, Mitchell Thomas, R. P. Culpepper, C. M. Stokes, E. Ray Kirk, R. E. Dryman, D. I. Phillips, E. P. Henderson, Chester Shoupe, Tommy Futrell, Gene Rowell (32 years as pastor), and current pastors Wesley Neil Smith, Jr. who is the grandson of charter members Orian and Leuna Smith.

God has truly blessed the Williston Church of God in the past 98 years, as there has been constant and consistent growth and we shall continue to be the Church of God in Williston.



1973

FAITH BAPTIST TABERNACLE  
Williston, Florida



Around the year of 1973 an elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Harsh, settled in the sand hills about five miles west of Williston. This couple had ministered the Gospel to migrant workers in the southern part of the state for a number of years.

It was their desire to build and establish a church in the Williston area that would be non-affiliated. The churches in this area at that time were all of the main-line denominations and none were independent in organization and make up.

The Harshs acquired a piece of property in then what was called the Buy-Rite area of Williston. By the end of 1973 they built a small building and opened the doors for worship. The name of the church at that time was Haven of Hope Chapel. The name fit their concept of the kind of church they desired to build.

However, Mr. Harsh never preached in the new building. During the latter part of that year he had become ill and he died in the early part of 1974. He performed one wedding in the new building, that of David Clark and Patty Barker.

At this same time in early 1974, a recent seminary graduate and his wife were making plans to go to Ecuador as missionaries. Richard and Susan Harding were invited to attend the church and Richard was asked to do the preaching due to Mr. Harsh's sickness. In the early part of that year they made their first visit and Preacher Harding ministered from the pulpit

Shortly after this Mr. Harsh died. The Hardings were asked to stay on and minister to the small group of people that attended. This was the beginning of Pastor Harding's ministry to this area. The Hardings moved to this area in April 1974. They lived in a small travel trailer immediately behind the little chapel building.

At that time the church was not really a church but a sort of mission. Attending and committed to the establishing of the church was Mr. Harsh's widow, Anna Harsh, along with Mrs. Gita Barker (piano player),

Mrs. Snook, Mrs. Melling, Mrs. Freida Jones, Otis Carter, Mr. & Mrs. Varnhagen, Mrs. Laisy and a few others who were somewhat committed. Also, some of these had children and the children attended as well. The total number amounted to 12 to 14 who were mostly regular in attendance.

Brother Harding continued to preach at the chapel. In time he was asked to become the pastor of the congregation. In December 1974 Brother Harding put before the small congregation the matter of his relationship to the chapel. He would stay and become the pastor on the condition that the church would agree to organize herself into a local independent Baptist Church. All those named and committed to the church agreed to this proposal.

In early 1975 the church changed its name and became the Faith Baptist Tabernacle under the leadership of Brother Harding. In September of that same year the church opened a Christian School. The school was first named Cross and Sword Christian Academy but later changed its name to Williston Christian Academy. The school was in operation as a day school for 17 years. It still continues as a home school support ministry of the church.

In 1979 the church sold its little chapel building in the Buy-Rite neighborhood and built a new building on 27A about one mile west of Williston. Mr. & Mrs. Gregory were very instrumental and helpful in building the new facility. About two years later the church built an additional building. Mr. Jerry Johnson was instrumental in the building of this building. In 2004 the church built a fellowship hall. Mr. Stan McClain was instrumental in the building of this building.

From this church, Dale Towle is pastoring a church in Wisconsin. Also from this church came the Frank Maxson family who are serving as missionaries in Malawi, Africa.

The pastor of the church today is the same Richard Harding that came here in 1974. The church is an independent Baptist Congregation. It holds to the historic confessions of faith of the early Baptist in America, particularly the London Baptist Confession of 1689 and the Philadelphia confession of 1742.

## Long Pond Baptist Church Chiefland, Florida

### A Snapshot Of Church History



Long Pond Baptist Church was established at another location in this community in 1893. Early church records indicate it was moved to its present location from a place about two miles east. The one acre piece of property at the original location was donated to the early Long Pond Primitive Baptist Church by Mr. And Mrs. John T. Allen. Those early church members wanted to have a cemetery, but with only one acre there just wasn't enough room. That's why the Sims family, which still have descendants living near by, donated two acres for the church and cemetery. Those early church leaders felt moved to bring their meeting place, in July of 1895, to the very grounds we are blessed to occupy today. Plans are under way to add some much-needed space by building a fifty by eighty fellowship hall a little south of the existing church building.

The folks who made up the first congregation were "Primitive Baptist" or as they were called in that day "Hard Shell Baptist." There are many graves in the cemetery behind the church, which date to those early days. Many have come or called checking on some loved one they were told was buried here. One Sunday morning, before services started, a man and his grandson from Suwannee County came by. He wanted to show his grandson his great grandfather's grave because the grandson was named after him.

Uncle Johnny McCall, as he was called by many who knew him, pastored the church for forty years prior to his passing away in the early to mid 1970s. He lived in Otter Creek, Florida. One of his daughters, Ferrell Morris, who lives in Otter Creek, may be the only surviving member of that group.

When Brother McCall died the church didn't seem to have the will to continue. There were efforts made to keep it active, but to no avail. We were told that a preacher (some kin of one of those members) from up near Tallahassee tried to hold the church together but could not. Because of that no services were held for several years.



A new group of believers gathered on the first Sunday of March 1980, which was a day of rain and sleet. Some no doubt, would have been discouraged as the weather gave a cold welcome to this group of worshipers, which included Pastor Ron Cason and his wife, Elizabeth, their three children, Rhonda Cason Cook, Susan Cason Hallman, and Kevin Cason. Also Chuck Cook, the Wayne Thompson family, the Cliff Bell family, and Bart Pixon. On the first Sunday night, because of problems with the electricity, kerosene lanterns had to be used for church services. The church has been holding regular services ever since.

Many days have gone by and much water has passed under the bridge, so to speak, since that cold Sunday March 2, 1980. There have been many blessings and opportunities of testimony to the goodness of our Savior. One such blessing was when Georgia Pacific, a company that bought out Patt and Mack Timber Company of Gulf Hammock, donated an additional two acres of land to the church back in the mid 1980s. This brought the amount of church property to about five acres. Soon the men of the church added Sunday school rooms to the existing building. About 1985 the back wall of the old building was knocked out so an addition could be built. This almost doubled the church in size. The church building then took on a little different shape as well as becoming more useful.

The next year saw the church do something almost unheard of. In fact some even said it couldn't be done. But trusting in the Lord, petition was made to the Federal Communication Commission for a radio frequency to establish a 3,000-watt Christian radio station. In July of 1987, WTBH 91.5 FM "Joyful Sounds Radio" became a reality. We like to think of the radio station as a voice crying in the wilderness, reaching from the Gulf of Mexico into several rural counties around our area with the message of hope and encouragement, which only our Lord Jesus Christ can give. We are not known today as "Primitive Baptist" or "Hard Shell Baptist" folks. In fact we think of ourselves not as Primitive or hard-shell but as Bible believers who love the Lord and want to reach out to our fellow man for Him. Not a part of any denomination, or particular group, just independent Bible believers, independent of man but dependant on the Lord who leads and guides us through His Word, the Bible, which we understand and accept as the final authority in any area of life and practice. We are an evangelistic fellowship with a vision and a desire to be used of the Lord, to make a difference in our community for Him.









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