

THE ENTRANCE OF THE PRINCE
IN THE EASTERN PART OF THE PENINSULA
AND
SOME EARLY PROTESTANTIAN PLANTINGS
IN THE REGION
OF SAINT JOHN'S PROTESTANT

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AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO THE
FAMILY OF THE REV. WILLIAM B. TELFORD
BY
MRS. J. M. WATSON

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The faith of our fathers first found its way into Florida in the migration of a colony of over one hundred families of Scottish descent from the Carolinas, and others direct from Scotland.

The movement began in 1820 before the close of the pending treaty of the United States with Spain for possession of the Florida provinces. They slowly drifted into West Florida, and settled in the Euchee Valley now comprised mainly in Walton County.

State histories contain ample proof of the import and timely arrival of the large colony and its distinctive influence in the upbuilding of the new commonwealth.

In recent years the Rev. Wm. E. McIlvaine of Pensacola, published a delightful sketch of the settlement of Euchee Valley, entitled: "The Early Planting of Presbyterianism in West Florida." It is an inspiring story of the pioneer experiences of the Presbyterian forefathers and their zealous efforts in the formation of the Church, and its growth and expansion over the mainland, during the half century following Florida's accession to the United States.

Meantime, the peninsula remained a wilderness overrun by Seminole Indians, who inhabited the dense forest of the interior, suspicious, and resentful, toward the encroachments of civilized men. Means of expelling the wily red men from their haunts, (the last place left for retreat,) proved a problem for the Government for more than fifty years.

It is claimed that the geography of a country has much to do with its inhabitation, and authorities allow that in the Seminole Wars, unusual physical features of the peninsula, hindered the army, and obstructed ordinary military tactics. The great length, impenetrable cypress swamps, with their spiky knees, untraversable saw-grass marshes of the Everglades, strange and weird and uncanny to the white men, were the Indian's natural element, and a foil on the trail of his densely secluded habitat.

Green's History of Florida states: "By 1818 all white settlements in the interior were destroyed or abandoned," although it is a fact, that a few sparsely scattered settlers always hung along the fringe of the coast. This condition still existed at the outbreak of the Seminole War of 1835, when troops were ordered to the east. Fort Mellen was established in 1836 on the upper Saint Johns, with Fort Read, commissary department, situated $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles further south. Together, these formed the post of concentration for soldiers, and supplies, for distribution to the forts along the military road, and laterals, terminating at Fort Brook, Tampa. The territory traversed by this system of roads, comprised what is now St. Johns Presbytery.

After military power became established, the Government, in an effort to induce settlement in the interior, made attractive offers of land, so, that long before the Indian menace ended, civilian settlements were forming near the forts.

Some years later, when the regular army finally withdrew, a few of the volunteer soldiers remained as permanent citizens. Many of the little forts grew into neighborhoods which today are the peninsula's towns and cities.

Early in the 1850's Mr. Francis Lee Galloway, with his young daughter Nancy about sixteen years of age, settled in the Fort Read community. Mr. Galloway was a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church at his former home in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, and for some years following, they were the only Presbyterians residing at the fort.

Probably about 1855, Judge James G. Speer secured lands near Lake Apopka, about 35 miles distant from Fort Mellen, where he planted orange groves and erected a home called Oakland. Far removed from neighbors or church. It was the custom of this Christian household to assemble daily for prayers, including all the colored folk of the plantation. On the Sabbath Judge Speer conducted religious worship

and Sunday School in his house. The family returned in 1861 to their former home in South Carolina, coming back, after a few years to the orange groves and the peace of pioneer life. The worship of God in the faith of their fathers was resumed in the home at Oakland, embryo of the Presbyterian Church in the town of Oakland today, flourishing in the spiritual type of divine planting: "I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed." (Jer. 2-21.)

It is interesting to note that in the period between 1855-66 there were no new-comers.

The people lived comfortably in log houses, or others built of boards, split out by hand, on small farms or orange groves which yielded moderate incomes. Oranges were packed for market in barrels, or boxes of indiscriminate sizes, and usually sold to factors from Savannah or Charleston. The main wealth consisted of cattle which roamed at large, herded once a year and marketed in Cuba, or driven to points farther north. Actual need of the currency of the realm was not great.

By 1866 citrus culture in Florida, as a profitable investment, began to attract attention. Many families of the South, reared in plantation life, and familiar with agriculture, broken up in the former ways of living, found in it a congenial change and occupation.

The first contingent of Presbyterians to arrive at Fort Read after the Seminole War, were Dr. Andrew C. Caldwell and his family from Greensboro, North Carolina, in May, 1867. He had previously purchased lands and an orange grove, which became the home, located near to that of Mrs. W. W. Woodruff, née Miss Nancy Galloway, the pioneer Presbyterian girl.

The new comers arrived at Mellenville, (Old Fort Mellen), now Sanford, on the Steamer "Darlington," the only boat that plied the upper St. Johns, and the one means of communication with the outside world. Its weekly arrival, on Monday afternoons, was an event

of intense interest for Mellenville was the distributing point of mails, by horsemen to the interior, and the east coast, as far south as Fort Dallas, Miami.

The only building, a store adjoining a long wharf, and erected about 1865, carried a large stock of general merchandise. Being the only store nearer than Tampa, the settlers frequently came in groups from far in the interior for supplies and mail, in heavy wagons, each drawn by several yoke of oxen, and always timed to include "boat day."

Approximately twelve families were residing in the Fort Read community, with perhaps as many more within a radius of twenty miles.

No church organization existed. Occasionally a Methodist circuit rider preached at the little log Church-School-House, and on Sabbath mornings a community Sunday School was held and attended by all, of whatever age or faith.

In 1869 a Presbyterian organization was made at Leesburg, then in Sumter County, by the Evangelist of Florida Presbytery, the Rev. John W. Montgomery, under the name of the Sumter Church. Six members of the Gamble family constituted the membership with Mr. Wm. G. Gamble as a Ruling Elder. The name was later changed to the Leesburg Presbyterian Church. The building was erected in 1884.

Among those who located at Fort Read in 1869 were twelve Presbyterian families coming from Northern Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, New York, and one from Norway. In the Georgia group was a Presbyterian minister, the Rev. F. F. Montgomery. These with Mrs. Nancy Galloway Woodruff and Dr. Andrew G. Caldwell and family, were soon gathered together for worship, and planning to organize and build a church.

Services and all social meetings were held at the Orange House, a hotel in process of erection. Mr. Montgomery conducted the services,

Mr. B. F. Whitner served as Sunday School Superintendent and Bible Class teacher and Mrs. Herbert Holland of Springville, New York, an accomplished musician, directed a Young People's Musical group.

Silver Lake Church, named for a lake in the vicinity, was organized in February, 1870, by a commission of Florida Presbytery, composed of the:

Rev. J. W. McCormack, Micanopy,
Rev. John C. DuBose, Tallahassee,
Rev. James Little, Quincy, and
Ruling Elder, B. F. Whitner, Fort Read.

Officers of Silver Lake Church:

Ruling Elders:

B. F. Whitner, Madison, Florida,
Joseph N. Whitner, Tallahassee, Florida,
Angus Donald Bruce, M.C., Americus, Georgia,
Andrew Curran Caldwell, M.D., Greensboro, North Carolina,
Appleton T. Rossetter, Columbia County, Enterprise,
Volusia County, Florida.
James G. Speer, South Carolina and Oakland.
Zolotus Mason, M.D., Apopka, Orange County.
Benjamin Gould, Orlando, Orange County.

Deacons:

Mr. Stockton, North Carolina, and Beresford, Volusia Co.,
Mr. Joseph Newton Whither, Mar's Bluff, South Carolina.
Mr. Matthew R. Marks, Americus, Georgia.

Charter Members: (40)

B. F. and Mrs. Sarah Jane Church Whitner,
Joseph N. and Mrs. Mary Golphin Whitner,
Joseph Newton and Mrs. Amelia Melvina Howard Whither,
Angus Donald Bruce and Mrs. Cornelia Marks Bruce,
Mrs. Jacinta Marks, Americus, Georgia,
Miss Maggie Marks, Americus, Georgia,
Matthew R. Marks, Americus, Georgia,
Mrs. Adeline Tomlinson Marks, Americus, Georgia,
Mrs. Margaret Bruce Rees, Americus, Georgia,
Mrs. Janette Bruce Boone, Americus, Georgia,

Charter Members (Continued):

Andrew C. Caldwell and Mrs. J^Wllie Doak Caldwell,
Mrs. Nancy Galloway Woodruff, Fort Read,
Sallie Davidson Caldwell,
John Willy, Christmana, Norway,
Zolotus Mason, M.D., and Mrs. Mason,
Mr. Harrington, Anopka,
Appleton T. Rossetter, Enterprise, Volusia County,
Mrs. A. T. Rossetter, Enterprise, Volusia County,
Mr. and Mrs. Watson, Enterprise, Volusia County,
Benjamin Gould and Mrs. Gould,
James G. and Mrs. Speer,
Mrs. Madison McLean and Miss Josephone McLean, Beresford,
Mr. Stockton and Mrs. Maggie McLean, Stockton, North Carolina,
and Beresford, Volusia County.

During the visits of Presbytery's Commissioners, the following ordinances of the Church were observed: Church organization, ordination and installation of ruling elders and deacons, the reception of members, the communions of the Lord's Supper, baptism and marriage.

Baptisms: Robert Ernest Caldwell,
Mattie Boone,
Cornelia Frances Boone,
Ella Holland.

Marriage:

Miss Maggie Marks
Mr. George D. Turner, Petersburg, Virginia.

Services were continued at the Orange House conducted by the Rev. F. F. Montgomery as stated supply. The choir was led by Mrs. Holland with the use of a small melodeon brought from Georgia by the Marks family, proprietors of the Orange House, which was their residence. A Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary and Aid Society was organized with fourteen members:

Mrs. Jacinta Marks, President,
Mrs. Nancy Galloway Woodruff,
Mrs. Cornelia Frances Marks Bruce,
Mrs. Margaret Bruce Rees,
Mrs. Jeannette Bruce Boone,
Mrs. Adeline Tomlinson Marks,
Miss Maggie Marks,
Mrs. J~~W~~llie Doak Caldwell,

J H L E

Mrs. Sarah Jane Church Whitner,
Mrs. Mary Golphin Whitner,
Mrs. Amelia Melvina Howard Whither,
Mrs. Maria Stone Nichols,
Mrs. Sarah Cochrane Holland, and
Miss Ursula Holland.

No record was kept of their good works; of ministries to the Church, the needy, or the sick, in a region where professional nursing was unknown. The building was completed within a year after the organization, and the bell was a gift from Mr. Geo. W. Wylly of Savannah and Fort Read. The interior walls were quaintly decorated in columns and arches, the work of a German painter, Mr. Charles Weinrich.

There were approximately forty charter members residing in the counties of Orange and Volusia. Later when churches were organized at Orlando, Apopka, and Oakland in Orange, and at Enterprise and Beresford in Volusia, members were transferred to their places of residence. Owing to the loss of session book, the list of names may be incomplete.

The group at Beresford was not long able to maintain organization for lack of members. Enterprise erected a church which survived a few years until the building was destroyed by fire. Both of these congregations were dissolved by Presbytery and transferred to the DeLand Church.

The Rev. Wm. B. Telford, called from Luraville, Suwannee County, was installed pastor of Silver Lake Church in January, 1873, by a Commission of Florida Presbytery, then the only one in the State, consisting of the Rev. J. W. McCormack and the Rev. Archibald Baker. The relation remained unbroken for more than twenty years of blessed ministrations to his people.

Mr. Telford was a deep student of the Bible, an excellent preacher and a genial friend to all ages in his congregation and the community.

One evening at Prayer Meeting he was suddenly impressed, as

he afterwards told, to announce services for young people to begin the next evening. The church was well filled, and with no effort to excite emotions, or draw large crowds, with prayer he preached and instructed in the Scriptures night after night, to increasing numbers. Persons who were never known in a church were deeply concerned, and to his great happiness, at the end of three weeks, thirty-seven persons stood around the altar and by profession of faith in Christ were received into the Church.

St. Johns Presbytery was organized by the Presbytery of Florida in convention at Silver Lake Church, March 9, 1878. The influence of the Pioneer Pastor extended beyond the limits of his parish, actively aiding in the development of the Churches arising over the peninsula, encouraging, and upholding, the work of the new Presbytery of St. Johns, and of the Synod.

The Pioneer Mission of Silver Lake Church seemed fulfilled in the twenty-five years of its existence, and its life and activities ebbed out with his own. In declining health, confined at home, a patient sufferer after his busy years, he conscientiously protested that another should be installed in his place, although services were regularly kept up in the Church by stated supplies.

In the seclusion of his illness he perhaps never fully realized the truth, that the center of population had already shifted to the rapidly growing town of Sanford, and the need of the country town had ceased. God was good to him, and called him Home before the approaching calamity of the great freeze of 1894-95. An epoch in the peninsula's history from which time and events are still computed; when his grove and all the orange groves in the peninsula were killed and most of the people forced to seek opportunity elsewhere.

The last rites of love and respect to the good pastor were had in the Church conducted by his friend, Bishop Whipple of the Episcopal Church. He was laid to rest beside Mrs. Telford, and their son who bore his father's name, the elders of his Church, and many friends of pioneer days, in the Fort Read section of the cemetery.

In 1900 the last remaining elder of the Church moved away to a distant State, and Silver Lake Church ceased by order of Presbytery

These early Churches in their day, served faithfully and well, laying Presbyterian foundations, the faith of our fathers; dissolved, and yielding place in the progress of time, they are not dead, but their influence yet speaks in the living Church. We revere the memory and their records are of historical value.

A neighboring pioneer Church, erected at the site of Fort Maitland, organized in the &70's, served usefully under the pastorate of the Rev. Dr. S. V. McCorkle. After the passing away of the beloved pastor, its work was done in the location. This Church was dissolved too by Presbytery, about the same time as Silver Lake Church, and the membership largely absorbed by churches of Orlando. Maitland Church cherished the recollection that the youthful years of the late Rev. Edgar Tufts were closely associated with its life, and followed the development of his beautiful Christian character and ministries, with warm personal interest. He worked at "Banner Elk", North Carolina, and organized a school.

In 1916 at the Convention of the General Assembly in Orlando, a gavel, made of wood taken from Silver Lake Church, was presented to the Moderator, Dr. C. W. Graften in memory of the Rev. John W. Stagg, lately deceased pastor of the Host Church, by his friend Mr. J. N. Whitner, an elder of the Sanford Church. At the request that a service be held in the Silver Lake Church on Sabbath afternoon, Dr. Graften graciously responded, appointing a delegation of the Commissioners to assist the Rev. Dr. R. L. Telford, a son of the Pioneer Pastor, in conducting the service, perhaps the last ever held in its sacred walls. The property of Silver Lake Church is held in trust by the session of the Sanford Church. Falling to decay the Church was recently removed, and the pews lent to a Church in Sanford, of another denomination.

It is earnestly hoped, that in years to come, a House of God shall again be erected upon the sacred ground.