



First Presbyterian Church

Bartow, Florida

1882 - 2007

125 Years Sharing Christ

April 2007

Issue #3

Sanctuary

Webster defines a sanctuary as: 1.) a consecrated place 2.) a place of refuge. For 120 years First Presbyterian Church of Bartow has provided a place of sanctuary for God's people in Bartow; a consecrated place for the worship of God and a place of refuge where those weary and heavy laden can find rest for their souls. Did you know that our old sanctuary, now the fellowship hall, is the oldest existing sanctuary for worship in the city. Other church buildings existed before ours; in fact at one time the members of First Presbyterian worshiped in the Methodist sanctuary before we had a sanctuary of our own. Those other sanctuary buildings have since been replaced but under the brick and mortar of the fellowship hall is the structure built in 1887 for the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of Bartow. Think of all the worship that has taken place in that building over the past 120 years! The baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, prayer meetings and revivals! If those old walls could talk!

— Rev. Jim Hatch

Building . . .

Rev. Samuel Hair became the church's first full time pastor on March 1, 1886 and immediately entered into work. Services were held at the Opera House on Main Street and before the end of the month the congregation had not only observed its first celebration of the Lord's Supper, purchased an organ and hymnals, added five members but also elected Elders and Deacons. March 28th was doubly significant in that it marked the first celebration of the Lord's Supper and the first Session meeting.

In addition to regular services on the Sabbath the congregation began looking to the future. By September plans were forthcoming to erect a church building on the site originally selected in 1883. The Methodist and Baptist



Architect, Elder McKenzie Dunlope and Rev. Samuel Hair in front of the 1887 church.

congregations had already completed their building projects three years earlier by erecting sanctuaries on Church Street. The Presbyterian site would be located on the south side of town. The lot was considered strategic as it was in the center of town and adjacent to the new school property selected for Summerlin Institute. The Session entered into negotiations with William Hampton Johnson and his wife in order to purchase the corner lot on Stanford Street and Florida Avenue.

The body of believers had grown to 44 members and by December 1886 the land was purchased and the first capital campaign commenced. Bartow looked forward to seeing a new House of Worship erected on "Summerlin Hill". A loan for \$700 was secured from the Northern Assembly's Board of Home Missions. The local newspaper reported that every businessman in Bartow with the exception of two contributed generously. That same month witnessed the incorporation of the Church.

Ruling Elder Matthew McKenzie Dunlope was the architect and contractor for the building. The edifice consisted of an auditorium 36 x 60 feet with a small vestibule. A 40' bell tower topped with a steeple added to the small town's skyline. The walls were painted white and the windows filled with hammered rolled glass. A large three paneled peaked arch window with trace work forming crosses and lattice work in the upper extremities graced the eastern wall. The building was raised above the ground and the entrance was through the tower. Lumber was obtained by cutting down trees in the local area. The logs were hauled by oxen to Bartow's first saw mill and turned into boards and shingles. The mill was located west of Floral Avenue on Pearl Street.

A list of contributors reveals that the Ladies Aid Society raised \$396.16. Rev Alexander Sproull contributed \$500 on behalf of a friend which was used to purchase a small pipe organ. Another donation of \$100 was received anonymously along with the \$700 received from the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. A total of \$2,200 was contributed by the Presbyterians of Bartow and their friends. The capital campaign garnered \$3,896.16 enabling the First Presbyterian Church to reach its goal. Actual construction was reported as having begun by January 11, 1887.

Work on the building continued and local progress was announced on the Wednesday after Easter by the newspaper. The April 13th issue of the *Advance Courier* reflected the arrival of seating to grace the new sanctuary. Instead of pews the Presbyterians would enjoy patent folding opera chairs complete with foot rests. The editor also noted that the hat and shawl racks would add greatly to the appearance of the auditorium.

On December 7th a bell was presented to the church just in time for the first service held in the new sanctuary on Christmas Day 1887. First Presbyterian Church became the third church building in the city. The sanctuary and grounds were formally dedicated on May 20, 1888 commencing the building's use for worship and the Lord's service continuing to the present.



Interesting Fact!

- † The 1887 church building was completed at a cost of \$3,500. Average wage was \$2.40 per day.
- † M.M. Dunlope, the church's elder and architect, received the contract for the interior furnishing of railroad magnate Henry Plant's resort Tampa Bay Hotel (now the University of Tampa). Dunlope's other businesses interests included furniture and undertaking. After relocating to Steubenville, Ohio he entered the wholesale grocery business, land speculation and banking. He continued to serve as an Elder at Steubenville's First Presbyterian Church.

OH WHAT A SUNDAY!

Sunday, April 6, 1919 was a red letter day for Bartow and Polk County. Two thousand automobiles and eight thousand people gathered all morning to hear a former professional baseball player speak.

The numbers may not seem significant but one year later, the 1920 U.S. Census reported that the entire City of Bartow numbered 4,203. Winter Haven's population was 1,597 and a crowd of 8,000 exceeded the sum total of Lakeland's 7,062.

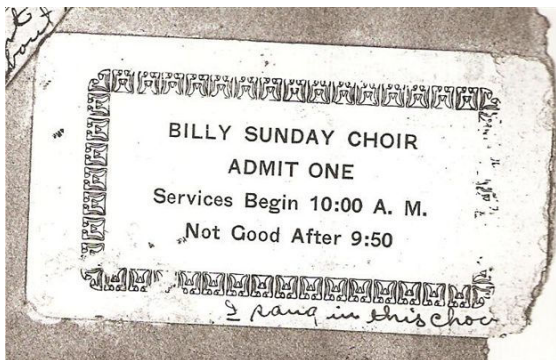
The baseball player was William Ashley Sunday, better known as Billy Sunday, Presbyterian minister and nationally recognized evangelist. Born on November 19, 1862 in a two room log cabin near Ames, Iowa, he grew up in orphanages and left the farm to become a professional baseball player. After leading a vice ridden life in Chicago he became a devoted Christian and left a lucrative baseball career to become a Spirit filled, minister of the Gospel. His message and flamboyant delivery style was popular and his revival campaigns across America drew thousands wherever he went.

For three weeks he spoke in Tampa before record numbers. The Lakeland Evening Telegram newspaper as well as others kept pace by printing front page articles during his brief stay in the area. The casino at the Tampa Bay Hotel (now the University of Tampa) and the fairgrounds next to the hotel hosted the popular preacher.

Bartow's local churches, civic organizations and the Board of Trade (Chamber of Commerce) requested Reverend Sunday to come to Polk County. A delegation representing the city went to Tampa by train. Rev. Sunday agreed to come for one service at 10:00 am Sunday morning on April 6, 1919, before returning to Tampa for afternoon and evening services.



Song Leader Homer Rodeheaver (left) and Rev. Billy Sunday (right). The man in the background is believed to be Clarence A. Boswell. He drove Rev. Sunday to Tampa following the morning service. (Photo courtesy of Jan Crawford)



'Choir Ticket' for the Bartow Service

Public Library. Thousands came from around the country to hear the great evangelist.

With no auditorium large enough to accommodate immense crowds, organizers chose the grounds of the Summerlin Institute (present playground of Bartow Elementary Academy) and the First Presbyterian Church. A large platform was built on the north steps of the gymnasium. The north steps were flanked on the east by the 1901 high school and on the northwest by the original Summerlin Institute, forming a horseshoe with the open end facing Stanford Street and the Presbyterian Church. Rev. Sunday's famous song leader, Homer Rodeheaver, led a choir and orchestra composed of local talent. Both school buildings were opened for spectators. Orange crates to accommodate seating were placed in rows on the school yard extending north across the street encircling the First Presbyterian Church and

Homer Rodeheaver played the trombone and led the hymns. Rev Sunday followed with a sermon from 2 Samuel, chapter 12-15 entitled, "I have sinned against the Lord". Bartow heard and experienced the Old-Time Religion. In his closing prayer, Billy prayed that Polk County would attain prosperity, that the farmers

would have good crops, business men would make money, the orange trees would be heavy laden with fruit, and the cattle would bring twin calves! Hundreds made a profession of faith that day. Down in Fort Meade, Billy Sunday had a great admirer. The night after the sermon C. W. Mills' jersey heifer gave birth to twin calves!

It is estimated that over a hundred million persons heard Sunday speak during his lifetime of ministry, and that more than a million made a profession of faith in Christ Jesus as a result of his preaching. He was the first minister to employ radio for national evangelization and coined the term, "broadcasting" alluding to the use of the airwaves to spread the gospel like the parable of the Biblical sower broadcasting seed.

The next time you step out of the sanctuary, take a moment to look across the grounds toward Bartow Elementary. Imagine 8,000 men, women, boys, and girls worshipping the Lord, and receiving the Good News. It was April 6, 1919. Oh, what a Sunday!

Let's Study!

📖 Presbyterian Lectionary for April 23, 1882

Lesson IV: Mark 6:45-56 Title: "*Christ Walking on the Sea*"

Golden Text: "*For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.*" Isaiah 53:2

Read All About It!

📖 In the late 1880s Bartow's citizens were blessed to have two newspapers, *The Informant* and the *Advance Courier*. Both newspapers reported on the town's three churches. The *Advance Courier* carried religious services on its front page City Directory. First Presbyterians services were listed as Sabbath at 11:00 am and 7:00 pm. Sabbath School at 9:45 am Standard Time. Rev Samuel Hair, Pastor.

Session Notes . . .

✍️ 1 May 1886 Ruling Elders were M. McKenzie Dunlope, and E. K. Gibbons. Deacons were Dr. M. Kennedy, Cyrus McNeill, and J.Z. Dunlap.

Did You Know?

? The interior of the Fellowship Hall is the original 1887 sanctuary. When the church building was completed it was oriented on an east-west axis. During the extensive renovation in 1932 the structure was turned to face north with the entrance facing Stanford Street. The bell tower was razed and additional rooms were added to accommodate a growing Sunday school. Brick walls and a gothic arch constructed of natural limestone were added completely enclosing the pioneer church. The interior open beams, ironwork, and wood paneling reflect the beauty of 120 years. The structure has been in continual use for the Lord since Christmas Day 1887 and is the oldest church building in Bartow.

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