



First Presbyterian Church

Bartow, Florida

1882 - 2007

125 Years Sharing Christ

February 2007

Issue #1

125 Years Serving Christ!

15 times in the book of Deuteronomy God instructs the Hebrew people to “remember”. They are preparing to move ahead into a new future and God wants them not to forget the blessings and lessons from the past. This year we celebrate 125 years of ministry in Bartow. Each month we will highlight various milestones and events in our church history as we move forward in ministry remembering God’s faithfulness in the past!

— Rev. Jim Hatch

Our Beginning...

After the American Civil War efforts were made by the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Church to organize congregations in Central Florida. Rev. William Gordon Flagler Wallace, a circuit riding minister for the Presbyterian Church U.S. (South), gathered six persons in 1882 to establish Bartow's First Presbyterian Church. That same year Bartow struggled to find 25 voters in order to meet State requirements for incorporation as a municipality.

Bartow's four page newspaper the *Bartow Informant* announced on February 25, 1882 that Rev. Wallace had formed a Presbyterian Church with six members. It was the third congregation formed in Bartow following the Methodist and Baptist churches. Worship was held at the Hughes Opera House and the County Court House on Main Street. Services were held monthly as Rev. Wallace's circuit extended over a wilderness landscape boasting primitive roads to Bowling Green and Wauchula.

Records indicate that the founding members of the church were John R. Richardson and family, Olivia Smith and her mother Melinda Hyland, and A. P. McLeod. The other two members though not mentioned by name were in all likelihood the wives of John Richardson and A. P. McLeod.

John Richardson was the first Elder, and the newspaper again reported one week later that a site for the new church had been chosen and that Mr. Richardson had secured pledges amounting to \$200 toward the construction of the new sanctuary. The newspaper further speculated that coupled with the zeal and energy displayed by the young congregation the Presbyterians would probably be the first to erect a house of worship in Bartow.

BARTOW INFORMANT

FEBRUARY 25, 1882

BARTOW, FLORIDA

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Presbyterian Church

A Presbyterian congregation has been formed and steps taken looking to the erection of a house of worship.

Mr. John Richardson and his family, Mr. McLeod, and Mesdames Hyland and Smith are members and with their well known energy and zeal we should not be surprised if they had a church as soon as any of the congregations at Bartow.

We are informed that Mr. Lytle has generously offered to donate land for a site, or if a better location is donated, he will give an equivalent in aid to the enterprise.

We admire this generous public spirit and wish all success to them and we tender our aid in anything we can do for them.



Interesting Fact!

† Our first minister Rev. William Gordon Flagler Wallace was a first cousin once removed of Railroad Baron and Florida developer Henry Morrison Flagler.

Let's Study!

📖 Presbyterian Lectionary for February 26, 1882

📖 Lesson IX, Mark 4: 21-34, title: "The Growth of the Kingdom"

📖 *Golden Text: There shall be a handful of corn in the earth, upon the top of the mountains: the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. – Psalm 72:16*

Bartow News 1882!

📅 *January-* amazing, two weeks ago there were three wagons, a hack, and a carriage on the court house square at one time. All are prospectors for homes.

📅 *February-* Presbyterians form church

📅 *March-* An unwelcome guest comes to town, "Whiskey!"

📅 *June-* Citizens extend city limits to include Prince Johnson, former slave, to secure 25 votes in order to meet requirements for incorporation as a municipality in the State of Florida.

What in the World! 1882

🌐 *Births:* Franklin D. Roosevelt, John Barrymore, Samuel Goldwyn

🌐 *Deaths:* Charles Darwin, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

🌐 First US Ski club begins; Circus entrepreneur P. T. Barnum buys world famous elephant "Jumbo"; the electric iron is patented; Hatfield's & McCoy's begin Eastern Kentucky feud 100 wounded or killed; First Baseball World Series between Cincinnati and Chicago; First string of Christmas lights produced by Thomas Edison.

Our First Minister...

Rev. William Gordon Flagler Wallace, the founder of First Presbyterian church in Bartow, was born in Kingstree, South Carolina on January 22, 1852. His father was preaching at Kingstree when he was born but soon afterward removed to Bullock County, Alabama. Most of his childhood was spent in the bounds of Bethel Church where his father was the pastor. In the fall of 1869 he entered Davidson College as a candidate for the Gospel Ministry. In June 1873 he entered Columbia Seminary for two years where after he was licensed to preach by the East Alabama Presbytery. He continued his education at the Dutch Reformed Seminary at New Brunswick, NJ where he graduated in 1876. He immediately went to pastor the Broadway Presbyterian Church in Sedalia, MO for three years.

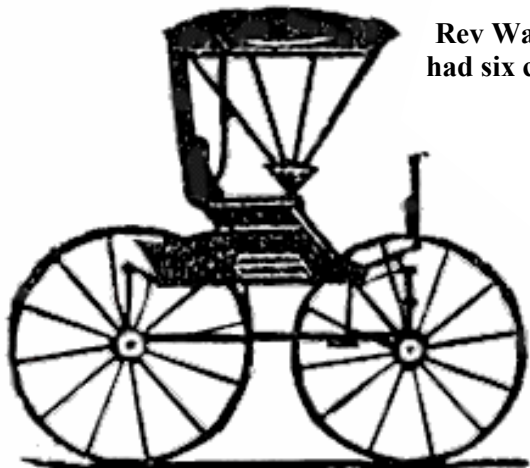


He came to Florida in 1880 and served as an evangelist of the Presbytery of St. Johns until 1885. During his evangelistic work in the middle part of the state he was away from home constantly and literally lived in a small covered wagon. He would often travel over 125 miles in a buggy to fill his appointments. There were no railroads and roads were in a primitive state. After establishing churches in the wilds of Florida and suffering from illness he returned to South Carolina, then to Virginia and back to South Carolina.

Photo & biographical information courtesy of Jean Gayle, collateral descendant of Rev. Wallace.

In 1895 he returned to Bloomingdale, Florida in Hillsborough County for three years and then moved to Sanford to pastor for another year. After Sanford he moved to Marianna Presbyterian for a year and then south into the wilderness area of Wewahitchka to take charge of a group of small Presbyterian churches. He was unable due to the illness contracted some years earlier in the wilds of central Florida to fully enter his new work. He was removed from his earthly labors on June 23, 1901 and as the *Christian Observer* reported, "His body sleeps among the pines, unmarked as yet, far away from friends and relations".

The *Christian Observer* further stated that, "Brother Wallace was a good man, unselfish and genial, full of kindly humor and gentleness. He was a diligent student of books, and his store of information remarkable, not only on Biblical subjects, but also on natural science. He did not seek churches that other men wanted but was content to labor in the difficult and undesirable fields, and in doing so he suffered great hardness as a good soldier. He was a pious and consecrated servant of God, and a faithful and scriptural expounder of the Word. He was absolutely without guile, his faith was of the sweetest type, He simply believed in God, he believed in Christ, and had no doubts and no shadow of fear. He just talked with God, and had no doubt that God heard him."



Rev Wallace was married to Susan Myers of Lexington, Virginia and together had six children.

CONSTITUTION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES, RICHMOND, VA 1879 (The Larger Catechism)

Q. 1. What is the chief and highest end of man?

A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully enjoy him forever.

From the Archives of First Presbyterian Church of Bartow

- ✠ February 1882 Church organized by Presbyterian Evangelist Rev. William Gordon Flagler Wallace (Presbyterian Church in the United States (South) with 6 members.
 - ✠ March 1882 John R. Richardson elected 1st Elder.
 - ✠ Worship services conducted in Hughes Opera House and County Court House.
 - ✠ 1882-1885 Site selected for church but the congregation is unable to secure loan to build a church due to financial depression of the Southern Home Missions, Presbyterian Church in US.
 - ✠ 1885 congregation turns to Rev. Alexander W. Sproull from the Presbyterian Church in the USA in order to secure loans and guaranteed monthly services.
 - ✠ July 26, 1885 church borrows Methodist sanctuary and reorganized by Rev. Sproull. Rev. M. Waldo is the temporary pulpit supply.
 - ✠ March 1, 1886 Rev Samuel G. Hair called as first full time Pastor.
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*Thanks to the Fellowship Committee and Connie Phillips
for providing the 125th Celebration Reception and Anniversary Cake
and to Will & Nick Harboe for hanging our anniversary banner.*

◆ *HISTORICAL COMMITTEE* ◆

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