

137-YEAR HISTORY OF EMMANUEL CHURCH IN WELAKA, FLORIDA (Reprint from the original record)

In the winter of 1878 by request of a temporary resident of Welaka the Rev. W.H. Williams of Crescent City began a monthly service in the afternoon of a Sunday. The service was held in the public school room, which was two lower rooms thrown into one in a tumbledown dwelling.

Occasionally the service was held under the oaks on the banks of the beautiful St. Johns. The scene thus presented was almost awe-inspiring and one long to be remembered by each participant.

The white robed priest with head faced to the breezes, which gently played with his gray locks. Above whom the gracefully swaying oaks gently played a sweet and harmonious accompaniment to the singing, back of whom could be seen through the quivering leaves the distant silvery sheen of the waters of the St. Johns as they lazily drifted toward the sea. Arched above all could be seen through the tree tops the beautiful blue dome of God's temple with here and there a fleecy white cloud to offset the solid unchanging monotony of the blue. All of which combined to make a beautiful impressive picture. The harmonious blending made a lasting impression upon the minds and hearts of all who saw it. The congregations were uniformly good, composed of persons of various religious beliefs.

After a few months passed the building of a church began to be agitated. The current site was given soon thereafter by Mr. Reed of Jacksonville, Florida. The erection of the church was commenced early in 1880 and it was ready for occupancy in a few months, not finished, however, for it was only boarded up with rough boards and was unfinished in the interior and there was no bell or belfry.

Soon after the opening, several persons were baptized June 3, 1881. The name Emmanuel, meaning "God With Us," was chosen and the church was consecrated by Bishop John Freeman Young. The Rev. C.S. Williams and A.B. Stuart Marten assisting at the service. A delegation from Crescent City, San Mateo, and Palatka was present. Confirmation was administered at the same time to ten persons. Seven of whom had been baptized on a previous Sunday at the celebration of Holy Communion, June 17, 1881, when eight persons knelt at the chancel rail, this being the first communion service ever held in the church.

The monthly services continued until the summer of 1882 when the Rev. C.S. Williams was called by the vestry of St. Marks Church, Palatka, to take the rectorship of that church, resigned his charge of Emmanuel and the Church of the Holy Comforter, Crescent City, to the care of the Rev. A.W. Knight of Jacksonville. He continued to hold monthly services for a few months when through lack of support the services were discontinued and the church closed. It remained so for several years with the exception of an occasional service or a visitation of the bishop until the fall of 1889 when Bishop Weed appointed the Rev. E.C. Belcher to take care of Emmanuel and the church at Federal Point. The Rev. Belcher started in with a will

and after several months was rewarded for his labor by seeing a renewed interest in the church spring up and March 7, 1890 on the occasion of the Bishop's visitation presented a class of twelve adults for confirmation.

A movement was then inaugurated with the object of remodeling and completing the church both inside and out. After two years of hard labor the communicants of Emmanuel could point with pride to their church, complete in almost all of its appointments and with a very largely increased list of communicants.

To read more about the 137-year history of Emmanuel, please visit:
<http://www.emmanuelwelaka.org/history.aspx>