

An annual commemoration

The Venerable

Fred Yerkes

Priest and Missionary

Fred Gerker Yerkes

March 5, 1910 – January 28, 1989

January 30

Proposed

Annual Convention

Diocese of Florida

January 29, 2022

Edited
by
Les Singleton
18120 SE 59th St.
Micanopy, FL 32667
352 208 9582
Les32667@gmail.com

“I have had the honor of serving five churches in the Diocese of Florida
and Fred Yerkes was my predecessor in all five churches!

Resolution: Establishing annual commemoration:

The Venerable Fred Yerkes, Priest and Missionary, January 30

1. Resolution.....	1
2. 350 word inspirational biography.....	3
3. Appointed readings.....	5
4. Resolution. 1989 Diocesan Convention.....	7
5. In Celebration of the Life and Work of Fred Gerker Yerkes (bulletin).....	9
6. Biography from Celebration and Thanksgiving for the life and work of A Priest in the Church of God, The Venerable Fred Gerker Yerkes, March 5, 1910 – January 25, 1989 [Church of the Good Shepherd].....	13
7. Fr. Yerkes Remembered. The Diocesan.	21
8. Travelin’/River Churches Still Visited (Emmanuel, Welaka) [No date].....	23
9. Father Yerkes – a modern-day saint. Gary Kirkland. Monday profile. Gainesville Sun, November 14, 1983.....	25
10. Country priest a living saint to those he’s served so well (Trinity Melrose) About Florida. Bob Morris. December 4, 1983.....	27
11. Yerkes found souls on dusty trails. Horace Davis. February 2, 1989.	31
12. Ordination. June 11, 1936. The Witness. June 25, 1936. Page 5.	33
13. St. Augustine School: Seventy Five Years of Negro Parochial Education in Gainesville, Florida (served in the 1930's) Florida Historical Quarterly Vol. 51. No. 1. (1972).....	35
14. Father Yerke’s Oldsmobile at Camp Weed. 1952. By TW+	43
15. Fred Yerkes in The Episcopal Diocese of Florida 1892 - 1975 George R. Bentley	45
16. Oral history. Interviewee: Fred Yerkes. Interviewer: Emily Ring. Date: February 24, 1987.	55
17. Letter from Fred Yerkes to Les Singleton, August, 1985. Obedient to the bishop.	91
18. Sermon of Les Singleton, All Saints Day, 2020	93
19. Procedures for Churchwide Recognition. A 350-word bio.....	99
20. Churches served by Fred Yerkes	101
21. Memorials and remembrances of Fred Yerkes	103

Note: Anyone with information on churches Father Fred Yerkes served, please email Les Singleton: Les32667@gmail.com Also, the same email, if you are aware of any memorials or remembrances for Father Fred.

Les Singleton. 352 208 9582.

((Thank you to all who have helped this project in so many ways! – Les))

Co submitted by the Rev. Les Singleton and the mission board of Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Welaka;

And the Rev. Tony Powell and the vestry of Trinity Episcopal Church, Melrose.

Resolution Title:

Establishing Annual Commemoration for Father Fred Yerkes, Priest and Missionary, January 30

Whereas, Father Fred Yerkes faithfully served innumerable small churches with unflagging zeal for fifty years;

Whereas, his Godly example reminds us of the worth of small churches;

Resolved, that January 30 (the first open day after his January 25th death date) be set forth as a commemoration for Father Fred Yerkes

Be it further resolved, that those churches founded or served by Father Fred Yerkes be strongly encouraged to have an annual commemoration on January 30th or some other convenient date;

Be it further resolved, that this convention contact the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music of The Episcopal Church to memorialize this Fred Yerkes commemoration for inclusion in "A Great Cloud of Witnesses,"

Be it further resolved, the following collect and readings are set forth for that commemoration:

O God, our strength and our salvation, you called your servant Fred Yerkes to be a faithful shepherd of your people by preaching, teaching, and planting churches in small communities. Multiply among us faithful pastors who will give inspiration to those who are small in number, yet continue to gather in the Risen Christ's name; and bring us all, we pray, into the fellowship of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Jeremiah 1:4-7;

For the Psalm: Christ our Passover, *Pascha nostrum*;

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

Mark 16:5-8 + the shorter ending.

Fred Gerker Yerkes

Fred Gerker Yerkes was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1910. An Episcopal minister and classical scholar, who styled himself “a country mission priest,” he devoted his life to serving small, isolated congregations in North Florida, where he was for years Archdeacon for the Diocese of Florida’s Gainesville convocation. He carried a portable altar, organ, hymnals and prayer books in the trunk of his car, often conducting five services each Sunday and driving over 1,000 miles every week, serving over 25 parishes in his career. Unmarried, the small church was his family. Fred died in 1989.

A “river rat,” who as a teenager piloted his father’s hardware store delivery boat, Fred ferried Father Thomas Brayshaw, who supplied 18 Episcopal missions on the St. John’s River, and was moved to follow in his footsteps.

His mother, fluent in languages, inspired him to study Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. He graduated from St. John’s College in Annapolis in 1932 and received a divinity degree at the University of the South, Sewanee, in 1935. He was ordained deacon in 1935, priest in 1936.

During the Depression years of the 1930s, many Episcopal congregations in North Florida were without pastors. Bowing to Fred’s request to be a country parson and missionary, Bishop Frank Juhan assigned him a string of missions from Ft. George to Cedar Key. Fred, unmindful of material goods, visited lumber camps, turpentine mills, and anyplace else that needed the Lord’s word, to conduct what he called “Oak Tree Services,” outdoors. He was rector and taught classics at a girls’ school in Gainesville, where students from the local synagogue joined his Hebrew classes. He was engaged in prison ministry, and, during World War II, opened a service center for soldiers at Camp Blanding and a retreat house for service wives. Year after year, in small towns, he organized scout troops and boys’ choirs. When chapels and Sunday School buildings were in poor condition, he paid for the repairs. He learned the history and lore of each community he served and cherished their children, declaring, “This is what we are building for.”

Fred Yerkes Commemoration Bible Readings

Jeremiah 1:4-7

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

For the Psalm: Christ our Passover, *Pascha nostrum*;

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

⁵¹ Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die,^[a] but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Mark 16:5-8 + the shorter ending.

⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

[[And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation]]

Notes:

The collect initially drafted by the Rev. George Hinchcliff and revised by the Rev. George Holston and other clergy of small churches.

Jeremiah 1:7. The boy could be a teenager, the age Fred Yerkes was when he first visited the river churches.

1Corinthians 15:58 "...in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Mark 16; shorter ending: "...Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."

Among the earlier witnesses for the shorter ending of Mark is codex k, Bobiensis a Latin manuscript, an appropriate reading in a commemoration of a man who at one point had taught Latin.

The biography was prepared by the Rev. E. T. Malone, Jr., of Trinity Episcopal Church, Warrenton, NC based on the following biographical material.

1989

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION FOR FRED G. YERKES

Whereas, the Reverend Fred G. Yerkes was a priest in this diocese for more than fifty years, and

Whereas, through all those years he remained true to his original purpose, to be a country parson ministering to the little missions in the rural areas of the diocese; and

Whereas, he ministered to some thirty of those missions, in an area stretching from Cedar Key to Bunnell and from Micanopy to Macclenny; and

Whereas, for much of this area he was the diocese's archdeacon for forty years; and

Whereas, no group of persons seeking to worship God was too small to merit his attention and service, no place too obscure, no individual too humble; and

Whereas, he took care to minister to the young people, sponsoring boys' choirs, and boy and girl scout troops, and cub scouts, in Melrose, Waldo, Welaka, and other of his missions; and

Whereas, he was an early leader in the development of child-care centers in the diocese, and

Whereas, he died on January 25, 1989; and

Whereas, he is remembered in all the places where he served his God and his Church as a near-saint;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved that the 147th Convention of the Diocese of Florida gives thanks to God for the life and ministry of Fred G. Yerkes.

In Celebration of the Life and Work of

FRED GERKER YERKES

1 9 1 0 - 1 9 8 9

A Priest in the Church of God

Processional Hymn	Hymnal #94
Burial Office, Rite One	BCP Page 469
Opening Sentences	
Collect	
First Lesson: Wisdom 3:1-5,9	
Psalm 46 (responsively)	Page 471
Second Lesson: Revelation 7:9-17	
Psalm 27 (responsively)	Page 477
Gospel: John 14:1-6	
The Apostles Creed	
Prayers	
The Peace	
Offertory - Hymn	Hymn #92
The Great Thanksgiving	Page 333
Communion (The Sacrament will be administered at the High Altar and the Chapel of the Holy Child)	
Thanksgiving	
Commendation	
Recessional Hymn	Hymn #91

Celebrant
The Rt. Rev. Frank S. Cerveney, D.D.
Bishop of Florida
Assisting
Clergy of the Diocese
(Interment, Evergreen Cemetery)

**In Celebration and Thanksgiving
for the life and work of**



**A Priest in The Church of God
The Venerable**

Fred Gerker Yerkes

March 5, 1910 - January 25, 1989

CELEBRANT
The Rev. Paul L. Thompson, STD
ASSISTING
The Rev. Charles Seymour

USHERS

Barney Barco	Charles Dedmon
Will Hulett	Lee Helton

**THE MINISTRY OF
FRED GERKER YERKES**

Fred G. Yerkes, Born March 5, 1910. Jacksonville, Florida
BA, St John's College, 1932, BD, University of the South, 1935.
Ordained Deacon June, 1935; Priest June 1936 by Bishop Frank Juhan.

Fred Gerker Yerkes grew up in Jacksonville along the St John's river. He loved the river, exploring and learning to know the upper reaches by heart before he was twelve. He called himself a young "River Rat" and was allowed at an early age to pilot his father's hardware supply boat on its frequent trading trips up the St John's.

His mother started his Christian education at St Mary's in Green Cove Springs because it was a "quiet church". Later they moved near the Church of The Good Shepherd where Fred was confirmed. Here he met a Father Thomas Brayshaw who was in charge of eighteen Episcopal Missions along the river.

Father Brayshaw would hitch a ride up the river on the "Hardware Boat" and young Fred would often accompany him ashore to help set up for the service and act as acolyte. Later as land transportation improved and his father discontinued use of the supply boat, he persuaded his father not to sell the boat, but allow him to continue to use it, transporting his priest on the rounds to his missions. During this period, he became imbued with the idea that being a country mission priest was his calling also.

Young Fred suffered from asthma and the humidity around Jacksonville aggravated his condition. At age twelve his family secured an appointment to be a page in the United States Senate, thinking the change of climate might be beneficial. He traveled to Washington DC and for three years served in that capacity, receiving his education attending tutoring sessions during free time in the day and at night in the YMCA where he stayed. His mother, an expert linguist, had started him at an early age in the

classics. By the time he was of college age he was proficient in Greek, Latin, Hebrew and French. His mother also tutored him in piano and violin.

Returning to Jacksonville in 1925, he finished his high school at Duval High in 1928. Entering St. Johns College at Annapolis, he majored in the Humanities with a minor in classics and graduated Cum Laude in 1932 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He went on to attend The Univ. of the South at Sewanee, Tenn. and recieved his Bachelors of Divinity degree in 1935.

After graduating from Seminary and being ordained Deacon, Father Fred was offered a post at his home church, the Church of the Good Shepherd in Jacksonville. He explained to Bishop Juhan that he preferred to be a country parson and missionary like his former mentor, Father Brayshaw. This was during the depression and churches were quite poor. The Diocese extended across North Florida to Pensacola and there were many churches and missions without priests. The Bishop warned Father Fred that he couldn't give him a lot of help and assigned him a string of missions from Ft George to Cedar Key. He was supposed to reside at Cedar Key, but finding a "Rectory" with no running water or plumbing, no screened windows, the largest mosquitoes he had ever seen, humidity high enough to make asthma attacks acute, he decided to reside in Starke instead.

At one time his responsibilities included Starke, Melrose, Hawthorne, Micanopy, Brooksville, Mayo, MacClenny, Hibernia, Chiefland, Williston, Cedar Key and about 10 more stops in between. His average Sunday would include Melrose, 9 AM; Starke, 11 AM; Waldo 3 PM; Cedar Key, 7:30 PM. The remaining days of the week he was on the road to takeing care of his other missions. In addition to this he visited lumber camps, turpentine mills and anyplace else that needed the Lord's word, to conduct "Oak Tree Services". His car was well equipped, with altar, fold up kneelers, Communion service and, after WW II, even an old army surplus portable organ.

For this he drew the fabulous sum of \$60.00 per month in salary and expenses. He jokingly says that it was during this period he learned to subsist on the minimum amount of food. His diet consisted mainly of vegetables given him by "friendly 'olk" on the road. This undoubtedly contributed to his spare build and, in more bountiful times made him the target of solicitous women parishoners who tried to ply him with all sorts of fattening goodies.

In the late thirties he was assigned an additional duty as Rector of Miss Maggie Tebeau's Seminary for Girls, in Gainesville. Miss Maggie also promptly put him to work teaching the classics for which she allowed him room and board. As the only teacher in

Gainesville proficient in Hebrew, he gained many students from the Synagogue at the other end of main street.

Also during this period, Father Fred started his prison ministry, teaching school at Raiford and working with the inmates. This ministry was continued at his request by subsequent priests assigned to St Mark's, Starke. In 1939, Bishop Juhan appointed him Archdeacon of the Gainesville Convocation giving him supervision of six parishes and five more missions to add to his crowded schedule.

During the war years of WW II, many priests joined the services as Chaplains causing a shortage on the home front. Father Fred not only continued his mission ministry but assumed added responsibilities caused by this shortage. Gas rationing slowed him down, but he still managed to make his missions, helped sometimes by parishoners giving him a few extra gas coupons. He also managed to open a service center for servicemen in Starke as a joint effort with the Presbyterian Church.

In 1949 he took a sabbatical in London where he worked and studied in an inner city parish. Then in 1958 he again journeyed to London for two years graduate study at Oxford. Returning to his beloved missions in 1960, he spent the next two decades ministering to them, filling in as "Parson" to those missions without an assigned Priest. Since he seldom had more than seven priests to help this was a common occurrence. During most of this period as Archdeacon of Gainesville Convocation he was responsible for missions in Gainesville, Bunnell, Hibernia, Micanopy, Palatka, St Augustine, Melaka, Williston, Newberry, Mayo, Cedar Key, Crescent City, Federal Point, Green Cove Springs, Hawthorne, High Springs, Interlachen, Key Stone Heights, MacClenny, Waldo and Melrose. In 1972 his convocation had grown to the extent that it was split and the Palatka-St Augustine Convocation was formed from it.

In 1983, as Father Fred was approaching his 72nd birthday he was faced with mandatory retirement and the congregation at Melrose Trinity was faced with his imminent loss. The congregation sent an appeal to the Bishop asking him to retain Father Fred on active duty and the Bishop consented, placing him on special assignment to Melrose Trinity and Hawthorne Church of the Holy Communion. Father Fred also kept his eye on, and ministered to, Waldo and Newberry.

In trying to describe the ministry of Fred Gerker Yerkes, it is extremely difficult to know where to start. His fields of interest and endeavor were so wide they encompassed more than most ordinary people can begin to think about. One priest remarked that "in many ways Fred Yerkes ministry comes as close to the Biblical ideal of ministry that I will ever see."

The basis of his ministry is probably best summed up by saying that he believed in bringing the word of the Lord to all people, everywhere, anytime; but especially to those who were in need. He didn't care if it were one person or a hundred. If they asked, he came. It didn't matter if he had to get up in the middle of the night to drive a hundred miles to answer a sick bed request, he went. He never complained if he drove for an hour to hold service for one or two people in a near empty church, he believed those few were worthwhile. His thoughts were always for others and he always went where he thought he was needed.

His cars were mute testimony to this ministry. A car never lasted him for more than two or three years. His rule of thumb was "When the odometer turns past 150,000 miles, it is time for a new car. He didn't like the newer models too well. There just wasn't enough room for all of his "equipment". His car was his traveling office and contained just about anything needed to conduct a service, help someone out, or make someone feel they were wanted and loved. The cars had to be large, roomy and fast.

Many stories are told of his penchant for "getting there fast" to get the job done. He had so many jobs to do in so many different places he had to move fast. A typical Sunday last year meant leaving Jacksonville by 7:30 AM, service in Hawthorne at 9:00 AM, service in Melrose at 11:00 AM, dinner with one of his parishoners at 12:30 PM, service in Waldo at 3:00 PM, hospital rounds at four different hospitals in Gainesville from 5:00 PM till finished and then home to Jacksonville. One trooper told another, "If you see a halo driving a large grey oldseobile beyond the speed limit, that is Father Yerkes. Don't stop him."

He was a strong believer in good music to help us worship and express the glory of God. Whenever possible he insisted on a choir and organ in church, often training the choirs himself. While he did not class himself as an "accomplished musician" he was proficient in several instruments and frequently subbed as organist in church. Margaret Jones Gillan tells of her childhood memories of Father Fred conducting service, running to the rear of the church and throwing wood in the stove, playing the organ for each hymn and acting as his own acolyte.

He did not care much for the modern electronic organ when comparing it with the old fashioned mechanical pipe organ and frequently spoke of the difference in quality. In 1987 the Mission Board of Melrose Trinity purchased and installed a five rank pipe organ in the old mission church for him. This organ gave him inexpressible pleasure and he remarked that there didn't seem to be any other sound made by man which could compare in expressing the glory of God.

He loved children and believed they were the future and the salvation of our world. As such, he believed they should be given the best opportunity to learn about God. I can remember the first day that Sunday School was started in the new Parish Hall. As the children were dashing around laughing and playing, Father Fred was standing at the door beaming with happiness and he turned to me and said "This is what we were building for. This makes all the work worthwhile!" He started so many Boy Scout Troops and Cub Packs in North Florida that, to this day, when you mention his name in Scout circles all over the South, someone knows him. He is one of only two Churchmen in the state of Florida who wore the "Silver Beaver", Scouting's highest award.

He had some family income, but his share always went to some cause or need of others. Few people know of all the things he paid for from his own pocket, not only food, clothing and sustenance to help people in need, but any good cause or worthwhile project. When the scouts needed a place to meet in Waldo he paid for most of the materials and helped to go out into the swamps to cut logs to build their cabin. In Melrose he paid for most of the materials in the Scout hut and supervised the construction.

Knowing that Melrose Trinity needed a Rectory, he arranged the purchase and paid for most of it through another man. When the Scouts were raising funds to buy a surplus chapel from Camp Blanding to move to Melrose for a Parish Hall they came up short. Few people know he made up the difference. Just about every project through this part of the state has some of his money in it. Moving the Church in Cedar Key; buying the organ for Trinity; building the new Trinity Parish Hall; college tuition for dozens of youngsters who couldn't afford it; the libraries in Waldo, Cedar Key and Melrose; a new roof for St John's and many many more projects might never have been completed except for his contributions and his willingness to pitch in and make the project work.

He was always willing to go out of his way to help a family in need and as a consequence was considered by some to be a soft touch. His main concern, however, was to help where needed and if he ended up helping someone who really did not need or deserve the help, he shrugged and said, "Oh well, they must need it more than I do."

He was extremely interested in the people and places, and soaked up information about the history and background of each area he visited. During the past fifty years he has become a walking encyclopedia of information and could usually furnish more history about a locale than people who have lived there for many years.

One indication of the effect of his ministry is the resulting feeling exhibited by all people who came in contact with him. They all seemed to believe he belonged to them personally and they were just sharing him with others on a temporary basis. This feeling of possession and perhaps the idea of security it enhanced was not a selfish feeling. Each person seemed to realize it was a ministry to be shared with the world and seeing others share his ministry brought pleasure.

His impact upon the future of our country will continue for many years through his work with our youth. He believed in the programs for the children and worked especially hard for the advancement of the Boy Scouts of America program. He once explained to a new Boy Scout leader, "We must work for growth in moral strength, character and the development of a boy's relationship to others as a good citizen. We must develop healthy bodies and minds in our boys and, above all make sure they become good Christians." This guidance seems to sum up his attitude to all of us.

Many of us started under his ministry as children, advanced to maturity and became senior citizens with his example and guidance to help us. To measure the effect of his ministry upon us would be difficult and would be a self evaluation. In the words of one of his parishoners, "That dear, sweet, kind and saintly man. Will we ever know the full extent of the good he did for all of us?"

B. M. Barco

"To depart, and to be with Christ....is far better." St Paul.

"If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because...I go unto the Father"

Fr. Yerkes remembered

The Venerable Fred Gerker Yerkes, Jr., died at his Jacksonville home January 25, 1989. Last Rites and Eucharist in celebration of his life and work were held January 28 at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, with the Rt. Rev. Frank S. Cerveny, Bishop of Florida, celebrant, and the clergy of the diocese assisting. Interment was in Evergreen Cemetery, Jacksonville.

The Rev. Frank Dearing, a boyhood friend of Archdeacon Yerkes, gave the eulogy, recalling a ministry spanning more than a half-century. Fr. Fred was active as a lay reader in the 1920's before his ordination in 1935 following graduation from the University of the South.

Fr. Fred was honored with the Distinguished Service Award at the 1982 Diocesan Convention. Feature articles in the February and March issues of *The Florida Episcopalian* chronicle his scholarship, musical gifts, and devotion to small rural congregations for which Bishop Cerveny termed him "a 10th century circuit rider." He served 27 congregations at some time, officially; there were probably more.

The newspaper quoted Fr. Dearing: "At one time Fred was responsible for 13 missions. We called it a coast-to-coast network. He would start early in the morning at Ft. George, at the mouth of the St. Johns River, and work his way across to Cedar Key on the Gulf Coast by nightfall." (The legend of Fred Yerkes is well known to the Florida Highway Patrol who long ago gave up the chase and now just wave him through.) His brother Francis states that he puts over 50,000 miles a year on



Fr. Fred Yerkes

a car and usually logs over 150,000 before trading for a new model."

"A priest of the diocese said, 'In many ways Fred Yerkes' ministry comes as close to the Biblical ideal of ministry as I will ever see. He is always taking in strays, going out of his way to do someone a favor.'"

More than 400 friends turned out for a Fred Yerkes Appreciation Day in 1979 at St. Paul's, Waldo, and the Gainesville Sun gave the celebration front page editorial coverage.

The 146th Diocesan Convention opened as news of Fr. Fred's death was still reaching delegates. Two nametags bearing his name lay unclaimed on the registration tables; at age 79, his congregations still spanned two convocations. On his registration blank he had written, in a firm hand, Parish / Mission: "Trinity, Melrose; Palatka-St. Augustine Convocation; Holy Communion, Hawthorne; St. Paul's, Waldo; Gainesville Convocation."

Status: "Retired, but active."

* The journals of the Diocese of Florida show some 27 churches "officially" served by Fr. Yerkes. The list follows, but there were probably many more.

Bunnell, St. Thomas; Cedar Key, Christ Church; Cross City, Holy Cross; Fort George, St. George; Gainesville, Holy Trinity; Hawthorne, Holy Communion; Hibernia, St. Margaret's; High Springs, St. Bartholomew's; Interlachen, St. Andrew's; Keuka, St. Andrew the Fisherman; Keystone Heights, St. Anne's; Macclenny, St. James; Mayo, St. Matthews; Melrose, Trinity; Micanopy, Mediator; Milton, St. Mary's; New Berlin, Our Merciful Saviour; Newberry, St. John's; Palatka, St. Mary's; St. Augustine, St. Cyriacs; Shamrock, St. Patrick's; Starke, St. Mark's; Trenton, St. John's; Waldo, St. Paul's; Warrington, St. John's; Welaka, Emmanuel; Williston, St. Barnabas.

YERKES - Funeral Services for The Venerable Fred G. Yerkes, Jr., will be held at 2 p.m. SATURDAY in the Church of the Good Shepherd, with the Right Rev. Frank S. Cerveny, Bishop of Florida, and the Right Rev. Robert Varley, Bishop, officiating. Interment will be in Evergreen Cemetery. The Rev. Mr. Yerkes died Wednesday, January 25, 1989. He was born in Jacksonville on March 5, 1910, and attended the Church of the Good Shepherd. He graduated from St. Johns College, Annapolis, Md., and received his Bachelor of Divinity Degree from the University of the South, Seawane, TN. He did graduate studies at Oxford University. The Rev. Mr. Yerkes served as Arch Deacon of East Florida since 1929. Survivors include a brother, Francis Yerkes; a sister, Cornelia Yerkes Kafka; 4 nieces; 8 nephews; 7 great-nephews; and 2 great-nieces. In lieu of flowers, Memorials may be made to the Endowment Fund of your own Church. Arrangements by Kyle McEllan, 17 W. Union St.

THE DIOCESAN

NEWS OF THE
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN THE DIOCESE
OF FLORIDA

Travelin'

River Churches

Still Visited



The steamboats no longer cruise the St. Johns River but like the mailman's motto, "neither rain, sleet or snow" Father Fred Yerkes still makes his rounds to the many churches he serves.

Known as the River Churches during the days of the steamboats, several small churches lined the St. Johns River during an era of logging and steamboats.

Ministering the churches along the river route was a man who followed the same vein as the traveling salesman or regular route of a delivery person.

"I guess you could say I drifted into the ministry by way of the river boats," recalls Father Yerkes. "About the time the river boats were taken off the river I used my family's small boat to take the missionary to the churches which had to be serviced."

"During the time I was taking the missionary to the river churches in my family's boat, his sight and hearing began to fail, I then helped him read the services," explained Father Yerkes, who was 16-years-old at the time.

As roads were made better and the river became less feasible for the traveling missionary, the boat was traded for an automobile but not before Father Yerkes became a minister for the Episcopal Church.

He began his schooling and after returning to his home in Jacksonville, Father Yerkes took up where he left off. Replacing the small boat with a Willis Olds "Puddle Jumper", the routine continued.

Years have passed and times have changed. Father Yerkes now drives

a 1979 Oldsmobile Cutlass but each week the rounds are still made to the several small churches which he once visited by boat and Model A.

Between then and now, the likable minister for the Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Welaka, has gone through several cars and during the rationing years he depended on bus, rail and thumb to make the required visits.

The early hours of each day are spent in his Jacksonville home but it's not long before the Episcopal Arch Deacon for East Florida is behind the wheel of his car again and on the road to visit his churches and members of the various congregations.

"It's a little unusual these days for a minister to travel as much as I do and to minister to so many churches," Father Yerkes admitted. "I travel about 1,000 miles a week and last year put 140,000 miles on my car."

In his position with the church, Father Yerkes is responsible for 21 churches and ministers to five personally. He makes several trips a week to churches in Welaka, Melrose, Newberry, Waldo and Palatka.

After each day on the road, he returns to Jacksonville and after a few hours sleep, he is on the way again visiting hospitals, churches and even homes of congregation members.

"It's just a bad habit," Father Yerkes said with a laugh. "The Bishop calls me the patron of hopeless causes but I enjoy this type of work."

He explained when the lumber industry and the steamboats left

the church considered closing some of the small country churches but he didn't want to see that happen.

"I prefer the country churches," he said. "It has been a joy to minister to succeeding generations. I have raised a good many youngsters but many of them leave to find work after they grow up."

At 70 years of age, Father Yerkes still spends about five hours of each day driving his car, which serves as an office and according to the traveling minister, "a self service cafeteria."

"I carry just about everything in the front seat of my car," Father Yerkes said. "I have materials I will be using for the sermons and many times the materials from the previous week. I usually carry a little food also and have a do-it-yourself cafeteria."

While much of his life is spent on the road, Father Yerkes doesn't like to drive that much and it seems to be only his dedication and desire which keeps the wheels turning.

"I'm not an avid driver," he explained. "But when I have to go some place, I have to drive."

"I have come to know a lot of people and the church has come to be something the town can depend upon," he continued. "The only things that are dependable in a small town are the post office and the church."

Father Yerkes explained the customary age for retirement with the Episcopal Church is 65 and retirement is required at 72 but, "I'd like to go on as long as the Lord will let me," he said and climbed into his car to record yet another mile of

Father Yerkes — a modern-day saint

By GARY KIRKLAND

Sun staff writer

His frail appearance disguises a strong spirit. With hair that has gone from thinning to missing and wearing a well-worn black suit accented by a frayed clerical collar, the Rev. Fred Yerkes is quick to disagree with those who call him a legend or saint.

Yerkes, an Episcopal priest, has traveled by rail, riverboat, horseback and car to spread the Word in dozens of missions from Jacksonville to Cedar Key. He's held services at crossroads, logging camps, prisons, and courthouses in North Florida for more than 50 years.

Though he is well known and well loved, Yerkes shuns the limelight, saying he has done nothing really special. To those who call him a saint, Yerkes answers, "I know me a lot better than they do. I have a lot of serious faults. I'm just a moderate-sized frog in a very, very small pond."

At age 73, after many of his colleagues have traded clerical collars for golf clubs and retirement, Yerkes is still going strong.

"He's a lot better than some of those young guys we have," Canon Arthur Spruill at the diocese headquarters in Jacksonville said. "He does sleep a little bit, but when he isn't sleeping he's doing church work."

A lifelong bachelor, the church has been Yerkes' only bride. He still lives in his family's large home in Jacksonville but commutes to hold services in Melrose and Hawthorne every Sunday, travels to make calls during the week and squeezes in services a couple times a month in Newberry and Waldo or anywhere that two or more are gathered.

While it may seem like quite an area for one man to cover, Yerkes has had plenty of time to get used to it. At 15 he got his first taste of the ministry, helping the Rev. Thomas Brayshaw of Jacksonville. An aging missionary, Brayshaw hitched rides on riverboats along the St. Johns to serve 18 small river mission churches.

Monday profile

Because the climate in Jacksonville aggravated his asthma, Yerkes was sent to Washington, D.C., where he worked as a page in the U.S. Senate and the U.S. Supreme Court by day and attended school at the YMCA at night. But during the summer he would return to his family and Brayshaw and the river missions.

Yerkes' parents, Pennsylvania German Quakers, came to Florida in the 1880s, where his father took advantage of the state's water highways to sell and deliver axes, sawblades and other hardware to timber and turpentine industries. Mrs. Yerkes was faced with a dilemma, however. At the time, Archer had the only Quaker church in North Florida.

"Mother said we had to have some religious upbringing and the Episcopal Church was the quietest in town," Yerkes said.

As an Episcopalian and a self-proclaimed "river rat" it was natural that Yerkes and Brayshaw would meet. During summer breaks from school, Yerkes would use his father's boat to taxi Brayshaw from mission to mission each Sunday.

His father had hoped Fred would follow him into his hardware business, Florida Hardward Co., which would eventually grow to the largest wholesale dealer in the state. But his son's interests were in the church. "I was interested in people, not things," Yerkes said. While he didn't know it then, those river missions set the pattern for his ministry. He worked in missions while going to college in Maryland and while attending seminary at the University of the South in Tennessee.

See PROFILE on page 164



The Rev. Fred Yerkes at Trinity Episcopal in Melrose.

All-Wash Sun staff photographer

Profile 11/14/83

From page 1A

Even though he's been offered the pulpit at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in Jacksonville, he let it be known that his heart was in those "little two-by-four churches" in the country. "It did not have quite the intimacy of the 18 little churches along the river I'd learned to love," Yerkes said of the large church.

It was a choice that has kept Yerkes on the run for over 50 years. His first assignment was to serve Melrose, Starke, Waldo and Cedar Key. Though slowed by asthma attacks, Yerkes soon added stops in Newberry, Trenton, Chiefland and Williston.

With such a widespread flock, Yerkes has not been one to let a speed limit stand between him and a waiting congregation. He still puts over 1,000 miles a week on his car and a welcome of flashing blue lights is common.

"I remember one patrolman laughed and said, 'The patrolman on this beat last Sunday was an Episcopalian, but I'm a Baptist and I'm going to have to give you a ticket,'" Yerkes recalled. Recently Yerkes opted for traffic school to cut penalty points against his license.

Serving the small mission churches has offered other hazards as well. Yerkes has been chased by "blessed bees" in Newberry and extinguished burning acolytes who stepped too close to candles in Cedar Key. He's even had to negotiate his way past well-meaning but over-zealous members of another sect who tried to convert him on a waist sidewalk, while the St. Paul's congregation was waiting for service to begin.

Yerkes never boasts of his good works but his parishioners seldom hesitate. Rodney Estes, a teacher at Mebane Middle School in Alachua, is one that uses the word "saint" when discussing Yerkes.

Estes served in the St. Paul's choir as a boy. He said it was Yerkes who paid for music lessons for neighborhood kids. He said he is one of more than a dozen people that Yerkes put through college. Estes said Yerkes paid all his expenses and asked for, and expected, nothing in return.

Yerkes denied there were "dozens," but did say Estes wasn't the only one.

"There have been a lot of youngsters that have grown up in these communities that have needed an education which they probably would have never gotten."

I really don't hardly remember. These are things you did on the spur of the moment when they're needed and you really don't remember what you did," he said.

Gainesville Sun opinion page columnist H.G. "Buddy"

Davis recalled how the Church of the Holy Communion in Hawthorne needed an altar. Davis said a retired history professor finally agreed to build one. But when Davis delivered the altar, he found one already in place. Davis said Yerkes claimed the altar came from his "ecclesiastical hope chest."

That hope chest, which Yerkes says he stocks with cast-offs from other congregations, has supplied altars, kneelers, pews, pianos and organs for mission congregations throughout North Florida. The hope chest was even big enough to hold a fellowship hall for Trinity Episcopal in Melrose. The building was rescued and moved from Camp Blinding after World War II.

Davis has worked as a lay reader, one who assists a priest in the service, at Yerkes' request several times. He remembered one Sunday several years ago that was indicative of how Yerkes would go to any length to reach just a few.

At the time Gainesville had three Episcopal churches, but in east Gainesville, near Newman's Lake, three families expressed an interest in starting a church. So Yerkes asked Davis to meet him at Lake Forest Elementary School to assist with the service.

Davis said Yerkes "screamed up" in a battered car and from the car came a portable organ, a folding altar, kneelers, folding chairs and even a bottle to hold wildflowers. Everything was set up under a covered walkway at the school.

"In a matter of five minutes he and I had set up a church there in the open," Davis said.

While the church has been Yerkes' life, it hasn't been his only interest. Wherever he's gone, Boy Scouts have followed. Yerkes calls scouting "a way to build Christian citizenship." In that effort Yerkes has started Boy Scout troops and Cub Scout packs and built Scout houses. A campsite at Camp Baden Powell near Melrose bears his name.

Libraries are another Yerkes interest. Libraries in Waldo, Cedar Key and Melrose were all started with his help. He also helped organize nursery schools in Gainesville to take care of the baby-boom children of former GIs attending U.F.

Flossie Jennings helped Yerkes with those nursery schools, which she said "started with a 46-cent budget" and were built with community support. Jennings also uses the saint label for Yerkes, but adds, "he's hopelessly impractical."

To Jennings and others, one particularly annoying Yerkes trademark is his attire. Ripped sleeves, dangling or missing buttons and frayed cuffs are common.

"He always looked like he was wearing rejects from a thrift store," Mack Futch, a former Yerkes attendant and

now an assistant state attorney in Macclenny, said with a laugh.

The stories of church members trying to improve Yerkes' appearance are numerous. Davis said when a group in Hawthorne took on the task, it was decided a new suit had to be either fitted or given in the form of a gift certificate because, "a check would end up in an offering plate in one of those missions."

Even though Yerkes is respected by the church hierarchy, he has had his differences with them on subjects such as mandatory retirement, changes in the worship service and the move to consolidate mission congregations.

The Episcopal Church has mandatory retirement at age 72 for its priests but — after receiving a special request from congregation members at Trinity in Melrose — Yerkes was given a "special assignment" by Bishop Frank Cerveny.

Yerkes said that in seminary he was taught "thou art a priest for life." He said he is worried by fellow priests who retire and then don't even go to church.

Yerkes' idea of what is needed to start a mission is different from the church's.

"His concern is the Episcopal Church be available wherever possible, wherever they are," Canon Spruill said. While the church has moved to consolidate missions, Yerkes sees mission expansion as the key to growth.

The product of this difference of opinions is a mission like St. John's in Newberry. Church records show it is no longer active, but at least twice a month Yerkes holds services there.

A traumatic event in recent years for Yerkes was the loss of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. The book he'd used since seminary was updated and replaced in 1979. Yerkes has tried to soften the blow by using the more formal of the new services, along with Victorian hymns. He said the combination gives an "old book flavor" to the new service.

But on top of the generosity and years of hard work there is the concern parishioners feel from Yerkes. Davis, wife, Margie, and Futch noted that while they no longer attend a Yerkes church, both said their families call on him in times of crisis.

"When there was difficulty, that's when you wanted him, when you wanted someone to talk to, to have on the ground with you," Futch said.

Mrs. Davis said she can still recall a sermon Yerkes gave when she was a young girl. It centered on a misfit he'd picked on the roadside on his way to Starke. But she said it wasn't Yerkes' sermons that made him special, but that feeling she got from him.

"He just seems to care," she said.

Country priest a living saint to those he's served so well

MELROSE — As a boy growing up in Jacksonville, Fred Yerkes was a river rat. His father, a prosperous merchant who owned the Florida Hardware Co., saw to it that his son had a boat, and the boy spent his days exploring the St. Johns River.

It was the river that led Fred Yerkes to his life's work. This was in the early 1920s and there was an aging Episcopal priest, the Rev. Thomas Brayshaw, who needed help attending to a string of backwoods missions along the St. Johns. The missions could only be reached by boat, and it fell to Fred Yerkes to provide the transportation. Along the way, Fred Yerkes found himself transported.

"I came to understand that I, too, wanted to be a country priest. I wanted nothing else," he said.

Fred Yerkes went off to college. He majored in classics at John Hopkins. He went to seminary at the University of the South and was ordained an Episcopal priest. When he returned to Florida, the Rev. Fred Yerkes went to his bishop and explained that he wasn't at all interested in serving at a big-city church. He wanted to travel the North Florida countryside and look after the church's tiniest outposts.

"The bishop told me, 'Fred, I can't do much for you. But I'll see to it that you don't starve.' I got paid \$60 a month," Yerkes said.

That was more than a half century



ABOUT FLORIDA

**BOB
MORRIS**

ago and the Rev. Fred Yerkes is still making his rounds. Most every morning, before daylight, he cranks up his car and leaves Jacksonville (a lifelong bachelor, he continues to live in the old family home), heading for the small communities that have become his most blessed domains.

At one time, Yerkes had about 16 missions, from Brooksville to Mayo, from Cedar Key to MacClenny, Hibernia, Hawthorne and points in between. No matter that only a scattering of the faithful showed up for services. They could count on Yerkes to be there.

Some Sundays, Yerkes might find no parishoners in the pews.

"I'd arrive, sweep the church, pray, ring the bell, play the organ, pray a little more and, if no one showed up, then I'd go on to the next church," he said.

Once, in Waldo (a small community about 17 miles northeast of Gainesville) a young boy whom Yerkes had never seen before was the lone member of the congregation. Yerkes duly

conducted the service and afterwards thanked the boy for attending.

"He said, 'That's OK, mister. I just had to see how this one-man church operated.'"

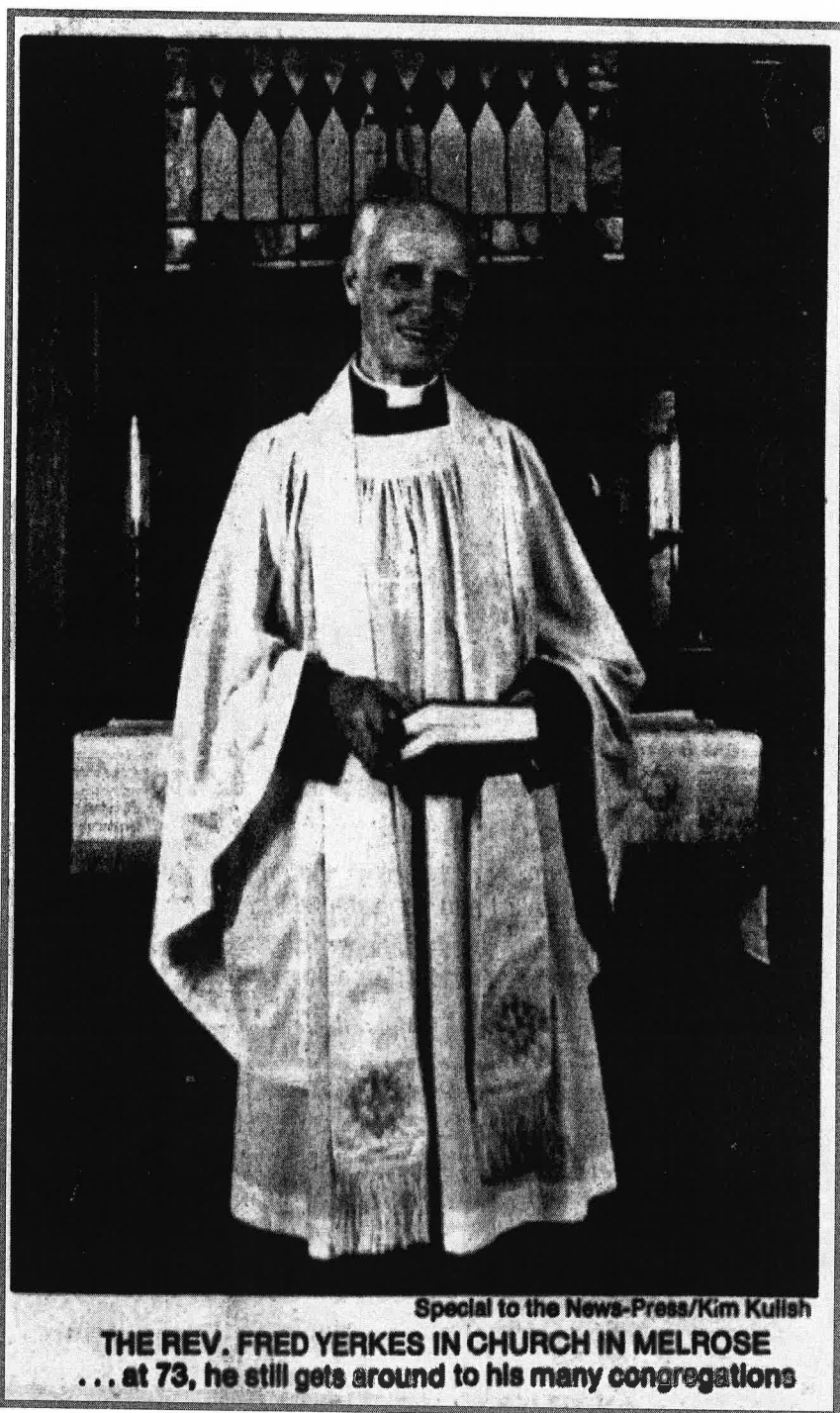
It is somewhat surprising that the Episcopal Church ever became a presence in this part of Florida. Most of the South, especially the rural South, is more likely to be hard-line Baptist or Methodist. But in the late 1800s, when the big lumber companies began putting their saws to the piney woods of North Florida, many of the company officials, some from Canada, some from England, were Episcopalians and saw to it that they had houses of worship. Like Trinity Church in Melrose, built in 1882, the buildings were put together with the best heart pine, the sturdiest of beams, and they have endured with grace, warmth and dignity.

For Yerkes, the old churches — "my two-by-four churches," he calls them — were treasures of the Florida heritage and he sought to maintain the buildings as well as their congregations.

"I tried to save as many of them as I could," he said. "It always pained me deeply to see one of those grand, little churches just wither away."

But even when there was no church building, Yerkes was ever-prepared.

**See MORRIS,
back page this section**



Morris *From page 1D*

If a gathering of families out in the middle of nowhere decided they had been too long without communion, all they needed to do was get in touch with Rev. Yerkes and he'd be there. From the trunk of his car he would pull a folding altar, a portable organ, kneeling cushions, chairs, hymnals, prayer books, even a vase full of freshly picked flowers and the service would begin.

Nowadays, at 73, Yerkes says he just can't visit all the communities as often as he used to, but darned if he doesn't try, still managing to put some 1,000 miles on his car each week.

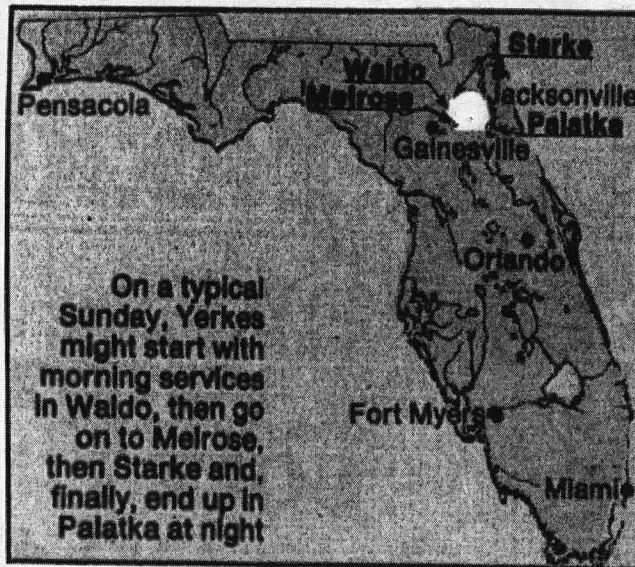
On a typical Sunday, he might hold a 9 a.m. service at Waldo, be at Melrose for Holy Communion at 11 a.m., have lunch with one of his parishoners, visit the church at Starke at 3 p.m., then wind up in Palatka for 8 p.m. worship. Weekdays will find him visiting hospitals, holding choir practice, helping out a Boy Scout troop, conducting funerals, weddings, baptisms, in short, attending to the never-ending duties of a country priest.

He does this despite the Episcopal Church's official rule that its priests must retire from full-time work at 72. For years, Yerkes has encouraged younger priests to take up his small town ministry. And some stepped in here and there. But they never stayed long, leaving for better-paying positions at bigger churches.

With his forced retirement fast-approaching, members of the congregation in Melrose petitioned the Episcopal Diocese of North Florida, asking that Yerkes be allowed to continue his work. Church officials granted him a special dispensation to keep his full-time ministry, but since he chose not to retire, he is not paid a salary and reaps no retirement benefits. He is supposed to take payment from the collection plates at his churches, but few of his parishoners would believe that he actually does so.

"Oh, he might take a little money just so people won't worry about him, but I guarantee you that he turns right around and pours it all back into the churches or uses it to help out someone," said Rodney Estes, a member of St. Paul's in Waldo who is proof of Yerkes' good deeds.

A few years back, when Estes wanted to go to college but the money just wasn't there, it was Yerkes who insisted on footing the bill. Today, Estes is a public school



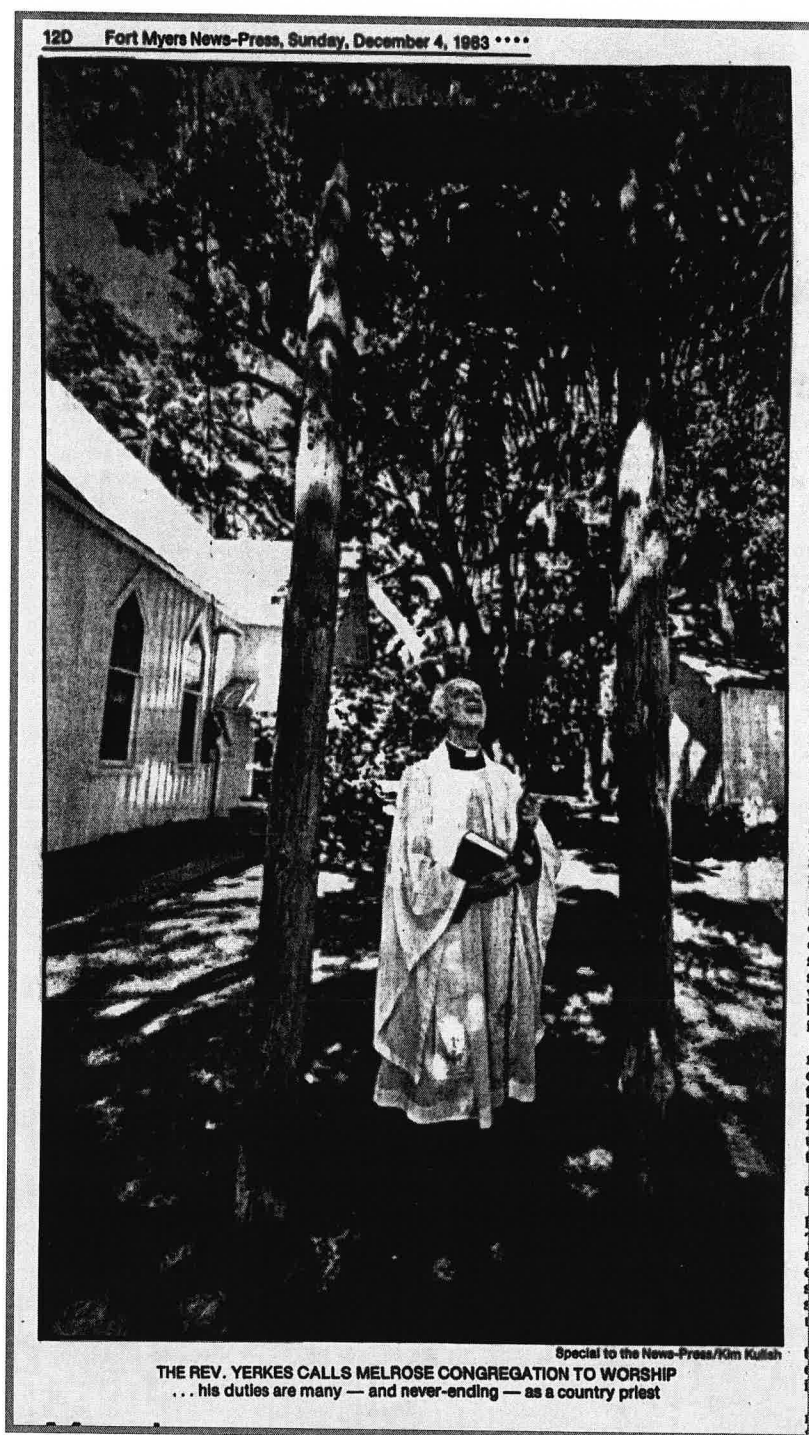
teacher. John Savant, who is studying computer science at the University of Florida, lives in the old rectory next to St. Paul's. It is Yerkes who pays for his education, too.

"Lord knows how many people he has helped like that. He'll never tell you. He just does it and that's it," said Estes. "When the roof here at St. Paul's started leaking, it was Rev. Yerkes who paid for a new one. When a church needed new wiring, it was Rev. Yerkes who paid the electrician. That Boy Scout house out there — it was Rev. Yerkes who went out and cut the logs and saw that it got built. You'll never know all the things he has done. The man is a living saint."

But Yerkes will hear no such talk.

"I know me better than they do and I am anything but a saint. I am just a country priest. That's not so much, really. I have my faults and they are many and right now," he paused to check his watch, "I seem to be running a little late. If you'll excuse me I do have to be going."

Then he stepped into his car, cranked it up and drove off. Down the road, another congregation was waiting.



Yerkes found souls on dusty trails



The story is told that when Fred G. Yerkes Jr. collected his divinity degree from the University of the South in 1935, his well-to-do mother rushed up and announced she had found just the church for his ministry and that she could install a tight new roof.

He replied, "Mother, I don't need such roof where I'm going."

That was not even the beginning. As a lad, he had boated many times down Florida's St. Johns with a veteran minister who served 18 riverbank missions. He already had stirred up the dust of North Florida backroads as an altar boy and scripture reader. As a student minister, he already had campaigned for the Lord among the Tennessee stumpknockers.

So this fellow, who could read scripture in Hebrew and Greek and got his theology from the Latin and even studied for a year at Oxford in England and suffered terribly from rheuma, disdained the lure of tight roofs and ecclesiastical ambition. He staked his claim wherever two or three souls willingly gathered together amid the oaks and creeks and marshes and dusty trails and logging camps and tank towns of North Florida.

An Episcopalian, he reached churches accessible only by rail, horseback or johnboat. If any were in need of paraphernalia, he dug it out of his bottomless "ecclesiastical" chest. If their sons were needy, he financed their college educations — since, never wed except to the church, he could scrape together a few wherewithals. He left behind a trail of Scout troops and libraries and nursery schools.

A wisp physically, he commonly held five services in five separate rural churches on a day — begging off from socials and dinners and subsisting on Moon Pies and RC Colas slipped down over the steering wheel. He put a thousand miles a week on his automobile. He traveled such haste that highway patrolmen regularly waved him along as a speeding mad preacher, but he did finally accumulate enough citations to earn a session in traffic school.

By "official" count, he served 20



The Rev. Fred Yerkes Jr.

churches during his career — which hardly addresses his efforts since he had an optimistic propensity for founding missions which were shortlived. Thirty years ago, as an Episcopal layreader under his tutelage, I had an experience that illustrates.

While Gainesville had two or three mainstream Episcopal churches, Rev. Yerkes had found a couple of families unserved on the eastern fringe. He arranged for me to meet

**An Episcopalian,
he reached
churches
accessible only by
rail, horseback or
johnboat.**

him at a school and to read scriptures for Sunday services. He obviously had ambitions for creating another mission.

I arrived a bit early to find the building locked, with no hope of access, and I sank into despair. Then Fred Yerkes screeched up. He threw open the car trunk and pulled out a handful of chairs and a folding table and several beer cartons, which I found to contain kneelers. He pulled out a battered box which converted

to a surplus Army pump organ. He set these items up in the school's covered walkway because, indeed, he had no arrangements for getting inside. As a finishing touch, he mounted a Coke bottle with a single flower on the table that served as altar.

Church was ready. While I only read the scriptures, Yerkes played a hymn, read the liturgy, offered the prayers, preached a sermon, played more hymns, and blessed the departing congregation, all six of them. Then he loaded the equipment and scratched off.

In demeanor, he was the precise opposite of a pulpit-thumper. He was self-effacing, modest if not actually timid, and uncaring about his personal fortune. When his car was stolen, he refused to prosecute. If he agreed to accept money, which was seldom, he passed it along to those in need. Knowing well the uselessness of giving him cash or gift certificates, his admirers arranged fittings and purchased clothing he could not easily pass to others.

Except for a brief aside about an attempt to retire him at age 72, Fred Yerkes never shared with me an unkind word for the Episcopal hierarchy — but he was being nudged, for sure. After all, he nursed along missions that tended to become financial drains. His scrounging for parishioners in the shadows of mainline churches was not exactly appreciated. He was pegged as a dreamer, an impractical religionist. And, with his frayed sleeves and missing buttons and rumpled appearance and gaunt presence, he was an untidy relic in a church known for its formality, crisp regalia, shining brass and Sunday finery.

Americans live in a society that values acquisition, money, things, consumption. Most conform. Those who do not conform, the dreamers, tend to evolve into cynics. Fred Yerkes resisted both conformity and cynicism. At age 79, still a circuit-riding priest, he was the Ultimate Unselfish Dreamer.

Sparing him tubes and injections and pain and indignity, the Lord claimed Fred Yerkes in his sleep last week. And there went a fellow who paved his own road to glory.

Horance G. "Buddy" Davis writes for *The New York Times Regional News* paper Group.

sion before the service. Judge Edgar E. Pomeroy of Atlanta, chancellor of the diocese of Atlanta, gave the commencement address. Honorary degrees were conferred upon Bishop Rogers; the Rev. C. B. K. Weed of New Orleans; the Rev. C. W. Sheerin of Chattanooga; Admiral Cary Grayson of Washington; the Rev. Albert Lucas, rector of St. Alban's School.

* * *

Ordinations in Michigan

Bishop Page ordained E. Thomas Rodda and William S. Hill to the diaconate on June 18th at St. Paul's Cathedral, Detroit. Rodda is a graduate of Bexley, and Hill just finished his work at the Virginia Seminary after first attending Cambridge. Both men are to work in the diocese.

* * *

Retiring Rector Is Honored

A dinner was given last week to the Rev. W. H. B. Allen, who is retiring as rector of St. Peter's, Narragansett, Rhode Island, after a rectorship of 37 years. The Rev. Thom Williamson of Pawtucket is to have charge of the parish during the summer.

* * *

Preaches on Campaign Issues

So far as maintenance of sufficient commodities for normal demands is concerned, both "the old deal" and the New Deal were at fault, the Rev. L. Bradford Young said at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Brooklyn, of which he is associate minister.

"The boll of cotton is the symbol of God's good news to this generation," he declared. "There are three words concerning it. God made it. God made plenty of it. And He wants men to use it to clothe His children."

"The boll of cotton stands also for God's plentiful provision of wheat, coal, oil, building materials, man power and technical skills. Even idle men, idle fields, idle factories are signs not only of an immediate social disorder but also of the possibility of an ultimate well-being of plenty for all, in which poverty, as we have known it, is to be abolished."

"God's blessing of plenty we have turned into a curse. In the prosperous years our system did not distribute sufficient purchasing power to buy what was made. There followed the familiar story. Prices fell, profits stopped. And when profits stop under the present system, production stops, even though human need has not stopped. The result is unemployment, artificial scarcity and deepening misery."

"The New Deal had rejected God's

gifts by paying the farmer for not growing things. The old deal did the same thing by evicting them so they could not grow things. The message of the boll of cotton should be the chief issue of the political campaign."

"It is the business of the church to preach the good news of plenty and the doom of all who reject it and so create faith in the possibility of God's economy of abundance."

* * *

Canon Prichard Endorses Birth Control

"There is nothing in the Christian religion which is in any sense antagonistic toward what we call birth control," declared the Rev. H. A. Prichard, rector at Mt. Kisco, N. Y., and canon of the cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York. He was speaking at a dinner held in Hartford, Conn., sponsored by the Maternal Health Center. Canon Prichard, long a supporter of birth control, championed the movement on the grounds of health and economics. Terming "absurd" the limitations imposed by laws, he asserted that the jails and "lunatic asylums" are being filled each year because it is impossible to curb reproduction by incompetents. He took to task church conferences, which, he said, have "sidetracked the issue," and doctors, of whom he said, "If there are any better pastmasters at passing the buck than the doctors, I don't know them."

Birth control, he asserted, is a fact and not a theory and is as old as the world. Discussing the religious attitude towards it, he declared he can find nothing in the Bible which objects to birth control and can see no basis on which it may be called immoral. The argument of critics that birth control constitutes murder he refuted by saying that murder means "destruction of the human personality on earth" and that birth control "cannot be murder because the personality never had a chance to come into being."

Urging the group not to be afraid of being pioneers, Canon Prichard predicted that the movement is coming universally. "And I think God is on your side," he concluded.

* * *

Christian Pacifists Pray in England

Thousands of Christian pacifists, led by the Rev. Dick Sheppard, marched to the Albert Hall, London, the other evening and there prayed for peace. There were no speeches. Canon Raven, Anglican, invited everyone to pray for the peace of the world, and pointed out that similar meetings were being held throughout the country. These folks are not looked upon favorably by the Bishop of London who is reported to have

stated recently that "the extreme pacifism which prevents young men from joining the territorials, holds back recruits from the army, and even discourages clergy from acting as territorial chaplains, is absolutely hastening war."

* * *

Holderness School to Build

Holderness, New Hampshire diocesan school, was full to capacity this past academic year and is now planning to construct a temporary dormitory this summer to accommodate the increasing number of entrants expected in the fall.

* * *

Ordinations in Harrisburg

Kenneth M. Gearhart and Albert O. Judd were ordained deacons by Bishop Brown of Harrisburg on June 9th. Judd was presented by his father, the Rev. Archibald M. Judd.

* * *

Ordination at Sewanee

Bishop Juhan of Florida ordained the Rev. Fred G. Yerkes to the priesthood in St. Luke's Chapel, Sewanee, Tennessee, on June 11th. Mr. Yerkes is in charge of chapels in the diocese of Florida. Norman Francis Kinzie, who is to be placed in charge of the vacant parish at Pensacola, Fla., during the summer, was ordained deacon at the same service.

* * *

Hornell Parish Is Rededicated

Christ Church, Hornell, N. Y., was Rededicated on May 31st by Bishop Ferris. The church had been completely renovated at a cost of \$20,000. The rector of the parish, the Rev. John G. Spencer, was honored with a doctorate at the commencement of Alfred College this month.

* * *


Prayer Cards at Old Trinity

Eight Prayer Cards are in use in Trinity Parish, New York. They are described as follows in a recent Sunday bulletin:—No. 1 is a daily intercession "for my Parish"; No. 2—"S. Richard's Prayer"; S. Richard of Wyche, Bishop of Chichester, 1245-1253; No. 3—prayers mindful of one's Baptism and Confirmation, for the Christian Soldier and the Christian Knight; No. 4—a card of "Acts"; of Faith, Hope, Love, Contrition, Dedication, Thanksgiving, Worship; No. 5—"In the Hands of God", a number of brief ejaculations, mostly from the Psalms, for use upon rising and going to bed, and for praise and recollection during the day; No. 6—some prayers for noon-day, giving expression to the mean-

1972

St. Augustine School: Seventy-Five Years of Negro Parochial Education in Gainesville, Florida

Harry A. Kersey, Jr.

 Part of the American Studies Commons, and the United States History Commons

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Kersey, Jr., Harry A. (1972) "St. Augustine School: Seventy-Five Years of Negro Parochial Education in Gainesville, Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 51 : No. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol51/iss1/7>

ST. AUGUSTINE SCHOOL: SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF NEGRO PAROCHIAL EDUCATION IN GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

by HARRY A. KERSEY, JR.*

THE BAPTISTS and Presbyterians already had active congregations in Gainesville, Florida, when, in 1868, the Episcopalians formed "Trinity Parish." Land was secured and in 1873 a frame church was built on north Main Street where the Masonic Temple now stands.¹ This structure served the needs of the parish for over three decades.

It is not known whether black and white Episcopalians worshipped together at Holy Trinity, but given the residual southern white bitterness during Reconstruction and the Negro separatist sentiment of the time it is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, the establishment of Negro congregations was a topic often broached at diocesan councils, and some progress had been made in opening parochial schools in conjunction with a few of the churches. This was consistent with the philosophy espoused by John Freeman Young, bishop of the Diocese of Florida throughout the Reconstruction era.² He believed that if the church was to have lasting influence among blacks it should provide elementary schools for the children and education for the Negro preachers who were the leaders of their people.³ Young's work among the freedmen in Florida was carried on

* Mr. Kersey is professor of education at Florida Atlantic University. Some of the themes in this article initially were explored by William King in a graduate seminar paper presented at Florida Atlantic University.

1. Frank W. Pisani, "Holy Trinity Church- Its Story" (Gainesville, 1951), 3.
2. Joseph D. Cushman, Jr., *A Goodly Heritage: The Episcopal Church in Florida 1821-1892* (Gainesville, 1965), 155-70. John Freeman Young was ordained into the Episcopal priesthood in 1845, and after serving various church posts in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, and New York, he became the second bishop of the Diocese of Florida in 1867.
3. *Ibid.*, 83-87. Young envisioned a network of Negro schools in his new diocese under the direction of the Church. One of his strongest supporters was Harriet Beecher Stowe, a recent convert to Anglicanism and a winter resident of Mandarin, who hoped to aid the project by teaching and raising money. Because of the lack of funds in Florida and a waning interest in the Negro in the North, the bishop's hopes did not fully materialize. Church academies were opened in Fernandina and Lake City.

by his successor, Bishop Edwin G. Weed, and by 1889 over 600 Negroes were attending seven Episcopal churches, while approximately fifty colored children were enrolled in parochial day schools.⁴

The diocesan records for 1892 reveal that the rector at Holy Trinity had established the St. Augustine Mission for Negroes in the parish hall and had "opened a night school and hopes soon to have a day school for colored children."⁵ This may be considered the beginning of the St. Augustine School, although an organized educational program was still five years away. The St. Augustine mission was the smallest of the Negro congregations established in north Florida prior to the division of the Diocese in 1893; it was also the last to establish a parochial elementary day school. Yet, it was the only one that survived to this decade, and it remained throughout under the control of its own congregation until the St. Augustine Church merged with Holy Trinity Parish in 1970.⁶

The efforts to maintain a school were desultory until the Reverend Mr. John Speight, a black minister, arrived in 1896. Shortly thereafter classes were being conducted at the mission with all grades meeting in one room. When a new church was completed in 1907, the original structure was turned over to the Negro congregation as a mission church, and the building was moved to the corner of what is now Northwest Fourth Avenue and Northwest Fourth Street where it served as both a sanctuary and a school. In 1905 Ada Speight, a graduate from the St. Augustine Normal School in Raleigh, North Carolina, joined the school staff. Another Speight daughter, Florence, also a graduate of the normal school, later joined the faculty for a short time. A third teacher early in this century was Miss Ela Kendrick. The conditions under which they labored were trying at best. The building was poorly heated, and the roof leaked so that the children during a hard rain had to cluster wherever

4. *Ibid.*, 186-87. Edwin Gardner Weed, a native of Georgia, was ordained in 1871. After fifteen years as a rector in Connecticut, he became the third bishop of the Diocese of Florida.

5. *Journal of the 50th Annual Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Florida* (Jacksonville, 1893), 42.

6. *Journal of the 127th Annual Council of the Diocese of Florida* 1969 (Jacksonville, 1969), 106, 138.

they could find a dry spot to study.⁷ Funds for furniture and educational materials were in short supply. For many years there were only enough desks and chairs for the older students; one observer recalls seeing the younger children sitting on the kneelers and writing on the pew seats.⁸ The children provided their own writing materials, and they brought lunches from home as there were no kitchen facilities in the building.

In 1944 the original building had become so dilapidated that it was torn down and a new one was erected with the financial aid of the women's auxiliary of the Diocese. The new building was partitioned to provide a small section for worship and a larger area for the school. In 1949 a surplus World War II building from Camp Blanding was obtained and placed next to the church as an additional school building. After regular church services were discontinued in 1969, the space in both buildings was devoted to the school.

The early funding for the church and school came from the Episcopal Diocese of Florida, primarily from the bishop's discretionary fund and the small Livingston Trust established for the school; the total revenue from these sources never amounted to more than \$1,500 a year. This was supplemented by minimal contributions from the congregation and tuition fees of the students. In the beginning tuition was ten cents a week, and many students paid with a bushel of potatoes, ears of corn, or a cord of wood in lieu of cash. Lebbeus Speight, who attended the school from 1900 to 1908, recalls that his father received a salary of \$30.00 a month, and part of that came from the Diocese.⁹ The Reverend Mr. Fred G. Yerkes, Jr., archdeacon of Gainesville, who began supervising the school during the depression years of the 1930s, remembers that many children generally brought their dimes to school in their mouths because their parents were afraid they might lose them, and every Friday morning the teacher's desk would be covered with wet dimes.¹⁰ This tuition prevailed until after World War II when it was raised to \$1.00 a month.¹¹ In 1970 the tuition at St.

7. Interview with the Reverend Mr. Fred G. Yerkes, Jr., Jacksonville, June 18, 1971. Tape in files of the author.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Interview with Lebbeus Speight, Gainesville, July 14, 1971. Tape in files of author.

10. Interview with the Reverend Mr. Fred G. Yerkes, Jr.

11. *Journal of the 105th Annual Council of the Diocese of Florida 1948* (Jacksonville, 1948), 55.

Augustine was \$4.00 for a five day week, including lunch in a recently-added kitchen facility. The Diocese paired St. Augustine with the Episcopal Child Day Care Centers in Jacksonville for funding purposes in 1970, but it had little effect except to raise teacher salaries. The bulk of funding for the school still comes from local sources. This dependence on self-help rather than the diocesan treasury can be traced in part to the influence of Archdeacon Yerkes, who consistently held that St. Augustine should be supported primarily by the constituency that it served. This allowed the black community to shape the school to meet its particular needs without undue influence from the Diocese or the white Episcopal congregation in Gainesville. Such a policy may not be viable in the future, but apparently it has served the school reasonably well.

The organization of the school has fluctuated greatly since its founding. From 1896 until about 1910 it offered work concurrently with the Union Academy for Negroes in Gainesville, and went to the ninth grade.¹² From 1910 until the time of Reverend Speight's death on Christmas Day in 1924, the school taught the normal elementary subjects but went no higher than the sixth grade. After Speight's death the school continued under the direction of Melvis Jackson, who insisted that St. Augustine remain a parochial elementary school despite some feeling in the congregation that the school should not conflict with Lincoln High School which had opened in 1923 and which provided twelve years of education. In the late 1940s the organization and curriculum of St. Augustine was greatly influenced by Dr. Florence Jennings, an experienced educator whom the Reverend Yerkes had prevailed upon to work with the school. She began reorienting the program toward a preschool curriculum, and conducted extensive in-service training for the staff.¹³ This trend was reportedly vigorously opposed by Miss Jackson, who resisted any change which she thought might jeopardize the autonomous existence of the elementary school.

12. The Union Academy for Negroes in Gainesville was established by the Freedmen's Bureau in 1866. It opened in January of that year with 120 boys and girls as students, and offered the only public educational opportunities for Negro children until Lincoln High School was opened in 1923.

13. *Journal of the 104th Annual Council of the Diocese of Florida 1947* (Jacksonville, 1947), 62; interview with the Reverend Mr. Fred G. Yerkes, Jr.

However, as Miss Jackson's health worsened and public educational opportunities for black youngsters were expanded and improved in Gainesville, fewer children entered the upper elementary grades. Following her death in 1957 the course of the school was irrevocably set toward its present status, and it eventually was renamed the St. Augustine Day Care Center.

Some have observed that St. Augustine never was a true parochial school in the sense that there was no substantive direction from the Diocese on curriculum development, teacher selection or supervision, and it received only minimal financial support. Despite these shortcomings the quality of the school's program appears to have been good, according to the accounts of some former students. Lebbeus Speight recalls his father's insistence that "the children learn something" and how he enforced this admonition with strong discipline.¹⁴ Evidently the combination of no-nonsense education in a religious setting appealed to many parents, for children sometimes walked three to seven miles to attend what Gainesville's black community often called "Speight School." It is estimated that enrollment may have reached as high as ninety in the original building but remained around fifty in the years since World War II due to space limitations and local laws governing the number of students that could be accommodated. The tradition of excellence established by the Speights was continued by Melvis Jackson during her three decades as director. Although she possessed only a high school education, she had a strong personality and was highly respected since she emphasized both rigorous academics and character building. Mrs. George Gibson is director in 1972. She attended the school in her youth and later returned to teach under her cousin, Miss Jackson.¹⁵ Evidently Miss Jackson was a versatile and energetic person, for she taught all grades above kindergarten utilizing used texts which she arranged to have supplied by the Alachua County School Board. When children left St. Augustine for the public schools they were sought by the teachers who knew that most of them would be working on or above grade level due to their preparation. Many students continued their education through college, and

14. Interview with Lebbeus Speight.

15. Interview with Mrs. George Gibson, Gainesville, July 14, 1971. Tape in files of the author.

today leading members of the black business and professional community in Gainesville are alumni of the little white schoolhouse "near the square."¹⁶

With any private educational venture the question is inevitably raised— who patronized the institution? Certainly St. Augustine did not cater exclusively to a particular religious or socio-economic group as might be expected of an Episcopal school. There were probably never more than two dozen black Episcopalian families in the parish during its existence, and that would not have sustained a school.¹⁷ Neither was there a well established Negro "middle class" in the city which would have patronized the school as a badge of social status. Therefore, there appears to have been broad based support for the school due in large part to the esteem in which the Reverend Speight and Miss Jackson were held, but also because many parents wanted more for their children than what available public education facilities had to offer Negroes throughout most of this century.

In December 1971 the St. Augustine Day Care Center received its final financial support from the Episcopal Diocese of North Florida, thereby terminating a seventy-five year association. An independent board of directors comprised of local Episcopal churchmen, parents, and laymen now directs the affairs of the center. Although its days as a school are at an end, St. Augustine continues to serve the Negro community of Gainesville, perhaps in ways more appropriate to the times and needs of the people.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Interview with the Reverend Mr. Fred G. Yerkes, Jr.

^{+Time}
<http://plusmoretime.blogspot.com/2013/08/ordinary-time.html>

Ordinary Time (a total of nine pages)

August 16, 2013

The summer of 1952 I spent at Camp Weed, the summer camp of our Diocese of Florida. Managing to finagle my way onto the staff so as to remain all summer with my best friend Jack Dennis, I was variously a counselor for Junior Boys, a counselor for Father Fred Yerkes' Choir Boys camp, and on the kitchen staff. The most fun always was Father Fred and his camps.

Archdeacon of the Diocese of Florida, the Venerable Fred Yerkes was from the Jacksonville end of the diocese, and he, with his younger brother Francis Yerkes who assisted him as a layman, held down about six small mission churches for which he was the pastor, and in each of which he held services every Sunday morning. I don't know how many miles he drove a year, but he wore cars out and at least in the years I knew him, he always drove Chevrolet cars, always black. Father Fred was one of my heroes in my teen years.

The summer of 1952 Father Fred arrived at camp with a new 1952 Chevrolet. It was a Fleetline DeLuxe two door sedan, the fastback model, black as he probably felt befitted his priestly role.



43



He was quite generous with the car, letting Jack and me drive it, not only around camp when none of the campers were out, but also into town to Carrabelle from time to time to pick up stuff. For two sixteen year old boys, this was the biggest deal and privilege imaginable.

That was a year when the Korean War was in full force, and a great deal of industrial production was diverted to the war effort. It included cars, such that there was almost no change in styling, the 1951 Chevrolet



By
TW+

44

Fred Yerkes in The Episcopal Diocese of Florida 1892-1975 George R. Bentley
University of Florida / Gainesville c. 1989

Yerkes, Fred G., priest 67, 132-33, 145, 150-51, 159, 160, 179

67 (no reference found)

132-33 (photo copy follows)

144 – 45 (photo copy follows)

150 – 51 (photo copy follows)

159 – 160 (photo copy follows)

179 (photo copy follows)



The Reverend Fred G. Yerkes ("Father Fred") and the junior choir at Trinity Church, Melrose

classes permitted for an informal visit "to give the Chaplain a chance to talk straight religion on any question the man might have." He would spend at least an hour with the chaplain and would have lunch or dinner with the West family. "It is a system adapted to the needs and time schedule of my parishioners," wrote Mr. West. In one month, November 1937, he held Parson's Day for forty-four students. He thought that month was "one of the most effective months I have ever spent in the ministry."⁸¹

The students' work in missions was done "through the cooperation of the Rev. Mr. Fred Yerkes," reported Chaplain West. Weed Hall's Brotherhood of St. Andrew designated six of its members for training as lay readers, and they were "regularly scheduled" to go with Mr. Yerkes on his visits to the missions in Trenton, Waldo, Cedar Key, Melrose, Newberry, and Cross City. There was a waiting list when Mr. West wrote his report, early in 1939, and the men on it were "ready now to pounce upon vacancies, should they appear." Mr. West vouched for "the good effect it is having upon the men."⁸²

Mr. Yerkes in 1939 was becoming one of the foremost missionaries of the diocese. His specialty then and through all his ministry

was rural work. As a small boy in Jacksonville he had sometimes gone out to Macclenny to serve in the St. James Academy, where he met another of Florida's rural missionaries, Mr. Grubb, and as a teenager he sometimes accompanied a priest or the bishop traveling by boat to the "river churches" along the St. Johns.⁸³ During his summer vacations while he was a seminary student at Sewanee he was assigned to work in missions, first at New Berlin, then in the Warrington-Milton field.⁸⁴ When he graduated in 1935, the bishop had no place for him—had no money with which to put him in any place—so the young deacon briefly filled vacancies in his home parish, the Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, and in Holy Trinity, Gainesville. However, he continued to tell the bishop that what he wanted was country work. He got it. Bishop Juhan told him he had no money to pay for that work, but if Mr. Yerkes's missions could not pay him \$60 a month he, the bishop, would make up the difference. His missions were to be any or all of some fifteen churches scattered along the Suwannee-Santa Fe river valleys. He was officially given charge of Cedar Key, Melrose, Starke, Newberry, Trenton, and Waldo, but he also gave occasional services at Chiefland, Cross City, High Springs, Mayo, "and various others." The bishop made him archdeacon of the eastern convocation and told him, "Fred, you can't go down there and stay a year until you find a bigger parish and do any good. This is a job that'll take twenty years."⁸⁵ When just five of those years had passed, Bishop Juhan said, "I doubt if a Diocese could have a better example and demonstration of progress and extension in rural areas than has been given us by the Archdeacon of the Eastern Convocation. A few years ago I assigned this man several of our weakest and most dormant missions. . . . He has brought these missions to new life, interest and responsibility. These missions and several others, which he has added to his string now constitute a real field."⁸⁶ Not that Mr. Yerkes was finished; he was to stay the full twenty years, then double that, and then still stay on at the job he had asked for at the beginning. "Many churches still stand today, boasting robust and vigorous ministries which might have been closed but for the stubborn zeal of 'Father Fred,'" wrote a parochial paper in 1960.⁸⁷

Mr. Yerkes was the first person Bishop Juhan named as a convocational archdeacon, but in 1937 he appointed another one, an archdeacon for the western convocation. This was the Reverend Valentine G. Lowery, who came from the Diocese of Alabama. Mid-

only two in the 1920s. Meanwhile, eleven of the churches on the diocesan roll in 1920 had been closed, so there had been a loss, not an advance, in the number of congregations.³³ Only eleven counties had two or more Episcopal churches in 1939; fourteen had just one each; nine had none at all. It was suggested by the Committee on Rural Work that missions should be established in these nine counties at the rate of one county a year, and the Department of Missions recommended that "the next step in our Missionary Program" should be to survey the communities in the diocese where the church was not present, then to make a more intensive effort to meet their religious needs.³⁴

The diocese was in its best position since the depression began to make such an effort. In closing his books for 1938 the treasurer found that his deficit was only \$510.42. Two churchmen, approached by the bishop, contributed that sum, so there was no deficit for the year. "It has been a long time since we have been this fortunate," reported the finance committee.³⁵ The morale of the diocese was improved both by the centennial celebration and by the rising economy. Jeffrey Alfriend thought the convention of 1939 was "one of the best in recent years. . . . I believe we had a minimum of froth and a greatly improved spirit of co-operation. . . . I really think we are on the way to a much better diocesan spirit." Bishop Juhan replied, "I too think we reached a high point in our Council this year. There is certainly better cooperation all around and I am confident we are going forward."³⁶ There was no money to employ a general missionary,³⁷ but, reported the Department of Missions, the missionary work of the diocese was "more completely staffed, and more efficiently organized, than at any time in the past 10 years."³⁸ The diocese had no surplus of either men or money, but it had enough of both to resume its task of extending the church.

Extension in Jacksonville began in 1939 when a vestryman in the Church of the Good Shepherd, Frank H. Fant, surveyed the suburbs of the city and decided that the Edgewood Heights section was the place to start a new mission. Under the leadership of the Reverend Mr. Yerkes, services were held weekly in people's homes; then a small house was rented. In December 1940, at Bishop Juhan's request, the Good Shepherd became sponsor of the mission, which was named St. Stephen's, the second Jacksonville mission with that name.³⁹ It continued as St. Stephen's until 1971, when it merged

with another mission, St. Alban's, and they became Jacksonville's Church of the Nativity.⁴⁰

The Department of Missions gave Mr. Yerkes much credit for "the stimulation of interest" in the St. Stephen's project.⁴¹ He was also a prime mover in the revival of the church in Macclenny. No clergyman had been assigned to St. James's since the death of Mr. Grubb in 1930, and St. James's, a casualty of the depression, was not included in the list of missions in the diocese from 1933 until 1942. Mr. Yerkes had "resumed sporadic ministrations" in 1934, but little progress was made until he organized a combination school-welfare center-mission in 1938. Soon the work was made part of the Lake City field. It progressed so well that a new chapel was built in Macclenny in 1941. Mr. Yerkes proclaimed it a "symbol of advance" and noted that one of the nine unchurched counties in the diocese had been reclaimed.⁴²

Lake City was no longer having to share a clergyman with Live Oak. That had been necessary during the worst years of the depression, but in 1936 Bishop Juhan felt justified in giving each city its own resident priest.⁴³ The new man at Lake City, the Reverend Richard G. Urban, was asked also to take charge of High Springs and



St. Michael and All Angels Church, Tallahassee

of Religious Education. Louise Gehan, sister of Julia Gehan, was employed in this capacity, and she was expected to "devote all of her time to all of the Diocese, leading in the development and strengthening of the Church's work, especially in the Service Leagues and Church Schools."⁴ In addition, in April 1941 a Division of Youth was created in the Department of Religious Education. Composed of representatives of all youth groups in the diocese, it was to "make and carry out plans for the extension of the Church's work with the young people in the diocese."⁵

By 1942 the new division had nearly completed a survey of youth activities in the diocese, had promoted the organization of youth councils in every congregation, and had offered to counsel all parishes and missions. Miss Gehan had visited nearly every church school in the diocese and had assisted the young people with many of their meetings and activities.⁶ The Department of Religious Education was well pleased with her work, but it felt that much remained to be done. "In the field of the Church Schools," it told the diocesan convention of 1942,

there exists an almost frightening inadequacy in spite of much earnest endeavor. . . . Many parishes and missions remain too inadequately equipped. . . . Usually the Church School is left to finance itself, or even help support the Church. . . . Too often the training of our children and young people is left to too few or less capable hands when valuable and able leaders turn deaf ears to the challenge. . . . Not until every parish and mission has a definite, well thought out program of Christian education for all members, with trained teachers, adequate equipment and a definite educational goal . . . can we even dream of competing against the vast forces of secular if not actually pagan education.⁷

Another area in which there was a great inadequacy in the diocese's work, and consequently a great opportunity for service during the ten-year program, was the work with black people. Mr. Yerkes, as chairman of the Commission on Negro Work, reported in 1942 that "every year for several years our Negro work has actually lost ground. . . . More than a third of our congregations are virtually unpastored. This has been the case for some years. We have played chess with an inadequate staff. The shepherded congregations have always showed growth, the vacant ones have always lost

ground.”⁸ Just three black priests were working in the diocese, and one of them was assigned to serve St. Augustine as well as the two Jacksonville missions.⁹ That assignment was apparently little more than words on paper, for Mr. Yerkes wrote that “St. Cyprian’s, St. Augustine, and St. Augustine’s, Gainesville, show the effects of a prolonged vacancy. They need a pastor.”¹⁰ The Gainesville mission also desperately needed building repairs: “The building in Gainesville simply must have attention,” Mr. Yerkes said. “Its condition has been deplorable for some years.” He deemed it an act of Providence that the day a committee of auxiliary ladies visited the mission was a rainy one—they “were appropriately shocked as well as wet,” he reported. “Some sixty children meet daily in this shambles of a building.”¹¹

The work with black people was included in Bishop Juhan’s list of projects for the ten-year program because it so badly needed attention. The Laymen’s League was included because it might be used as an instrument for improving many aspects of the diocese’s work. The league had been growing in recent years, and it had been formally organized at the diocesan level in 1939.¹² There were seven local leagues at that time; two years later there were thirteen, plus ten men’s groups which might develop into leagues.¹³ The bishop felt that the league had become “a potential and valuable force.” The service he hoped it would give in the church’s ten-year program was “personal evangelism—the recruiting of Church membership to full strength.”¹⁴

Church membership and strength could also be increased by the “advance work” Bishop Juhan was calling for—the establishing of new congregations, especially in places having no Episcopal churches. One place where the bishop was able to get a new mission, soon after he proposed his six projects for the ten-year plan, was the San Jose area of Jacksonville. He had wanted a mission there since almost the beginning of his episcopate,¹⁵ and in 1941 he finally had both a man and a facility with which to get the work started. The man was the Reverend Lesley Wilder, a newly ordained deacon who was an assistant at Jacksonville All Saints and who was to “cultivate a new field of opportunity for the Church in San Jose.”¹⁶ The facility had been the administration building for San Jose Estates during the real-estate boom. In 1941 it had been closed for several years, and it was made available to the diocese by Mrs. Alfred I. duPont. It was readily adaptable for church purposes, and,

duty servicemen in several other towns and cities in the diocese, with "excellent work" being done, said the diocesan army and navy commission, by St. John's, Tallahassee, Christ Church, Pensacola, St. James's, Lake City, St. James's, Perry, and Trinity, St. Augustine.⁵⁸ In all of these places much of the work was done by the Woman's Auxiliary.⁵⁹

The burden was perhaps greater in Starke than anywhere else, and the facilities for coping with it were very small. The town's population in 1942 was less than two thousand;⁶⁰ St. Mark's Church had only fifty members, and its total receipts for the year were just \$823.57.⁶¹ Its priest-in-charge, Mr. Yerkes, was responsible that year for six other missions as well as for St. Mark's.⁶² He opened the rectory in Starke to the men coming into town from the army's immense Camp Blanding, just seven miles away. The Jacksonville churches tried to keep the pantry stocked, and the soldiers cooked for themselves in the rectory kitchen. They "seem to enjoy the freedom from organized entertainment or supervision," said the diocesan army-navy commission. No doubt they did, but not many of them could—not in one little kitchen.⁶³

The national church's army and navy commission came to the rescue by giving the Diocese of Florida enough money to build on its own property in Starke "a small but suitable building" to be used "as a Church Center for the soldiers from Camp Blanding." The government gave the diocese permission to build, the diocese provided the center's furnishings and equipment, and the building was completed and put into use in May 1943.⁶⁴ Salaries and operating expenses were to be paid by the northern and southern Presbyterian churches, for they had joined the Diocese of Florida as sponsors of the center.⁶⁵ The Reverend Alison R. Bryan, a Presbyterian minister, became the center's first director and agreed with Bishop Juhan that it was not to compete with the USO in Starke. Instead of serving the men in large groups, as the USO was designed to do, the church center was to be "more particularly for a place of quiet and rest and friendly gatherings and meetings, [with] some social affairs."⁶⁶ Seven hundred visitors came in the first six weeks after the center opened, and it was especially helpful, Mr. Bryan reported, to soldiers' wives looking for places to stay when they came to visit their husbands. One of Mr. Bryan's successors sounded a similar note a few months later: "The greatest ministry of the Center is to the non-commissioned officers whose wives are living with them in

Starke. Usually these couples have small rooms with no privileges and the Center offers their only opportunity to be together in a Christian society. . . . The Center ministers to the wives . . . by providing them with companionship, teas, and Red Cross work."⁶⁷

Mr. Yerkes had suggested in 1942 that a resident priest should be placed in Starke to minister to St. Mark's and to the men at Camp Blanding.⁶⁸ But it was hard to find clergymen, and more than two years went by before the bishop had someone he could assign to Starke.⁶⁹ In the meantime, in his report as archdeacon for 1944, Mr. Yerkes returned to his point. Speaking of St. Mark's, the church center for servicemen, and the state prison at Raiford, he said, "The placing of a proper priest at Starke would give these three beckoning opportunities a wonderful advantage, and would permit your archdeacon to function in his proper sphere. At present his ministry in such places as High Springs and Welaka is so thrifty as to be all but destructive. Trenton, Newberry and Cross City are but little better off, and yet these are the churches that should merit his time, together with such new work as present conditions abundantly present."⁷⁰

New work was not being done either by Mr. Yerkes or by the diocese as a whole. The outlook for it had been bright in 1941, but



The church center for servicemen at Starke

grated program for Christian Citizenship." The convention "trusted" that the auxiliary's suggestion would be effected, but no action had been taken when the cathedral was organized a year later.⁷¹

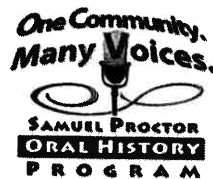
Still, in the field of Christian social service more work was already being done than had been before World War II. The rector of St. Paul's, Quincy, was holding a regular schedule of services for the hospital patients at Chattahoochee,⁷² and the priest-in-charge at St. Mark's, Starke, was serving also as chaplain for state road department prison camps.⁷³ Another kind of service was provided by the Margaret Tebeau Nursery School, organized and directed by Mr. Yerkes, in Gainesville. It provided care for preschool children—twenty-five of them in 1945, more than a hundred in 1948. The need was so great just then in Gainesville because many of the students at the university were older than the typical students of ordinary times. They were back from fighting the war, many were married, and many of the wives had to work to help pay the family bills. They brought their children on workdays to the nursery school on the Tebeau property, where, besides being cared for physically and helped to develop socially, emotionally, and intellectually, the children were given "a firm foundation in the everyday art of Christian living." Black children were cared for in Gainesville's St. Augustine's Mission.⁷⁴

Care of the aged was yet another area of Christian social service in which the diocese was beginning to take action. Mr. Lee had attended a provincial social-relations conference in which attention was given to what the church was doing for old people who needed help. "The story is lamentable," he reported to the convention of 1950. Only two or three institutions existed in the province to help old persons, and they were "on short rations." Bishop Juhan told the convention that he was "anxious to tackle during the year the problem and privilege of our ministration to older people." Half the people in the country over sixty-five, he said, were dependent on private or public assistance, and the church should be helping to provide that assistance. "We have an excellent piece of property and buildings which could be used for this or other kindred purposes," he concluded.⁷⁵

The property Bishop Juhan was thinking of had been willed to the diocese by Sister Esther-Carlotta, the only surviving member of the Sisters of the Resurrection.⁷⁶ The sisters had been physically present in the diocese since 1896⁷⁷ but had never been recognized

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz
Technology Coordinator: Deborah Hendrix



241 Pugh Hall
PO Box 115215
Gainesville, FL 32611
352-392-7168
352-846-1983 Fax

The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) was founded by Dr. Samuel Proctor at the University of Florida in 1967. Its original projects were collections centered around Florida history with the purpose of preserving eyewitness accounts of economic, social, political, religious and intellectual life in Florida and the South. In the 45 years since its inception, SPOHP has collected over 5,000 interviews in its archives.

Transcribed interviews are available through SPOHP for use by research scholars, students, journalists, and other interested groups. Material is frequently used for theses, dissertations, articles, books, documentaries, museum displays, and a variety of other public uses. As standard oral history practice dictates, SPOHP recommends that researchers refer to both the transcript and audio of an interview when conducting their work. A selection of interviews are available online here through the UF Digital Collections and the UF Smathers Library system.

Oral history interview transcripts available on the UF Digital Collections may be in draft or final format. SPOHP transcribers create interview transcripts by listening to the original oral history interview recording and typing a verbatim document of it. The transcript is written with careful attention to reflect original grammar and word choice of each interviewee; subjective or editorial changes are not made to their speech. The draft transcript can also later undergo a later final edit to ensure accuracy in spelling and format. Interviewees can also provide their own spelling corrections. SPOHP transcribers refer to the Merriam-Webster's dictionary, Chicago Manual of Style, and program-specific transcribing style guide, accessible at SPOHP's website.

For more information about SPOHP, visit <http://oral.history.ufl.edu> or call the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program office at 352-392-7168.

-October 2013

AL-089

Interviewee: Fred Yerkes

Interviewer: Emily Ring

Date: February 24, 1987

Father Fred Yerkes is pastor of the Melrose Episcopal Church. He was born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida, where he attended the Church of the Good Shepherd and its day school. His recollections of these childhood days offer delightful reading.

Because of his asthma, he went to Washington, DC for a few years. There he worked as a Senate page and sang in the St. Johns Church boys choir. From Washington, DC he went to prep school in Manassas, VA, and on to St. Johns College in Annapolis, MD.

There he majored in classics, which was easy for him, since his mother was a Latin teacher and he had been exposed to the classics at an early age. While in Maryland, Yerkes took the opportunity to do some lay reading in various churches. For a time, he did some mission work in Sewanee, TN.

Yerkes returned to Florida in 1934 and went to work teaching Latin and Greek in the Tebeau School in Gainesville and working with Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. Remembrances of the Tebeau School are most vivid, and Yerkes speaks in detail on the daily workings and workers of the school, its relationship with Holy Trinity, and its eventual demise into a city parking lot. Also, during this time there was a strong need for pastoral leadership in numerous small churches in northeast Florida, and Father Yerkes served churches in Trenton, Newberry, High Springs, Cedar Key, Starke, Waldo, and Melrose – sometimes as many as five churches concurrently. Here, too, Yerkes' recollections are abundant, and he pays particular attention to the churches in Cedar Key, Starke, and Melrose. Cedar Key has had problems keeping a church building intact, due to storms

and fires, and he has been of significant help providing the needs of these people. During World War II, Starke's population exploded because of the military facility at Camp Blanding, and Father Yerkes led them through this challenging time. Melrose experienced a parish house fire in 1984, and Father Yerkes was conducting a boys choir rehearsal in the building when the fire broke out.

"I do not think I was really called [to the ministry] – I drifted into it." Father Yerkes' acclamation is understating his own contributions. He has lived through and served churches and schools during the Depression, World War II, storms, fires, and the many other challenges the years have offered.

R: Today is February 24, 1987. [My name is Emily Ring, and] I am at Holy Trinity Church. I am doing an oral history with Father Fred Yerkes who has just come over from Melrose, where he is currently a pastor. He is going to tell us something about his life. Father Yerkes, what year were you born and where was your birth place?

Y: March 5, 1910, Jacksonville, Florida.

R: March 5, 1910, Jacksonville, Florida. You are two years younger than I am. Well, we are both getting on, aren't we. What was your father's name?

Y: I am a junior, [so his name was] Fred Yerkes.

R: And what was your mother's name?

Y: Frances Rebecca Huddleston.

- R: Did you have brothers and sisters?
- Y: An older sister, Cornelia Yerkes, and a younger brother, Francis Huddleston Yerkes.
- R: Are they still living?
- Y: Both.
- R: Do they both live in Jacksonville?
- Y: Yes, within a few miles of where I live.
- R: Where do you live in Jacksonville? Where is your home?
- Y: King [Street] and St. John's Avenue, right in back of St. Vincent's Hospital.
- R: If anything happens to you, they can rush you right over.
- Y: I hope not. [Laughter]
- R: Now, can you tell us where you went to elementary school, or grammar school, as we used to call it?
- Y: There was no school in that neighborhood, so I went down to Riverside School, which was about three or four miles away.
- R: Did you walk, or did you ride a pony?
- Y: Well, I walked some. I was asthmatic as a child, and I did ride a pony sometimes when I was short of breath.
- R: Well, good. Jacksonville was not such a big city then.
- Y: No.
- R: That was a very exclusive part of Jacksonville, wasn't it?
- Y: Yes.
- R: I understand that your father was in the hardware business.

Y: Yes, ma'am.

R: What was the name of his hardware store?

Y: Florida Hardware. It had been in the family for several generations.

R: Is it still in the family?

Y: It is still in existence, but it has just recently passed out of the family hands.

R: Oh, I see. Now, after you went to elementary school, where did you go? Did you go to New Mexico for high school?

Y: As an asthmatic child, they were always trying to find away places where I would not have asthma. At that time there was not much they did for it except send you somewhere else, so I went to Washington [DC]. Senator [Duncan U.] Fletcher was a great uncle, and he wanted me to try Washington. I went up and lived with them for three or four years. [While there I] was a page in the Senate and sang in St. John's Church (16th and H) as a choir boy. It was a very happy experience, and I did not have asthma there.

R: You did not have asthma in Washington?

Y: No.

R: Well, that sounds like a wonderful experience for a growing-up boy, to be a page in the Senate and to sing in a big boy's choir. Is that where your love of music began?

Y: Well, I had had some music lessons in Good Shepherd choir before I left. I guess the musical love came from [my parents]; both of them were fond of music. Mother especially was accomplished in music, more so than my father.

R: After you went to school in Washington, where did you go?

Y: I came back then because all the things I was interested in were in Florida.

Although I had enjoyed this experience, I came back. I went one-half year to John Gorrie Jr. High School, which had just been built then. I was in the first half-year graduating class from John Gorrie. Then I went down to Old Duval, which was the only high school in Jacksonville at that time, and I did a year there. Then I began to be short of breath again, so I was sent to a preparatory school in Manassas, Virginia – the Swagley School. It had been the old army and navy prep school in Washington and still prepared for the two academies principally, although they prepared for academic institutions, as well.

R: You did not go to a military academy, did you?

Y: Well, all of my closest friends there at school had gone to Annapolis, and I used to go up and visit them. There was a small but old college, Colonial College, right across the street from the naval academy in Annapolis and St. Johns [College]. Once when I was up there visiting some of my friends, I went over and asked them about their academic program and if they would accept me. I had not graduated from prep school yet, but they told me they would accept me on probation and that if I made good I could remain, which I did. So then I did my four years of college work at St. Johns, Annapolis, and I majored in Latin and Greek. My mother had taught Latin. In fact, she had taught all the Latin that was taught in Duval County at one time, so she had started us early. When I went to college, the easiest thing to do was major in the classics.

R: At St. Johns in Annapolis?

Y: Yes.

R: I think the little news article that I read about you said that you had gone to Johns Hopkins. Is that right?

Y: That is probably mistaken. I did take a course or two in advanced psychology [there] my senior year. St. Johns and Johns Hopkins had some relationship, and they let senior students go up there and do a course or two at Johns Hopkins, which I did, but I was not really a student at Johns Hopkins.

R: Well, St. Johns College is still a unique and very fine college.

Y: Yes. They have a plan of their own which is more like the English schools.

R: You had a tutor and you just more or less met on your own?

Y: That is right.

R: That must have been a wonderful experience.

Y: It was especially helpful in my case because Mother had started us early in Latin, and by the time I got to St. Johns I had not only read all the things that are customarily read in high school – Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil – but I had read a good many other things that would have been offered in freshman class. My tutor in the classics was a newly graduated, very energetic and creative, interesting Harvard student who had earned a good many distinguishing marks himself. He told me, "Instead of taking classroom time here, suppose you just come down to my [house]" – he lived in on Prince George Street, just below the college there – "and we will read some interesting Latin authors in front of the fireplace at night." So that is the way I did most of the reading.

R: You read Horace and Lily?

Y: Yes, and other Vergil books and a great many of the plays that had been taken over from Greek literature and translated or paraphrased into Latin.

R: So you really had a firm foundation in the classics.

Y: I really had, more than generally, I guess.

R: And then you came back to Jacksonville?

Y: During these years, Bishop Murray of Maryland, who was another wonderful person, had permitted me to minister as a lay reader to three little churches along the electric railroad that went to Baltimore from Annapolis. While I had done some lay reading before I left Florida, it confirmed me in a conviction that I had that I wanted to go to seminary, so I came back and asked Bishop ^{Juhan} Gerran if I could go to the Virginia Seminary, which was close to Alexandria, Virginia. I could have gone there and commuted on Sundays to these lay churches I had taken care of in Maryland. But Bishop ^{Juhan} Gerran thought there would be a lot more commuting to Maryland and much less seminary study, so he said, "Fred, if you go one year to Sewanee [Tennessee] to break the sequence, then I will let you go wherever you like." So I went to Sewanee for one year and got involved in the mountain missions that Sewanee took care of. These Maryland churches had already been taken over in another way, so then I went on and completed my work at seminary.

R: Perhaps we should explain here that the Bishop ^{Juhan} Gerran was with the north Florida diocese at that time.

Y: The Diocese of Florida, it was called.

R: And the cathedral in Jacksonville was the seat of that bishop.

- Y: That was long before there was any cathedral. The cathedral did not come until the 1950s, I think. But he was bishop of the diocese and a wonderfully fine man. We did not always agree, but I always respected and honored his counsel.
- R: What was the mother church before we had the cathedral?
- Y: Almost no Southern diocese had a cathedral at that time.
- R: What year are we speaking of?
- Y: Well, I came here in 1934, so this was 1933. His work, as he conceded, was largely missionary work. He spent a great deal of time in the country churches and in places where churches needed to be established, as Bishop ^{Weed} ~~Reed~~ before him and Bishop ^{Young} ~~Brown~~ before him had done. The idea of a complete cathedral, a structured great church in Jacksonville, was not [a reality as of yet]. The diocese at that time included Pensacola, so it was much bigger than it is now.
- R: Yes, and Florida was still considered something of a frontier as far as the church was concerned. So you went to Sewanee for your freshman year.
- Y: Yes, I did go there for three years.
- R: And you decided to stay?
- Y: During that time there was another training school for the ministry. It was not exactly a seminary; it was a plan to train mountain boys to go back to minister to their own people. It was at Monteagle, six miles from Sewanee. It also trained older men who decided to go into the ministry, so it was a little bit different from Sewanee. During that particular time, Dr. Logan did not have anybody on the faculty there to teach ancient languages. The seminary faculty from Sewanee used to commute sometimes back and forth to help him, but they persuaded me

that, along with my seminary work, I could teach Latin and Greek at Monteagle. I did not do very well, but I tried. When I graduated, by that time Miss Maggie was quite infirmed. They still had older girls who wanted to go, and I really came to this section to teach Latin and Greek at the Tebeau School [in Gainesville, FL], which I did for a good many years.

R: Now, Miss Maggie [Tebeau] was the head mistress at the Tebeau School?

Y: Yes.

R: Her sister was Miss —?

Y: Miss Alice Thomas was the vice principal, but they were not blood sisters. They had some sort of a blood connection, but they were not sisters.

R: And that is [inaudible].

Y: [Inaudible] years right after the war between states. It was first established in Fernandina at St. Mary's priory when Miss Tebeau came down from Charleston. Then they had a bad fire there, and Bishop Young persuaded them that perhaps it would be better to place it here, nearer the center of the diocese and not at one edge. Miss Alice had this big house. I do not know whether she had taught up there or whether they were simply academic friends, but at any rate, the school was established in the Thomas home, Miss Alice Thomas's home, and they added something to it. It was a huge house at the time I taught there.

R: According to Mrs. Pound, who was a student there, every Sunday morning the girls were taken down to Holy Trinity for the service.

Y: Oh, yes, they all were. They — Miss Maggie and Miss Alice — always thought of it as the parochial school of Holy Trinity church, although academically it was on a

higher plane.

R: I see. Miss Anne actually had a little leaflet, a little catalog, telling the courses that were taught.

Y: I imagine I had some of that sort of material, but I would have to search for it.

R: It is probably at your house somewhere. Do you have a big attic where you keep things?

Y: Yes, ma'am.

R: Well, you probably have some treasures up there.

Y: While I was there, the Reverend Mr. Stoney, the rector here, accepted a call to Morganton, North Carolina, I think it was. At any rate, he left, and during the interim, before Mr. Wakefield came from Palatka, I filled in at Holy Trinity.

R: I must have just missed you, because my husband John McLaughlin and I came in 1938, and Mr. Wakefield was the minister when we came.

Y: Yes, he had come I think in 1936 or 1937.

R: I did not realize he was so new. It was such a small congregation there, and I was young. It seemed to me that most of the people in it were very old families in Gainesville, and it was a rather stiff and formal church then. It is so different now; it is a real swinging church now. [Laughter]

Y: Most Episcopal churches were fairly Victorian in their approach at that time. Mr. Stoney was a very loving soul. During the Depression years and the years when the boom burst in Florida, there was a whole group of little churches in the area, some of which were still alive, but many of them not, and he tried to minister to them Sunday afternoons and on weekdays and nights. Some of the vestry here,

Mr. [Wade] Hampton in particular, felt he was giving more time to the mission churches than he should, so when Mr. Wakefield came, there was an understanding that he was to minister only at the Holy Trinity altar. This is a sort of restriction that clergymen would not receive today, but he did.

Then Bishop ^{Juhan} Duran asked me if I would pick up [the slack] and try to help these little churches around. At one time I had sixteen of them. I did not go to them all every Sunday, of course, but I tried to give them the support they needed. Most of these little churches had been left. The lumber industry, a big mill would come there and when the [gap in tape] attached to the mills there. But when they would go build there, would be almost no [gap in tape] Fairbanks. There was a great big mill there and a beautiful little chapel. In fact, the church in Starke was building their [inaudible] at Rocky Point, if you know where that is.

R: I understand you grew up at Rocky Point. It overlooks the prairie.

Y: Yes, that is right. There was one in Micanopy which had perished, and I was able to get it together again after [gap in tape] and Trenton and Newberry, and [gap in tape] and High Springs and Melrose and Waldo [gap in tape] that used to go on. St. Johns had been taken off [inaudible] Jacksonville to build ships for the First World War. So there were eighteen little churches between Mayport or Fort George. The city that [gap in tape] load and unload passengers and freight and that sort of thing. People would go out and tap the chapel bell [gap in tape]. Then he would touch the whistle, and the missionary would come back.

[Gap in tape] and a Mr. Brayshore^{aw}. He was another Maryland clergyman; I knew him up there. He [inaudible] years was down here, and he was going to

[inaudible]. After they took the riverboats off, he did not have any means of getting from place to place because many of these chapels did not have roads to them. The river had been their highway. Of course, later there were roads built to them. The Florida Hardware Company had a boat which they called a napta launch. It was really [gap in tape] . . . chapels when he could not get there any other way. As he got older and [gap in tape] little church at McBerland. When they wanted to put me in my place, they used to show me a little box with carpet on it that had been built [inaudible] to read for Mr. Bernie Shore [laughter].

R: That was a wonderful experience.

Y: It really was. Some people said they were called to the ministry. I do not think I was really called – I drifted into it, from churches and some images also, of course. I had lived in that part of Jacksonville that had been strongly influenced by Good Shepherd in its mission days. It had been the little vertical-board church at first. Then Mr. Wersham moved that building out to Stockton Street. He had a very strong conviction about a seven-day-a-week church, a children's church. The first building they built over there was the gymnasium. The second building was from a gift from Mrs. Cummer, and they built a swimming pool. Then they built the parish hall, and finally they built the church.

R: Oh, my. What was it a day school? Did the church run the day school?

Y: No. Along Park Street down there I guess there must be ten or fifteen churches now, including Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Latter Day Saints, and Roman Catholic, but there was not a single church in that area then except Good Shepherd. It drew the children with the swimming pool and gymnasium. In fact,

Mother always said that if we were not at home, she knew where we were – at Good Shepherd.

R: Well, that was wonderful for the children growing up.

Y: Yes. I sang in the choir there, and I was much attracted to Mr. Wersham and others, so I sort of grew up under the wing of it.

R: Yes, you did. Now, you have come to Gainesville as Mr. Wakefield's assistant.

Y: No, I was a teacher at the Tebeau School. Holy Trinity did not want me on its staff. I was not their obligation.

R: But you attended.

Y: Yes, I used to attend with the girls, and I spent most of my weekends in the mission churches around here.

R: About how many girls did the Tebeau School have in your day?

Y: I guess there were about ten or fifteen boarders, and then there were a good many day-school girls – and boys – from Gainesville; they had little boys as well. They did not take boys after about the third, fourth, or maybe fifth grade, but they had a good many older girls from Gainesville.

R: Now, at no part in your life history did you take one church permanently, did you?

Y: No, I do not.

R: It was with Bishop John Clancy that you would be a [priest].

Y: Well, I had assisted briefly at Good Shepherd in Jacksonville. Mr. Wersham died and there was an interim in there, and I had helped. I told the bishop, "These people know me; they know me too well. I have stolen their plums and broken their windows. [laughter] I think you had better let me go to the country." He

said, "Fred, I would love to let you go to the country. [inaudible] Depression years and boom burst years, but we cannot afford to put a priest in charge at these country churches." I said that was what I would like [inaudible]. If I received something nowadays, it would be thought of as precious little from the Tebeau School. But he said, "Fred, if you are determined to do that, I will see that you do not starve, but I cannot do much more." I received sixty dollars a month and kept a car, and served churches between Fort George and Cedar Key.

R: This was while you were teaching at the school? You were certainly busy the whole week.

Y: It got to the point where there was not a great deal of teaching because young people wanted classics less and less. Of course, as the number of older girls gradually decreased at Tebeau School, during the Second World War years, if you remember, we had nearly 200 tiny mites there, child care center children, so there was no need at all for my training in classics.

I got Miss Florence Jennings to come. She had a Ph.D. from [Johns] Hopkins and had done a great deal of child care work; she really knew what she was doing.

She came as principal after Miss Alice was not physically able to carry on. I do not know why they called me rector, because a school of that sort really did not need a rector. Nevertheless, I remained as sort of a figurehead. I did not teach.

At that time we must have had a faculty of fifteen or eighteen whose talent was caring for little folks, so I spent little time there. I signed the checks, among other things, but most of my time was spent in the country churches. Of course, when the Second World War came on, they needed a great deal of help in Starke.

Starke had had a modest congregation, a loyal congregation, but when the workers came to build [Camp] Blanding – Starke was a county seat town of fifteen or eighteen hundred people – almost overnight it became the dwelling place of 5,000 workers at Camp Blanding.

R: What was the name of the Starke church?

Y: St. Mark's. It is a free parish now, but then it was a mission church. It was the largest church in the group except Cedar Key, and I usually tried to have the 11:00 service on Sunday at Starke. The evening service, which was then popular – it is not much any more – was at Christ Church, Cedar Key. In between, I would take care of the country churches at Waldo, Melrose, Trenton, and Newberry.

R: You must have worn out several cars in your lifetime.

Y: Yes. It usually amounted to about 1,000 miles a week that I drove, and it still does.

R: They charged pennies for the gasoline?

Y: There was a period when they did, and it really came out of my stock most of the time.

R: Well, you have certainly had an interesting life and have met a lot of wonderful people. Can you recall some of the individuals who were important to you? Would you say that women usually were the foundation of these little churches?

Y: To a large extent that was true, although almost every one of them had one or two outstanding men who were intensely loyal. In Starke, there were the two Hoover brothers, who are well-known photographers, especially in children's work. In the days when the Marables were here, they were great friends. They were the two

wardens of the congregation when I went there, and they were the sort of men that you just never had service without them unless they were sick in bed, and that was not often.

R: Do you remember their first names?

Y: Mr. Joe, and I cannot think of the other one. I ought to know his brother's name; it will come to me in time. And then along with that was Mr. Joe's wife, who was a great helper, and Miss Emma Richard, who not only was the altar girl but polished the—

[Break in recording]

R: She was your altar girl?

Y: Yes, Emma Richard; the emphasis, as they pronounced it, was on the last syllable. It was in her memory that a son who became president of the a in Palatka left a trust fund that helped them become a parish over there.

R: Tell me about the Melrose church. Who was the [gap in tape]?

Y: He said one thing that he never was going to do was teach school. When he came to Earleton, the first question that was asked him was if he could teach. They had a school there and nobody to teach in it.

R: So he was pressed into service.

Y: He was pressed into service. He was warden of the church there, St. John the Fisherman, for a good many years, and from that church the Melrose church was built. The Hiltons moved to Melrose, and he remained its warden, I think, until he was ninety-six years old. He was really a wonderful person. He played the organ when we had no organist, and he worked on the building when it needed it.

He practically never missed service. He was, like many Englishmen, very opinionated and hardheaded. When I first arrived, I thought the parson usually presided at vestry meetings or mission board meetings, but the mission board meetings were always held at Mr. Hilton's dining table at his house. [Gap in tape] song hill days all during the Depression. When I first said that we would try to have service every Sunday all year around, he said it would not work. "We tried before," he said. "We can have service here between Christmas and Easter when the northern people come down. Whenever you have service, I will be there, but there will not be anybody else in the summertime." But it got better and better.

R: It is getting better now.

Y: Yes, we have good congregations now.

R: And are you still serving that church?

Y: Yes, I am. I have not done it constantly because Bishop ^{Juhan's} Duran's principle was that whenever two or three of these missions would get to that point where they were half self-supporting, then he would give them [priest out of seminary]. He sent as many men as he could to seminary because he wanted a major priesthood in Florida. So whenever a large group of these boys would come out of seminary, he would organize three or four of these missions that could almost support them, and then he put them in charge. I was there for about twenty-five years, and I left in 1956, I think it was. There were four of these young men who stayed about six or eight years apiece [during that time], until they saw greener pastures in the figures. Then I guess it was 1976 that Bishop Cervany ^e said that he had several

country churches, and he wanted to see if I would help out in Melrose again for a few weeks until he could get somebody. I said I would try, and I have been there with the country churches ever since.

R: But not every Sunday. Every Sunday?

Y: Yes, every Sunday.

R: So now you are at Melrose –

Y: I conduct a service in Hawthorne at nine, Melrose at eleven, Waldo at three, and for a good many years I went to Newberry at five and Mayo at eight. But Newberry now is cared for by St. Joseph's pretty much.

R: I can hardly believe this. You did five services on one day!

Y: Yes. On Christmas and Easter we did a lot better than that sometimes.

R: I do not see how your voice could hold out.

Y: I was an asthmatic and I gasped at them sometimes, but they were very patient with me.

R: That is really a remarkable record.

Y: The Melrose church has been a very loyal, loving church. They meant a great deal to me. I think now they ought to have better care; I think they need it. They have a beautiful rectory and a new parish hall, and they really ought to have a resident clergyman again.

R: Is it a growing congregation?

Y: Yes, it is.

R: Both Melrose and Micanopy have become very attractive to people in Gainesville since Gainesville is getting so large and noisy and crowded, and you have to lock

and bar your doors. It is too bad. I guess you do not have to do that in Melrose.

Y: No. The church over there right now is locked because one of our own youngsters who went through his pyromania that boys do of wanting to light matches all the time. We kept finding candles burning in church and burnt matches around the altar, and we were afraid we were going to lose those frame buildings, so they lock it now. The Waldo church has never been locked.

R: That is too bad. How did it come about that the parish house at Melrose burned down? Was that two years ago?

Y: It was in 1984, I think, that it burned, and it was replaced last year. You remember, it had originally been a chapel building at Camp Blanding. They had forty-five of these great big buildings. There were 100,000 men over there to provide religious care for. Afterward, the government said that these buildings could be had for a nominal sum if they were used for a community building or a public facility.

R: Are those the buildings that we brought here [to the University of Florida] to make Flavet Village East during the war?

Y: No, those were day rooms and barracks. You may remember the old Christian Science church, the building that was on the street there past the hospital. It was one of those chapel buildings, a huge building; it was a much bigger building than the Flavet Village ones. We happened to get one in Melrose; that was rather unusual, but we did. That building had been wired at Blanding, and then it was rewired when it came to Melrose. It has been rewired at least once after that in the years that it served. We have always thought that the fire began under the

stage where there was a good deal of electrical circuitry and that it had a good start before it was observed. We were having choir practice in there for the boys choir, and suddenly this cabinet that was built into the stage sort of burst open, and there was this blast of flames going up there. It was like a chimney. The fire had a good start and was terrible hard to put out.

R: You were not there at the time, were you?

Y: Yes, ma'am. I was practicing with the boys.

R: You were right there with the boys when it started?

Y: Yes. One of the boys went over to the firehouse, which was about a block away, and another one went and telephoned. I went with two of the boys to find fire extinguishers, and we worked on it with fire extinguishers from back and front, but it just did not make any impression. The blast of flame [was just too much for us to handle].

R: So you were not able to save the building at all, and it was demolished, right?

Y: Yes. They thought they had it controlled by about 10:00 at night. The frame of it was still standing and we thought we could repair it, but early in the morning sometime – nobody knew exactly when – the fire department was still patrolling and it burst out again, and that time it finished it.

R: Well, thank goodness they were able to save the little historic church. It is such a beautiful little board-and-batten building. I suppose it is now on the [National] Register of Historic Places.

Y: It has not been placed yet. We have talked about it, but we have not done anything about it.

- R: I cannot recall just how close the parish house was to the church.
- Y: It was almost half a block away. We had placed it that way because the chapel building from Blanding was such a big building that it dwarfed the church, so we put it back at one corner of the lot so that it would not detract too much from the church. It turns out that that was a wise thing to do. When we built the new parish church, they wanted to connect it with the church, but I said no. It would be more convenient that way, but it would be dangerous to do it.
- R: You know, I have never been in the little Episcopal church at Cedar Key. Is it a historic building? Is it very old?
- Y: It is the third building on that site. This one is a masonry building that was built to replace one that was blown down flat in the street in 1949 during a tropical hurricane. The first building on that site was the only church building in Cedar Key for many years, and it was built of cedar. It was a beautiful building with a tall spire. You could go in there in the afternoon and –
- R: It would smell wonderful.
- Y: Yes, the sun would shine on it, and it would smell wonderful. But that burned before my day. I think it was destroyed by fire in 1916.
- R: What is the name of that church?
- Y: Christ Church. It was the church in Cedar Key and Levy County for a good many years. It was a self-supporting church in the days when they had a great deal of cedar down there. There were pencil factories there, and it was very lucrative. Cedar Key was a port, and there was a customs house there. But, of course, that day passed, and it became sort of a fishing village, and Christ Church became a

mission church.

After the first building was burned, they used a storefront down on the main street. Then Bishop ^{Weed} ~~Reed~~ tried to get the Waldo congregation, which had a huge old church that had been damaged by another storm, to let him move it to Cedar Key to replace this building. The Waldo people, quite understandably, did not want to do that. But finally the city fathers said that this building was dangerous. It was a large building and a tall building with a tall spire on it that had been thrown out of plumb by this storm, and there were some heavy bells in it. Finally he offered to buy for them the Presbyterian church there. The Presbyterian congregation had gotten smaller and smaller, and finally disbanded. Our church was over in the old railroad shops. Waldo was a railroad town. The Presbyterian church was in much more of a residential section, and they finally consented. They took the old building down, loaded it and took it to Cedar Key, and built a frame building to replace the 1916 church. Then that building, in turn, was blown down in a storm in 1949, so then we built a masonry building there.

R: I would think so, after having had two blown down by storm. Dr. Andrews and Ellen, his wife, used to be active in Holy Trinity. I think they moved down to the Cedar Key church. I suppose they became active.

Y: Yes, they were very helpful there. The lighting in the new church is a gift in memory of Dr. Andrews.

R: Did he stay in practice down there?

Y: Yes. He had a big, old house down there which I think had been built as an inn. It was really bigger than a residence. He envisioned at one time having a sort of a

convalescent hospital there.

R: Now, we are speaking of Dr. Edwin Andrews and his wife Ellen.

Y: Yes. His father had been a doctor, too, and lived there. That was Dr. Dan Andrews.

R: He had been a doctor in Cedar Key?

Y: Yes, ma'am.

R: I did not know that.

Y: He had a brother who was a dentist, also. They had come from Gary, Indiana, where I think they had run a big hospital. [Gap in tape] was a very healthful place to live, and that is why Dr. Edwin wanted to have a convalescence hospital there. It really never quite worked out because it was so remote; I guess that was one thing.

R: Do you think you would like to live in Cedar Key? Are you ever going to retire, Father Yerkes?

Y: According to the diocese, I am retired, but I have not stopped. I just have not learned when to stop. I lived in Cedar Key for twenty-five years.

R: Oh, you did? I did not know that.

Y: Yes. Part of it was during the summer while I was still teaching at the Tebeau School, and I had a room at the hotel there.

R: That wonderful old Allen hotel?

Y: Yes. We received room and board for \$24 a week at that time.

R: And those meals. The meals alone were worth better than \$24.

Y: Yes. The bishop thought it would be better for me to live in Starke, so I moved to

the rectory in Starke and was there during the Blanding years.

R: Did many of the soldiers come to church?

Y: Yes. Considering the number that were out there, you could say only a few came, but since there were 100,000 men there, if twenty or thirty came into Stark to church, that was many. Of course, that made a large congregation for St. Mark's.

R: Did you perform any weddings?

Y: Yes. In fact, I was looking the other day at the Waldo register. I filled up the married section of the Starke register. The rest of the book was full, so then I began to put them in the Waldo register, and I just put a note in the Starke register that such-and-such weddings were in the Waldo book.

R: I see. And I guess you officiated many baptisms and countless funerals.

Y: Yes.

R: How do you feel about the new prayer book? Do any of your little churches still use the old prayer book? There was such a controversy about it, and so many people wanted to hold on to the old one.

Y: You ought not ask me for opinions on this subject [laughter]. I am a conservative, but I try to be loyal. The bishop asked us to use the new book, and we have always used the new book, although the choir boys in Waldo say I read the old service out of the new book [laughter]. We use that Rite One over there, and pretty much the way it used to be used. I did that deliberately when I went back there. We had a couple of young clergymen who had been very aggressive for the new rites, the new liturgy and all. They went around without explaining and without being tactful; they approached people as though "if you were not so

ignorant, you would know better and would accept this." That attitude does not draw people close to the church. We had a modern approach in Keystone just six miles away, and we had a modern approach at Hawthorne nine miles away. But it seemed to me that in that area, for the older people at least, there ought to be a conservative altar, so we have always had conservative services in Melrose. They are not what I grew up with as a child or what they grew up with as children, but, compared to Holy Trinity, they would be conservative. It has been happy. I deliberately set about to find the people who had been lost to the church. There was a large group of Keystone and Palatka people that had formed a new congregation in Palatka, and I was good friends with all of them. In fact, I helped provide some of the furniture for their chapel and other things. But I could not help them as a priest; the bishop said so, and I told them so. I did not try to injure their work, but our own people who had gone down there and should not have I did try to encourage to come back. I do not think we lost a single family in Melrose. There was a number of Keystone families that could not seem to be ministered to in Keystone that have come to Melrose, and one or two from Hawthorne. There were even a couple of people from Holy Trinity who come there regularly.

R: My dear friend Elizabeth Simpson is a member of your congregation.

Y: She is a wonderful person.

R: She still comes to St. Mark's?

Y: Yes.

R: I did an oral history for [inaudible] of her sister Ila, and they had wonderful lives.

Y: Both of them. Of course, I had known them long ago because the Roundtrees

lived in Waldo for many years. Of course, Miss Ila's husband was the physician in Waldo, Dr. Pridgen.

R: We are speaking now of Miss Ila Pridgen, who was librarian of the University of Florida law school for many years. Her sister, Elizabeth Simpson, was Dean Simpson's wife, and before that she was Mrs. Yates.

Y: And before that she was a Roundtree.

R: Right. She served for many years as secretary of the English department at the University.

Y: And all of them are musical. She sang and Miss Ila played the old pipe organ in Waldo for a great many years.

R: And now Elizabeth Simpson's daughter, Margaret, is your choir director, right?

Y: Well, Dr. Stryker actually directs the choir.

R: Dr. Stryker is the organist and directs the choir.

Y: Yes, but she helps him, though; a great many times when he is not there, she fills in. All three of those persons have been great help to us.

R: We are speaking of [Philip] David Stryker, who used to be the organist at Holy Trinity. He is a retired professor of English, and he is now the organist at Melrose. And Margaret Rice used to be the choir director at Holy Trinity. We are so closely connected by people coming back and forth with the Melrose church. We now have an organist and choir director, David Benson.

Y: Who lives in Melrose.

R: Yes. He was the choir director, right? No, he was the organist [in the Melrose church], I think.

Y: No, he was organist and choir director at the Presbyterian church between Melrose and Keystone [Heights].

R: Oh, I see.

Y: But he had always worked very closely with us. His wife is Episcopalian, and he loved the Episcopal church. They had developed this Melrose music theater that did the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas each year, the madrigal dinners, and those things. Of course, our parish house was the only building in town that was big enough for these things, so they [did them here]. He plans to do another Gilbert and Sullivan operetta there this spring.

R: The new parish house is big enough for that sort of thing.

Y: Yes. It actually is a little bit bigger than the old one. We had not planned on that, but it turned out that way.

R: So you can still put on musicals?

Y: Yes, ma'am.

R: I guess David Benson was attracted to Holy Trinity because Holy Trinity had become known for its music written by our dear Earl Page, whom we just recently lost. You know, Fred, I had always wanted to do an oral history of Earl Page, but then he had his heart attack and then he had his stroke, and I just did not want to impose on him. Maybe Anne can tell us someday about his life experience.

Y: Yes, that would be wonderful.

R: Would you like to comment on any of the other unique features of these small churches where you have served?

Y: Well, I suppose I have served the Waldo church longest and most constantly. It

had a few little breaks when I could persuade a clergyman to come down from the North and help them in the wintertime or something. But, by and large, they have had to put up with me for fifty-two year, which is bad [laughter]. They need a change. I have tried hard to get it for them, and will soon, I hope.

R: Is Waldo growing like these other towns?

Y: Not really. Although it is a dormitory village for Gainesville like the other towns, it has been in a different way. The jobs or positions that people find around here with the big institutions – the University, hospitals, Sunland, and such – are usually manual jobs or that sort of thing. They come in elsewhere from the country and get a job in Gainesville. They cannot pay Gainesville rents, so they get a flat or a cottage or something, usually in one of these big, old rambling houses in Waldo, and live there until they find a place or can afford a place in Gainesville, and then they move in. It means that we constantly have these nice people with wonderful families with children, and just about the time we get them in Sunday school or get them in scout troop or Brownies or something, they tell us that daddy has found a house and they are moving to Gainesville.

R: That is discouraging.

Y: Then we start in with another group that would come in. Actually, there were more than 100 children who probably use the parish house in Waldo every week in [Boy] Scouts or Cub Scouts or Brownies or Girl Scouts. Actually, in the church there we have almost no children. It sounds as though I have not done a very good job. I know these children or nearly all of them, and their families belong to the Baptist church; that seems the right place for them to go. Occasionally they

visit us, but it is not right to proselytize them, to draw them away from their families. St. Paul's has not grown as the others have, and whether it will as things build up that way [remains to be seen]. Fairbanks and the area in between [there and Waldo] has built up. It may be that there were one or two housing areas built in Waldo, but they were principally for low-rent groups and were often occupied by black folks. We do not draw any line. We have plenty of black children in the Cubs and Scouts and occasionally in church, but, by and large, they prefer to attend their own churches. In fact, the pastors of those churches say that we are trying to get their most talented children to come to the white church, which leaves them with no leadership in the black churches. Sometimes that is true. It is quite unfair to them.

R: I was so glad to see that we took in a black couple, a man and his wife, at Holy Trinity last Sunday. We have had a hard time getting black people to come to our church.

Y: That is true. When they first wanted to merge St. Augustine's with Holy Trinity, I said that I thought it would be a great privilege for those trained Episcopalians, like the Bill Taylor family and those others who had been at St. Augustine, [to attend church here]. However, I am afraid the missionary work is going to stop, because it is not as easy for black families to go to Holy Trinity as it was for black families in the neighborhood to come to St. Augustine's.

R: Yes, I can understand that.

Y: And it has happened to some extent. I guess maybe I hope it will be overcome, and I am glad to hear that a family was taken in.

- R: It seems to me, [from my experiences] growing up in Mississippi and then [spending] the rest of my life here in Gainesville, except for my schooling in North Carolina, that actually black people become much more attached to their churches than white people do. They are so loyal to their churches.
- Y: Yes, this is true, and that is true at St. Augustine's. I have served there and have taught in the school there for a long time, and I grew to be very fond of them. There was a loyalty there that is not always true in our white churches.
- R: You have never served in Alachua or High Springs?
- Y: Yes, I served in High Springs for a good many years. There has never been an Episcopal church, to the best of my knowledge, in Alachua. We have had college services there a time or two, but, in addition to the Methodist and Baptist churches and the Church of Christ, there has always been a strong Presbyterian church there which seemed to minister to our sort of folk.
- R: I taught in Newberry one year, and I remember there was a young Episcopal clergyman there in Newberry. That was in 1960.
- Y: That would have been John Vinton.
- R: Yes, I believe it was. I never went to church there because I was not there on Sunday's, but [inaudible] that was the year after my husband died suddenly. Are there any other churches that you would like to comment on that you have served? We have covered a large territory.
- Y: Speaking of Newberry, something ought to be said, it seems to me, not so much about the church there now, but about the one family that kept the church alive there for so many years. The Westons were a South Carolina, low-country family.

He had come to Newberry about the turn of the century (or maybe a little before) as a factor manager for the Cummer interest there, the mines and the timber and other things. Mr. Franz Weston was not only a wonderful person, but a splendid churchman. He and his two maiden sisters, Miss Florence and Miss Alice, lived together in a house that had been built by the Cummers for them. If there were no other place to have church, church was always at the Weston's house.

Sometimes when things got a little bit stronger, we would have it in the Methodist church. We had had a church building or two there, but storms and fires and things seemed to be our enemies in Newberry. We just could not seem to keep a building.

R: I know they had a rectory the year that I was there.

Y: A big rectory. It was a house with six or eight bedrooms in it, and this is the house in which the Weston's lived. When they were getting older, they said they very much wanted this house to go to the church. It had been built by the Cummer interest on land that belonged to the Cummer interest, so I went to Wellington Cummer and talked to him. He said, "Of course, it is a big corporation, and I am only one; I cannot do much about it. But if the time ever comes when that place is available, I will let you know." He did, and the Cummer interests offered it to us at a nominal sum. It would be just chicken feed now. There were ten acres of land and this big, old house, and a little building in front that he used as an office. During the last twenty-five years or so, that little building has been the chapel; it is furnished as the chapel now. Although people are supposed to go to St. Joseph's, some of the old-timers are not very good about that because St.

Joseph's is a different kind of a church from what [they were used to]. At any rate, the Weston family was one of the early families in the section that really had a wonderful moral, ethical, religious, loving influence for the church, and the whole town loved them. Even people who never saw them now know who the Westons were. They helped a lot to get and keep that school there, although they had no children of their own.

R: It attracted boys to Newberry School, and the townspeople came?

Y: Yes, there was a time when they wanted to consolidate it.

R: I know. I well remember that because it really saved my life. I lost my husband, John McLaughlin, suddenly with a heart attack September 1. I had just gone out to Newberry to rebuild the library, which was my first job in a public school. I had been getting my certificate to teach, and it was because they insisted on having that school that I was able to get a job.

Y: That is right. And they ran a bus up to the new Alachua School for a whole year with nobody on it, I think to prove something legally.

R: It was a very enthusiastic faculty, and those children out there and those teachers really saved me when I was grieving that first year. They were wonderful to me. Well, I think you have had a beautiful life.

Y: Certainly it has been a most active life. It has not been as fruitful as it could have been because I spread it kind of thin sometimes, but it has been a very happy life, and I hope I can go on being useful. I do not want to hang on to any particular place the bishop could possibly find a younger man for, but if there are these places he cannot find any care for, I hope he will let me carry on until I get to be too

tired.

R: Oh, I am sure he will. Thank you so much for coming here this afternoon. I know you are supposed to get to the hospital to see the sick folks, and I hope I have not kept you. I appreciate it so much. I know the University [Oral History Archives] appreciates it. You have lived through so much Florida history in these little towns, and this interview is going to be very useful, I am sure, to future historians.

Y: I cannot easily see how, but I hope so.

R: Let us put a little postscript on this. [I am interested in the] demise of the beautiful Tebeau School, where you used to teach. How did it get to be a parking lot?

Y: Miss Maggie had left a very complicated and specific will – several typed pages, single spaced. First, the school building was offered to the church if they would continue it as the kind of a school that they had had there. Well, the time had passed for a girl's finishing school. There was just not any demand for it anymore, so the bishop did not feel that he could carry out [the specifics of Miss Maggie's will].

Then it was offered to the United Daughters of the Confederacy for a meeting place, but they chose to make it a home, I guess. It was to be under certain conditions: it was to be used as a park only for white people, the birds were to be fed forever, and there were some specifics about the plants in the yard, too. They felt that they could not carry that out, so then it was offered to the church to use in any way it chose. I believe Miss Maggie had said that she was very unhappy about this part. I am not clear about this because many of these things do not make a strong impression on me. At any rate, the city of Gainesville wanted a

parking lot very much, and they had promised certain emoluments to the Chapel of the Incarnation if this property could be made available for a parking lot.

R: It was sort of a property swap.

Y: Yes. So that was what was finally done. The city wanted to do it very quickly. They insisted that the old house was a fire hazard, and we had to move the school to what used to be called the Green Cottage over here because they would not even let us finish the year there. Mr. Stoney's daughter, Martha, was our principal at that time, and I remember how many trips she and I made up here in a car just to get the basic things into that building. Then, of course, there were worlds of old-fashioned double school desks that had been in a study hall there.

R: Those old school desks are valuable antiques now.

Y: Yes.

R: I wonder what became of them.

Y: Some of them were moved to St. Augustine's, and some of them I suppose people just came by and picked up. There was a square piano, too.

R: I remember there were camellia bushes that reached up to the second floor of the gallery.

Y: We used to go in at the front door, and there was a bower of Formosa azaleas that met over the top, so it was just like a tunnel. In fact, when we trimmed them, there was enough of both the dead wood and the live wood for us to burn in fireplaces. The house was terribly hard to heat. I can remember years when we burned forty cords of wood to heat that building.

- R: I guess none of the windows fitted and the wind just came through.
- Y: And it was just so big. Of course, there were stoves and fireplaces in every room, and they were not the easiest way to heat a building.
- R: They were also a fire hazard. It is a shame that they did not keep some of the palm trees and the camellia bushes, even when they made it a parking lot. Now they want to put a few trees in parking lots after they pave them.
- Y: They just stripped the yard. We did get the park department to come and take certain things out to Evergreen Cemetery.
- R: Maybe that is why Evergreen has so many camellia bushes.
- Y: There were a lot of things, though, that were lost. There was one thing there that Miss Maggie always called "Schiebemyrtel"; she gave it a German name. At any rate, it was a bush that a bit of it had traditionally for generations in Germany and on the Continent, and in England, been placed on a bride's headdress veil. You would be surprised the number of people who came by there and wanted a twig or two of this myrtle bush to put in some bride's headdress.
- R: That is a charming story.
- Y: There were a lot of other things like that that had a real sentiment about them.
- R: Does the myrtle have certain qualities about it in classical history?
- Y: Yes, I think it does.
- R: I am glad I got to Gainesville in time to see the old house and yard before they tore it down. I am glad we got that story in.

Church of The Holy Communion

POST OFFICE BOX 655

HAWTHORNE, FLORIDA 32640

Dear Fr. Singleton,

It was ever so good to have each of you with us, and so good of you to offer to take the first Sunday Service. And I hate to do this to you, but I promised, fifty years ago, obedience to my Bishop. (Even though no one knows how painful it is to me.)

There has been objection from St. Joseph and Bishop has asked that services at St. John's be discontinued. Therefore there should not be a service on September first. ¹⁹⁸⁵ I have tried to get in touch with everyone.

Following our Lord's example we must not be bitter, but know that the Good God still reigns, and we must be faithful. Thanking Him, and you, I am,

Faithfully yours,
Fred Gyeken.

SermonNov012020FatherFredYerkesPriestMissionary

Happy All Saints' Day.

Today I want to concentrate on one beloved saint who served Emmanuel Church, Welaka from 1940-1942 and again from 1953-1960, and then again from 1966 to 1983: a total of 26 years. I speak of Father Fred Yerkes. These dates come from a pictorial directory of the early 1980's.

Fred Yerkes' father owned the Florida Hardware Store in Jacksonville, and they serviced some of their customers with a boat that run up and down the St. John's River. The hardware store allowed a Father Thomas Brayshaw to ride their boat, and where ever there was a church, he would get off the boat, go to the Episcopal chapel, ring the bell, and have church for those who would come. When the boat tooted a whistle, he came back to the boat. His companion was a teenager, Fred Yerkes. (I am reminded that a 100 years ago, when my grandfather ran the mailboat on East St. Andrew's Bay, clergymen rode free.)

In college, Fred Yerkes studied the classics: Greek and Latin. While himself a student at the School of Theology at Suwanee, he taught Greek and Latin at a nearby school in Monteagle that trained local clergy.

Father Fred returned home to Florida in the 1930's and began teaching at Miss Tebeau's school in Gainesville. His love was the small churches. Bishop Juhan said he would support him as best he could. He wouldn't starve. He made about \$60 a month, which even in depression years wasn't much.

Each Sunday, he typically conducted five services. He would hold church at 9:00 am and somewhere else at 11:00 am. After a break for lunch, he would have a service at 3:00 pm, another at 5:00 pm, and a final service at 8:00 pm and then return home, whether that was Jacksonville, Starke, or Cedar Key. He conducted over 10,000 services in his lifetime.

I've done less than half as many. I served three years as curate at Emmanuel Church, LaGrange, IL, then ten years as rector in Racine, WI. In Florida I served 36 years at Church of the Mediator, Micanopy; 20 years at Church of the Holy Communion, Hawthorne; 10 years at St. Barnabas, Williston; six months at St.

Matthew's in Mayo; and since Easter her^e in Welaka. Father Fred was my predecessor at all five churches. I almost think if a person made a list of where Father Fred served, and where he didn't serve, the list where he served would be the longer list!

Father Fred had a plan. Every place he could, he would start a Boy Scout troop and a boys' choir.

He kept on keeping on.

It's not fair to ask: what about the girls? What about training lay leaders? He did what he did, four or five times a Sunday for 52 weeks a year for 50 years.

He drove over 1,000 miles a week. Finally, the Florida Highway Patrol gave Father Fred a "get out of jail free card." The word went out: quit giving tickets to Father Fred.

There would be times that Father Fred simply heard of a group of Episcopalians who hadn't had communion for a while. In that case, he would show up with his automobile, open up the trunk and pull out a folding altar, a portable organ, kneeling cushions, chairs, hymnals, prayer books, even a vase of freshly picked flowers and the service would begin.

The name "Yerkes" lives on. There is a cabin at Camp Weed. His name is on the library in Waldo, where he served St. Paul's for 52 years. His name is on the discretionary account at Christ Church, Cedar Key.

I did an internet search on Fred Yerkes, and came across a newspaper article from December 4, 1983 [News Press (Fort Myers, Florida)] and an interview by Emily Ring in 1987. [Samuel Proctor Oral History Program. AL-089. Interviewee: Fred Yerkes. Interviewer: Emily Ring. Dated February 24, 1987.]

Fred Yerkes died January 25, 1989; and after diocesan convention that year, we all went to his childhood church, Church of the Good Shepherd, for the celebration of his life.

He is an inspiration worth commemorating. I would like to see diocesan convention pass a resolution encouraging churches to remember Father Fred each year.

Father Fred should be remembered, not only because of the life he lived, but because the focus of his life was the small churches. Small churches are valuable: valuable for who they are; and valuable because some may become larger churches. And yes, there are those small churches that may fade away. Maybe populations change, mills close, industries change, and when towns fade away, a church may fade away as well. Small churches are valuable because of the people who are in those churches and no where else.

The work is not in vain.

I often have a historical tidbit in a sermon, and today's tidbit has to do with Florida back in the year 1675 when the colony was a Spanish possession. In that year 13,152 Native Americans received the rite of confirmation at the hands of Bishop Calderon of Havana. 13,152! That's a lot of souls won for Christ. Within a hundred years of that confirmation date, the ebb and flow of history led to the English being in control of Florida. In 1763, the few remaining Spaniards and native Indians depopulated Florida, either boarding ships from St. Augustine to Havana, or moving from west Florida further west into Louisiana.

So what would I say about the work of the Franciscans who maintained about a hundred missions for over a century? I would take the concluding verse of I Corinthians 15, that great resurrection chapter: "You know in the Lord, your labor is not in vain."

If there were a special day on or soon after January 25 each year to remember Fred Yerkes, Priest and Missionary, I have suggestions for appropriate Bible readings.

For a gospel reading, I would propose Mark 16:6-8 plus what is called the shorter ending of Mark. Mark 16:6 is in the empty tomb that first Easter Day, when the young man says to the women, "Don't be alarmed, Jesus has been raised. Go and tell the disciples and Peter. He is going to Galilee, there you will see Him."

If you buy a combination Prayer Book and Bible, in Mark chapter 16 you will find this shorter ending: "And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterwards, Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." [Repeat.]

The reason I propose this reading is because we are reminded of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our work involves proclaiming the reality of new life in Christ.

For a second reading, I would propose I Corinthians 15:51-58, and now I will read the final two verses of that scripture:

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Thousands upon thousands have heard the good news of the risen Christ through the work of Fred Yerkes.

Fred Yerkes reminds us one and all: small churches are places where people can celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our diocese would do well to honor Father Fred with a day in his memory that honors the value of his work in the small churches.

And, what about us at Emmanuel Church, Welaka?

The same pictorial church directory that listed Father Fred's twenty-six years of service had forty colored pictures of church people, with a total seventy-five people pictured. The same directory listed a total of fifty-four mailing addresses, with a total of ninety-one named individuals.

That's a lot of people!

Covid won't be forever.

Even now, we can explore ways to invite people, welcome people, and connect them with our Risen Lord.

Where there's life, there's hope.

Where the risen Christ is, there is the power of God.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:58 ...my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Amen.

Some commemorations, perhaps many, will remain local, diocesan, or regional in character. This in no way reduces their importance to those who revere and seek to keep alive the memory of beloved and faithful witnesses to Christ.

Procedures for Churchwide Recognition

All requests for consideration of individuals or groups to be included in *A Great Cloud of Witnesses* shall be submitted to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music for evaluation and subsequent recommendation to the next General Convention for acceptance or rejection (cf. Resolution A119s of the 1991 General Convention).

Each proposal must include:

- a) detailed rationale for commemoration based on the “Criteria for Additions to *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*” (above) and demonstrating how this person manifests Christ and would enhance the devotional life of the Church;
 - b) An inspirational 350-word biographical sketch of the person to be commemorated, preferably including some of the person’s own words;
 - c) Information concerning the spread and duration of local or international commemoration of this individual or group;
 - d) Suggested collect and readings.
- A. Proposals must be received by the Chair of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music no less than eighteen months prior to the next General Convention.
- B. The chair of the Calendar Committee of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music will communicate with:
1. Organizations submitting proposed commemorations;
 2. The Secretary of the General Convention regarding names and addresses of any groups applying for exhibit space in order to present to Convention delegates a potential addition to *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*;

Fred Yerkes Churches Served

Brooksville –

Bunnell -

Cedar Key – Christ Church

Chiefland – St. Alban's

Crescent City – Holy Comforter

Cross City – Holy Cross

Fairbanks – All Saints

Federal Point – St. Paul's

Fort George (Mayport) – St. George

Gainesville – St. Augustine's

Gainesville – Tebau School, taught Latin and Greek and other duties

Green Cove Springs – St. Mary's

Hawthorne – Church of the Holy Communion

Hibernia – St. Margaret's

High Springs – St. Bartholomew's

Interlachen – St. Andrew's

Jacksonville (New Berlin) Our Merciful Savior

Keystone Heights – St. Anne's (closed)

MacClenny – St. James (closed)

Mayo – St. Matthew's

Melrose - Trinity

Micanopy – Church of the Mediator

Newberry – St. John the Evangelist (closed August 1985)

Palatka –

St. Augustine – St. Cyprians

Starke – St. Mark's

Trenton – St. Thomas's

Waldo – St. Paul's (closed) 1935-1987 (52 years!)

Welaka – Emmanuel (1940-42; 1953-60; 1966-83) Total 26 years

Williston – St. Barnabas

Fred Yerkes – Memorials and Remembrances

Cedar Key – Christ Church – Outreach Account

Live Oak – Camp Weed – Cabin

Waldo – Public Library – Yerkes Room

