

The Palm Coast Historian

Published by the City of Palm Coast Historical Society

Editor: Kay Stafford

Issue: 29 Summer/Autumn 2011

RELIGION IN PALM COAST: From “the beginning” until 1981

by Art Dycke, City Historian

“In the beginning” there was only water upon the land, but by 1968 it had evolved into a big pine covered swamp with a few scattered beach houses, hunting camps, farms, and a large abandoned cement factory. But the leaders of the ITT Corporation and Levitt and Sons developers looked upon the land and proclaimed that it was good. They sent their prophet, Dr. Norman Young, unto the land and he vowed that he would build it up into a mighty city to become the home of 750,000 people. And the prophet’s sales disciples were sent throughout the country and the world to gather the people in and lead them to the Promised Land, a paradise named Palm Coast. But when the people arrived, they found the land was still mostly barren and empty, and they asked, “Where shall we buy our food?” and “Where shall we worship?”

The answer to both questions was an 11- to 15-mile trip to Flagler Beach or Bunnell, at least part of which was on a one-lane rutted dirt road. At first, the pioneer residents had to leave their small community in order to eat and worship. The creation of the huge Palm Coast infrastructure in a wilderness was certainly unique and the early residents were true pioneers in every sense of the word.

The October 1972 issue of the ITT newsletter called the Palm Coaster headlined, “Plans Underway for Interdenominational Church Complex at Palm Coast.” It stated, “Interdenominational religious leaders from the state of Florida met at Palm Coast recently with Dr. Norman Young to hear him present plans for a religious complex at the property.” The 14 leading clergy members of an interdenominational planning group represented Episcopalian, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish faiths in Florida.

“Dr. Young announced plans regarding the do-

nation of more than 12 acres of land and monies to be applied to the initial financing grant for the establishment of an interdenominational church complex and a major religious library.” The unified plan soon stalled as it became apparent that the individual faiths were taking independent steps in procuring their own ITT-discounted land with the aid of their local and national brethren.

In a lengthy interview with a multi-faceted pioneer woman named Dorothea Griffin, she insisted, “You have to tell everyone that we were the first.” She was very proud that she had obtained the use of ITT’s first building, the Welcome Center, for herself and fellow Catholics to hold the first religious service within the Palm Coast community.

Other religious groups followed and, as the early



ITT Welcome Center – Palm Coast’s first building and first “church”

Jewish residents who would later build Temple Beth Shalom explained, “When the Welcome Center became too small for us in 1973, our exodus began. Services would now be held in “the Valencia” model home, owned by ITT Community Development Corporation who graciously allowed us to use

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RELIGION IN PALM COAST *(continued from front page)*



ITT "Valencia" Model Home – Palm Coast's first "synagogue"

the building. Services continued in "the Valencia" but we soon outgrew that facility too. ICDC again helped us out and allowed us to use the dining room of the original Yacht Club as of 1974. The "Club" gave us the luxury for the first time of the space in which we could worship, celebrate, and socialize in comfort. When the ITT Palm Coast Yacht Club opened on December 15, 1972, it immediately became the religious, political, and social center of the community. All religious denominations held their services there in the years before they built their own houses of worship.



ITT Palm Coast Yacht Club – The "house of worship" for the Palm Coast community

"Religion in Palm Coast" now turns to the building of the first six "official" houses of worship in Palm Coast.

SAINT MARK BY THE SEA LUTHERAN CHURCH

In 1972, the leaders of the Lutheran Church in America were looking for a pastor to start a mission

in Palm Coast, then a new community just getting started along Florida's north Atlantic Coast. They found someone interested in their own Philadelphia headquarters. That someone was the Rev. Marcus Otterbein, who was then field supervisor for an 88-member staff of the Board of Education serving the United States and Canada. "I had just passed my 50th birthday and was looking for something new and exciting, plus a place where I could play a lot of golf," Pastor Otterbein said later. "The opportunity at Palm Coast looked like the answer to my prayers, so I took it."

He and his wife Naomi arrived here in late 1972 when there were only 75 families in the community. Their mission was to begin a congregation that would grow and eventually build a church. Rev. Otterbein began conducting interdenominational services shortly after his arrival. The congregation grew steadily and in May 1974 the Palm Coaster headlined, "Lutherans finalize land purchase from Palm Coast (ICDC)." It pictured and described a signing ceremony where Dr. Norman Young, president and chairman of the board of ITT Community Development Corporation, and Rev. Marcus Otterbein, pastor of St. Mark by the Sea, signed final purchase papers for three acres of land on which the congregation planned to erect a church building in 1975. It was not by chance that the name "St. Mark" was chosen. The Rev. Otterbein was also known by his nickname, "Mark," and the congregation was pleased to honor the popular pastor by that particular name selection.

The following text and pictures were taken directly from ITT's magazine, the Palm Coaster, for Summer 1976:

"First Church Has First Service on Bicentennial Fourth of July." "Palm Coast's first church building has been completed and two other denominations have purchased building sites. St. Mark by the Sea Lutheran Church was completed – literally – on July 3 and its first service was held on the morning of the Bicentennial Fourth of July. Sites have been

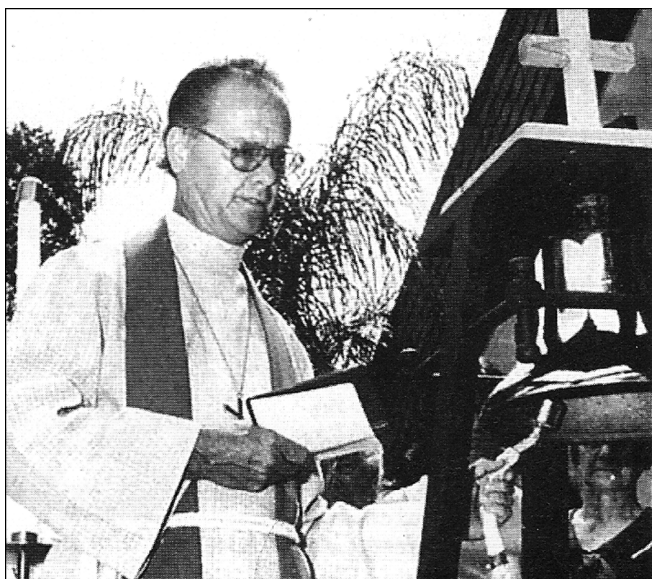
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RELIGION IN PALM COAST *(continued from page 2)*



purchased by Baptists and Catholics. Temple Beth Shalom is considering acquiring a site.

“Approximately 425 persons attended the Lutheran inaugural service, which was conducted by the Rev. Marcus F. Otterbein. A highlight of the first service was the dedication of the bell from the destroyer USS Barkley, on permanent loan to the church from the US Navy. The church is at 303 Palm Coast Parkway., about 1.2 miles from the

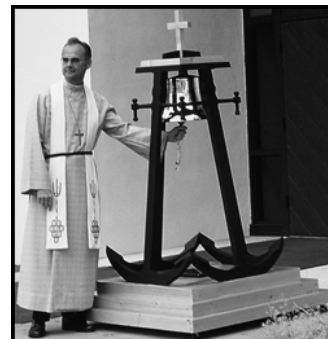


The Reverend Marcus “Mark” Otterbein conducted the opening service of St. Mark by the Sea Lutheran Church on the Bicentennial Fourth of July. He always welcomed people of all religious denominations to his church while they constructed their own buildings. His death of a heart attack in March 1979 brought grief and a deep sense of loss to the entire community.

Welcome Center.”

The Palm Coast-er surveyed the religious scene in the community in a 1981 article entitled, “Religion in Palm Coast,” describing the existing houses of worship and their activities in that year. The following summaries are re-printed from that article:

“July 5 marked a historic occasion for St. Mark by the Sea, the ‘granddaddy’ of Palm Coast churches, having been chartered in 1974 and housed in the community’s first church building in 1976. On July 5, 1981, four years and one day after dedication of the sanctuary, Rev. Carl J. Koenigsberger and many of the church’s 300 members ceremoniously burned the final mortgage papers on the land and building purchases.”



Burning the mortgage

“St. Marks’ 300-seat sanctuary is located on a beautifully landscaped 31/2-acre site on Palm Coast Parkway. The church is a center of activity, not only for church programs but community projects as well. During any given week, the calendar of activities at St. Mark may include a meeting of the Men’s Community Chorus, Boy Scout Troop 402, the church’s English Hand Bell Choir, or the American Heart Association’s Hypertension Clinic.”

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RELIGION IN PALM COAST *(continued from page 3)*

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

“First Baptist was founded by a small group of early Palm Coast residents meeting for Bible study in a room of an ITT model home. In 1974, Sunday morning services began to take place at the Palm Coast Yacht Club under the leadership of the Rev. Robert Tremaine. The First Baptist Church celebrated Palm Sunday on March 19, 1977 in their new church building located on Palm Coast Parkway. The sanctuary, which seats 125, was filled



for the first service, according to Rev. Shelton Brooks, pastor. The dedication was conducted on May 7. On that occasion representatives from the Florida Baptist Convention

were on hand to welcome the new church.

“The church is located in the center of the community on Palm Coast Parkway. In the planning stages is an addition to the present sanctuary which seats 175 people. Regular worship services and children’s worship services as well as Sunday school are held Sunday mornings. Prayer services are held each Wednesday evening and members get together for a fellowship dinner on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Ladies’ Bible study takes place every other Thursday afternoon. In May 1981 congregation members enjoyed a Christian home day picnic at nearby Faver Dykes State Park, and plans were being formulated for a tour of

the Holy Land for some members in December.”

(Author’s note – the original church site had expanded to its limits and the membership decided to purchase a 10-acre tract at the west end of Palm Coast Parkway. The congregation broke ground late in 2001 at 6050 Palm Coast Parkway NW, which is the home of the new First Baptist Church of Palm Coast. Walgreens and a Race Trac gas station presently occupy the site of the former church.)

MOTHER SETON CATHOLIC CHURCH

“Palm Coast was designated a separate parish in April 1976, although Catholic services had been held in the community since 1972.”

“A groundbreaking was held on September 3, 1978, for Mother Seton Catholic Church to be constructed on a 100-acre site on the east side of Belle Terre Parkway. Pictured in the celebration mass are first pastor Thomas Cody, Deacon Charles Karr, Bishop Paul Tanner, Father Roland Julien, Monsignor Leo Gildea, and two unidentified altar servers.

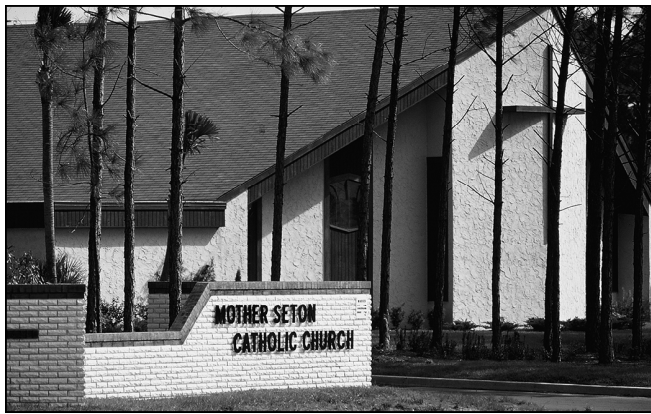


“The church building was completed in the spring of the following year with the first mass in the 600-seat multipurpose church and social hall taking place on Mother’s Day, May 13, 1979. The beautiful sanctuary sits on 10 acres of land on Belle Terre Parkway west of Interstate 95.

“A favorite among Palm Coast residents is the church’s annual Oktoberfest, sponsored each fall

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RELIGION IN PALM COAST *(continued from page 4)*



by the Mother Seton's Men's club. The church's Ladies Guild regularly conducts fashion shows and other social events. Both groups join Father Cody and Rev. Carr and general church membership as active participants in community service projects, including special events for local children, counseling services and religious education. The still-lingering brogue of Father Cody, a native of Ireland who has served in Flagler County since 1974, is a familiar and reassuring sound around Palm Coast."



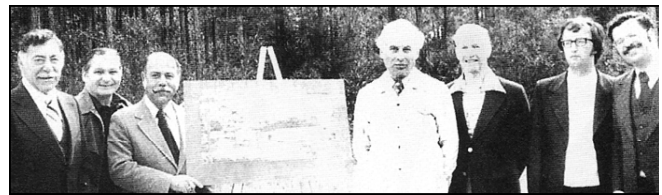
Father Cody

ceremonies.)

(Authors note 2 – the original church became part of an education complex and the present St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church was dedicated on January 22, 1994.)

TEMPLE BETH SHALOM

"On March 12, 1979, approximately 60 families gathered at 40 Wellington Drive. President Manny Zuckerman turned over the first shovel of dirt to break ground for the start of Temple Beth Shalom.



Ceremony participants Joe Bolton, Tim Legakis, Manny Zuckerman, David Siegel, Alan Smolen, Father Cody, and Rabbi Genn (The 1981 issue of the Palm Coaster continues) "The Jewish congregation in Palm Coast had its beginning about eight years ago and has grown to its present level of about 75 families. The temple was completed in early 1980 and the first Sabbath service was held Friday, March 14, 1980. In addition to Friday night services and children's school, regular adult education courses are conducted weekly, focusing on the study of the Bible and the Hebrew language.



"Temple Beth Shalom is located on Wellington Drive in the Palm Coast community of Pine Lakes. Synagogue members hold services each Friday night at 8:15 PM, frequently with a rabbi in attendance or with services conducted by a volunteer member of the congregation. An Oneg Shabbat refreshment social follows each service. Synagogue members conduct High Holiday services at the temple as well. Sunday school classes for children ages 5 to 12 are held weekly.

"Temple Beth Shalom is an independent religious congregation financed and administered exclusively by local members. President Benjamin Swartz is assisted by two vice presidents, a treasurer and both corresponding and record-

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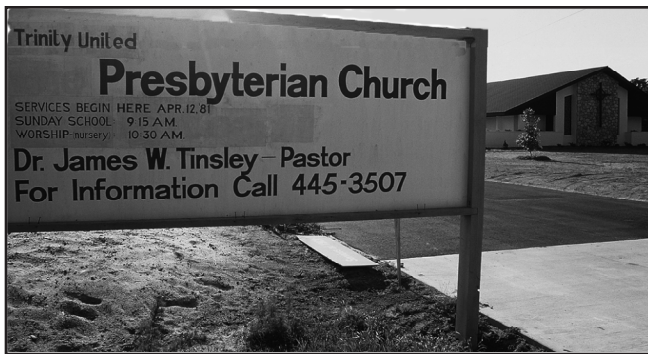


RELIGION IN PALM COAST *(continued from page 5)*

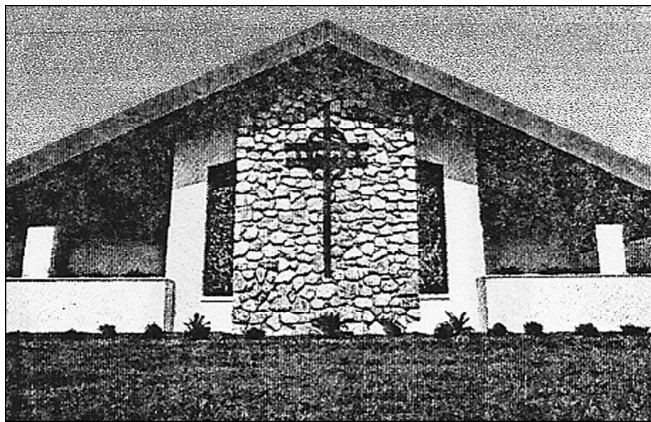
ing secretaries, all elected by temple members.

TRINITY UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Rev. Dr. James W. Tinsley first came to Palm Coast in 1979 and organized the first Presbyterian congregation in the fall of that year. The new Trinity United Presbyterian sanctuary, which includes



a 300-seat chapel, six classrooms, and administrative offices, is located at the end of Florida Park Drive at its intersection with Norman Young Parkway (presently Palm Harbor Parkway).



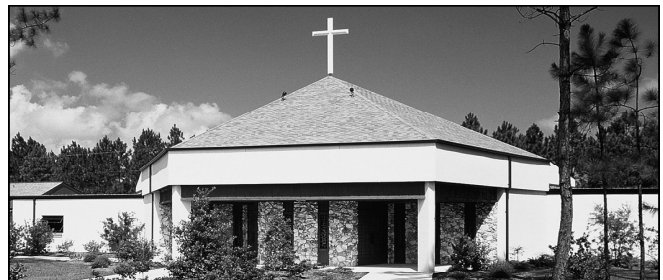
“Membership has grown to the 200 level, and members take part in a number of activities in addition to regular Sunday morning church school and worship. Volunteers donate their time and talents to the Duval County Home for Retarded Children at Glenwood (near Jacksonville). A diversified youth activities schedule is in the final planning stages and the church women’s group stages regu-

lar social functions, such as the recent Fellowship Day at the new church. This summer Trinity United Presbyterian hosted a conference of the Presbytery of North Florida, a group including more than 46 churches.”

PALM COAST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“Chartered in December of last year (1980), Palm Coast United Methodist Church is the newest Palm Coast church congregation. Its more than 115 members and Pastor Robert H. “Bob” Finch are in the midst of finalizing plans for a new sanctuary on Belle Terre Parkway north of St. Joe Road (presently Palm Coast Parkway NW), with groundbreaking scheduled for the fall of this year (1981). Currently holding Sunday morning services at the Palm Coast community YMCA, the United Methodist Church is administered locally by two lay organizations, the Council of Ministry and the Administrative Council.

“The new church facility will be an attractive ad-



dition to Palm Coast’s religious community. Only the first phase of a three-part building concept will be constructed initially, providing a sanctuary seating up to 280 members. Church members recently launched the Trinity Bible Studies program, meeting every Sunday evening and open to all Palm Coast residents. United Methodist Women meets the first Wednesday of each month. A church men’s group is in the planning stages, far enough along in fact to anticipate a community barbecue in the near future.”

*(Author’s Note – A more detailed history
(continue on page 7)*

RELIGION IN PALM COAST *(continued from page 6)*

of Palm Coast United Methodist Church by The Palm Coast Historian's editor, Kay Stafford, is also in this issue.)

The 1981 article about religion in Palm Coast ended:

“Building a viable religious organization from scratch presented a special challenge. But religious

leaders and Palm Coast residents accepted the challenge and succeeded. Today the churches and synagogue of Palm Coast are thriving organizations and the same enthusiasm apparent in private homes in the early years endures today in beautiful houses of worship throughout Palm Coast.”

Help Write the Rest of the Story

There has been enormous growth in the number and variety of houses of worship in Palm Coast since the original six in 1981. The Palm Coast Historical Society is now soliciting information, memories, and photos from all the existing houses of worship in Palm Coast.

We begin our quest for updated information by asking for your help. The Flagler Area Ministerial Association (FAMA) was

formed in 1979 when Palm Coast's first pastor, the Reverend Marcus Otterbein, passed away. Pictured in this 1986 photo are seven FAMA members. Please identify those you recognize and their church or temple.



FAMA meets in 1986

In addition, please complete the following questionnaire.



PALM COAST HISTORICAL SOCIETY Houses of Worship

House of Worship _____

Names of Clergy (include dates) _____

Present Address _____

Founding Address in Palm Coast _____ Year Founded _____

Name of Church Historian _____ Phone _____

Do you have literature, photos, or documents you can share? Yes No

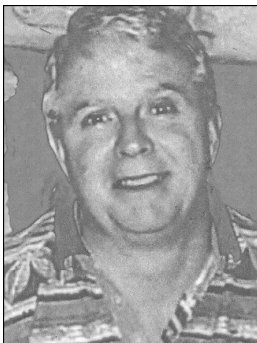
If yes, please contact Art Dycke, 446-8636, or Norma Kendrick, 445-3647

Palm Coast People: Jim Holland

A series of articles will appear in The Historian offering a brief biography of people who have made a significant contribution to our community. This article is by Jim Canfield.

Palm Coast's first city council was sworn in by Flagler County judge, Sharon Attack, on December 16, 1999. The ceremony was held to prepare for Palm Coast's becoming a city on December 31. (If the incorporation date had been January 1, 2000, the new city would have lost more than a million dollars in state revenue sharing.)

James F. Holland was a member of that first city council. Jim was elected in a city-wide vote as representative of District #3. It should be noted that 81% of eligible city voters participated in that first election.



Jim Holland

A native of Brooklyn, NY, Jim was 54 at the time. He graduated from New York State University and played baseball and basketball for the school. He was a supervisor of video and data transmissions for AT&T Corporation, retiring early on a medical disability which required him to use a

wheelchair for daily activity.

He became very active in community affairs when he moved to Palm Coast. Jim served as vice chairman of the Palm Coast Service District Advisory Council, chairman of the District Budget Committee, chairman of the Blue Ribbon Land Fill Board Committee, vice chairman of the Palm Coast Civic Association and the Flagler County Citizens League and he attended every Flagler County Commissioners' meeting for 12 years. He was also an active member of the Palm Coast Home Rule Committee.

Jim's focus during his council tenure was in the

areas of the city budget, economic development, and capital expenditure planning. The other members of the city council paid close attention when he spoke on those issues.

One of the issues that highlighted Jim's influence on the council concerned the sale of First Baptist Church's five-acres in the median of Palm Coast Pkwy. The buyer-developer planned a new Walgreen and other stores, including a RaceTrac gas station, for the property. Council was divided on the issue. Environmentalists didn't want any building on the site; others didn't want a Walgreen liquor store. Jim convinced the council, after much debate, that it was in the city's economic long-term interest to support the gas station and benefit from increased income in taxes and lower gas prices for our citizens. (Incidentally, that Walgreen does not have a liquor store attached.)

During our city's third year, February 2002, Jim passed away. Five people applied to complete his term of office, and the council selected Tom Lawrence. To honor Jim for his devotion and contributions to Palm Coast, the city council voted to name the park on Florida Park Dr. in his honor. It is now the James F. Holland Memorial Park.

Jim's daughter, Milissa Holland, now a Flagler County Commissioner, wrote, "My father was an extraordinary human being who had a strong commitment to family, friends, and community. There is not a day that goes by in which I don't think of him and miss him."



1980 – PCUMC, A New Church

A handful of Methodists had been meeting at the YMCA (now the Community Center) as a mission church since July 8, 1979. Flagler Beach UMC shared their minister, Rev. Cheryl Pingel, who conducted worship at 8:30 AM in Palm Coast, then rushed back to Flagler Beach to tend her own flock.

Membership grew slowly but steadily, reaching 27 at the first service conducted by Rev. Robert Finch, the newly assigned pastor, in June 1980. As he settled in, the congregation grew by leaps and bounds and by September the 89 members felt they were ready to become a “real” church, not just a mission church.

The “real” church needed a name. So many were suggested, they agreed to select one the democratic way – by voting between the three most popular, St. Paul’s, First of Palm Coast, and Palm Coast UMC.

Music Program Grows

When Catherine Wilson, a Flagler Beach UMC member sang solo at the first service as a mission church, followed by others from Flagler Beach and Bunnell, the church yearned for its own music program, which began with eight volunteers.

There was no place to store the 30 borrowed hymnals, so church members took them home and returned them each week. Flagler Beach United Methodist Men took pity and built the fledgling congregation a cabinet which they shared with the Presbyterians who also held services there.

Women Organize

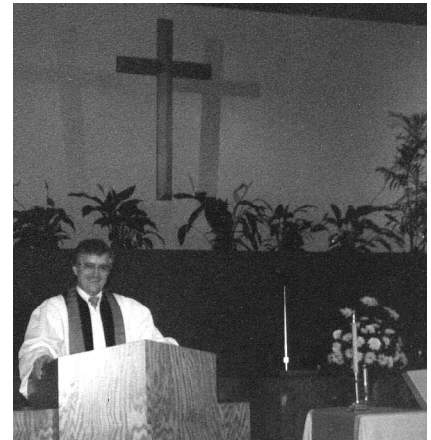
Rev. Pingel advised the women of the church to organize a UMW, which happened in March 1980 with 12 members. Each week the local paper carried some article about a bake sale, covered dish supper, picnic – and even the flea market in the YMCA parking lot on such a cold and windy day that those Palm Coast people who braved the elements congratulated the women on their dedication.

Membership Grows

To increase visibility and membership rolls, members canvassed neighborhoods for non-churched and United Methodist residents. Once, when one

couple visited a home in the “F” section, they were warmly welcomed by a friendly pair. After a nice conversation, the husband apologized and said they would like to attend a Sunday service but couldn’t join the church, admitting that he was a Baptist pastor. After they joined in a hearty laugh, he shared the results of his canvassing. How many residents who told him they were Methodists also said they were Baptists?

Membership grew so rapidly that in May 1980, a full year ahead of the predicted 1981, the church was assigned its own minister. Rev. Bob Finch, his wife Kay, and their two children needed housing, so members decided to build a parsonage rather than rent a house in the area. The Finch family arrived in June and stayed in the home of snowbirds while they went north.



*Rev. Bob Finch,
first full-time pastor*

On September 28, 1980, the parsonage was consecrated and Rev. Finch settled in to begin his five-year stay as pastor.

Mission Building

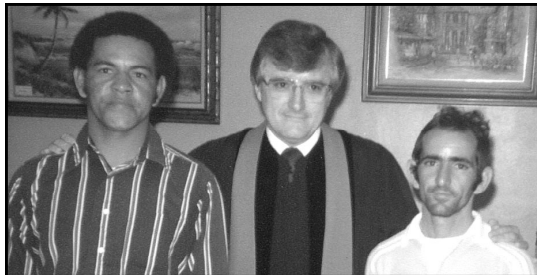
In the Fall of 1980, FAMA (Flagler Area Ministerial Association) decided to sponsor two Cuban refugees. Many people were fleeing their homes to escape Castro, then were kept in detention camps when they arrived in this country. Families and couples were easy to place with church groups, but it was difficult to find places for single young men. FAMA decided to help.

This was to be a cooperative project with all Flagler churches involved. St. Marks by the Sea Lutheran was in charge of finding employment for the two

(continue on page 10)

1980 – PCUMC, A New Church *(continued from page 9)*

young men, Palm Coast Baptist was to find housing, Santa Maria del Mar in Flagler Beach would provide transportation, and PCUMC would be responsible for collecting all donations for the project and serve as the welcoming committee when the two flew into Daytona Beach. Rev. Finch and two others met Carmello Rivero and Sandalia Acosta at the airport in



*Pastor Finch with two Cubans
co-sponsored by PCUMC*

in the Hammock where temporary housing had been arranged. Naomi Otterbein began their English lessons the next day.

It soon became evident that Santa Maria could not handle transportation, so Pastor Finch assumed the responsibility. Pastor Koenigsberger (St. Marks) had arranged for jobs – Sandy began his ground maintenance job at Pine Lakes Country Club at 7 AM, but Carmello needed to be at the fertilizer plant in Bunnell by 6:30 AM. Since neither the Hammock Dunes Bridge nor the Palm Coast exit from I-95 existed, transporters had to leave home by 5:30 AM to get each man to work on time. Moving the men to a trailer park on Rte. 100 uncomplicated many lives.

PCUMC members took turns inviting the men to dinner, and small get-togethers were arranged so everyone had a chance to meet and visit with them. Through this wonderful, rewarding – but often frustrating – experience, everyone learned lessons in patience and tolerance.

Sandy eventually settled in Miami and Carmello moved to Orlando.

**First Christian School
Comes to Palm Coast**

The year 1983 brought a new challenge to the young church. There was a need in the community

for a child care and pre-K facility that Rev. Finch felt the church could fill.

Struggling to meet expenses, this would be a giant leap, but, as always, God was right there. On August 25, 1983, Palm Coast United Methodist Christian School opened its doors to the community with Joanna Warren as its first director. Because of space limitations, it could only take 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds.

The Christian School has grown through the years and now provides year-round classes for infants through Pre-K. There is an active After-School Care program for children through fifth grade as well as summer’s Camp Can Do for youngsters in that age group. It has brought Jesus into the lives of hundreds of families, many of whom have joined the church. The school’s current enrollment is 115 and there is a waiting list. The staff has grown to accommodate all these youngsters. Under the loving, expert guidance of director Kathy Carey, the staff and the school are the finest in Palm Coast.



*Joanna Warren, founder
and first director of
PCUM Christian School*

Takes Money to Make Money

PCUMC has a very talented, devoted, and ambitious congregation. Its ingenuity and talent were challenged in the early days and it suffered from a chronic condition called “lack of funds.” So many wonderful plans and ideas were put on hold because there was only enough money for bare essentials. Bake and garage sales were just not going to fill the need.

With the Parable of the Talents as then-pastor’s, Dr. Wayne D. Wyatt, sermon subject one Sunday, collection plates were passed along the rows of seats. Instead of being filled, they were emptied of

(continue on page 11)

1980 – PCUMC, A New Church *(continued from page 10)*

the \$10 bills they held. Each member was encouraged to take \$10 to invest in his/her God-given talent and return the rewards to the church within a specified time frame.

This started everyone thinking, which was the best part of all since many felt that God had skipped them over when talents were being handed out.

Here are some of the creative ways the members met the challenge:

One couple refrained from buying lottery tickets and saved \$50.

One woman put aside \$1 each time she ate out. Her gift – \$110.

Two card parties were held. Twelve members paying \$3 apiece attended each. The \$5 prizes for high scores were refused, so \$82 came back to the church.

One ambitious lady cooked dinners in her home.

Guests were asked to leave a donation. Amount earned – \$175.

The youth sold their original art work and their troll collections; they mowed lawns and cared for pets while owners were away, then donated their money.

Pies, cakes, rolls and bread were baked and sold. Gardens were weeded and berries were picked and made into jam.

Savings from grocery coupons and discounts to theme parks and motels were turned in to the church – \$224 donated.

In addition, members with special talents created art work, taped songs, sewed, crocheted, knitted, carved, built, plus many other things.

There are countless stories to tell. Everyone had a great time, fellowship flourished and the church received \$8,000.



Membership Form – 2012 (please print)

First Name/s _____ Last Name _____

Street Address _____

Mailing Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

E-Mail Address _____

(you will be notified of meetings/Historical Society information via e-mail)

Single membership – \$15 Family – \$20 Recorder – \$30 Historian – \$40 Lifetime – \$200
Renewal New Member

Payable to The City of Palm Coast Historical Society Mail to Palm Coast Historical Society
P.O. Box 352613
Palm Coast FL 32135

Contributions to The City of Palm Coast Historical Society are deductible for Federal Income Tax purposes.

All members receive **The PalmCoast Historian**

A Fixture on Palm Coast Courts, Clarence Custer

by George Libonate

On October 24 Clarence Parks Custer turns 96. Despite his years, he remains a vital and active individual who continually impresses everyone with his warmth, uplifting spirit, and positive outlook – he is one of the “good guys.” However, his quiet demeanor and gentle manner belie the fact that he has the heart of a lion and the resilience of steel.

Following high school in the “Great Depression,” Clarence took a part time job with Crucible Steel Company, leaving it later for a more secure position with Isaly Dairy Company. Given his common sense, people skills, intelligence, and determination, he advanced from store clerk to manager to district supervisor, and eventually to general sales manager for Isaly’s Youngstown Division. During his first five years with the company, Clarence met and married Marie Shevenaugh. They had two daughters, Maxine and Janet, and eventually five grandchildren and 11 “greats.” They were married 58 years before her death in 1996.

While at Isaly, Clarence became a charter director and one of ten members involved in planning and organizing the Boardman Swim and Tennis Club. In 1957 400 shareholders invested \$1,000 each to raise capital to build the facility. That was only the first hurdle; they became embroiled in a difficult zoning battle but were eventually successful. Still recognized as one of the premier facilities in the area, Boardman serves as a developmental center for aspiring young athletes to pursue sports careers at the state, collegiate, and professional levels.

Clarence worked with the community-minded Isaly to sponsor the Ohio State hard court championships from 1958-63. He also participated in the event which drew as many as 200 entries each year. He met Ed Morris, event organizer and brother of Paul, who would eventually play a significant role in Clarence’s life. In 1966 Clarence left Isaly to start Mill Creek Dairy, and five years later the Custers sold the highly successful business. At 55, Clarence retired the first time.

As a young adult, Clarence continued to hone his

skills in racquet sports and won many local titles. He was a member of the YMCA much of his adult life and became a director of the Canfield Swim Club founded in 1962. He won the YMCA squash championship in 1963, 1964, and 1969 and was a finalist in 1965 and 1966. He also won bronze at the Ohio State YMCA squash championships in Dayton in 1964-66. Along with partner Bob Thompson, Clarence won the 1964 Youngstown tennis invitational senior doubles championship, adding the senior racquetball championship in 1969. While Clarence loves tennis, he always says that squash is his favorite racquet sport.

Spending as much time as he did on local courts, it was inevitable that Clarence would meet Paul Morris, brother of Ed and owner of Youngstown’s Paul Morris Sports. The two developed a 15-year tennis partnership and eventually a business relationship for nine years. Working together, they grew Paul Morris Sports from one to six stores. When Paul sold the business in 1978, Clarence became manager of Youngstown Racquet Club, where he remained until his final retirement ten years later.

Impressed with the tennis facilities in Palm Coast, Paul bought a couple condos here in 1978. He believed that, with Tom Gullikson’s and Jim Vidamour’s leadership, Palm Coast would become the best tennis facility in the country, and shared his opinion with his northern friends. Vacationing in Palm Coast, Clarence’s decision to retire here was influenced by weather, residents, community, and particularly the tennis facilities. On retirement, he joined the recently constructed Players Club with its worldwide reputation, 12 clay courts, four hard courts, two grass courts, and beautiful clubhouse, all in an idyllic setting. He became a member of the men’s 3.5 doubles tennis team that competed in the Greater Volusia Tennis Leagues, one of the largest in Florida. He and his teammates won six league championships – 1990-91 and 1994-97; partnering with Ron Capsy in senior men’s doubles, he

(continue on page 13)

A Fixture on Palm Coast Courts, Clarence Custer *(continued from page 12)*

won the Players Club championship in 1999. In 2000-01 Clarence and JoAnn Gaulin captured club championships in senior mixed doubles.

The game is not just about winning; it's about friendships. As "Tennis Ambassador" for Palm Coast and "Mr. Personality" for the Players Club, Clarence has made many enduring relationships. Twice weekly, the "Fabulous Five" – Clarence, Bud Downs, Mike Barbarian, Paul Elmore, and Frank Carroll – with an aggregate age of 379 years, play a highly competitive level of tennis despite major and minor health issues.

Clarence has celebrated many momentous events, including his surprise 80th birthday party thrown by Players Club staff and friends. Soon after, he and a cadre of others helped Ancel Rose, an eighth-grader at Buddy Taylor Middle School, prepare for Special Olympics World Games at Yale University. With more than 7,000 entrants from 140 countries participating in the nine-day event witnessed by an estimated 500,000, Ancel and Florida resident Kim Johnson won a gold medal in mixed doubles. Ancel also won a bronze in singles.

At the Players Club, Clarence rubbed elbows with some of the world's greatest tennis players and coaches like Jim Courier, Jimmy Connors, Jennifer Capriati, the three Maleeva sisters, and Todd Martin, to name a few. One of Clarence's most memorable matches was with Dodo Cheney in mixed doubles. At 86, she was here to compete in the national grass court championships. She held more than 330 national tennis titles.

Tom Gullikson, 17-year ITT touring pro (also Davis Club team captain for six years and victorious 1996 Olympics tennis team coach) became a close friend. When Tim, Tom's twin, passed away from brain cancer in 1996, Clarence assisted in establishing a memorial plaque and tree-planting ceremony honoring Tim later that year.

Of his many honors, two stand out. In 2002 Clar-

ence represented Flagler County as an Olympic torch bearer for the Salt Lake City Winter Games.



Holding the Olympic torch in 2002, Clarence Custer is flanked by Cornelia Manfre and Jim Canfield

Two years later, at 90, he was featured in the AARP magazine because of his incredible energy and stamina. In the interview, he stated that he believes that playing tennis and working out has enabled him to remain mentally and physically sharp.

At its 40th Annual Recognition Banquet in 2007 to honor Youngstown-area athletes, the prestigious Curbstone Coaches honored Clarence for his contribution to tennis. He was one of only 30 tennis inductees since 1958. His long-time friend Paul Morris was inducted in 1986.

Clarence always has a smile and words of encouragement for anyone who might have a bad day on the courts. It's almost impossible to talk to Clarence without feeling better.

For further information on tennis in Palm Coast, please refer to George Liibonate's articles in the Spring and Summer, 2010 editions of The Palm Coast Historian.

Palm Coast History Day

You are invited

**Wednesday, October 26
1:00-4:00 PM**

Palm Coast Community Center

Featuring the incorporation of the
City of Palm Coast

Exhibits, Power Point Presentation,
Discussions – Q & A,
Light Refreshments

Palm Coast Historical Society Annual Meeting

**2:00 PM Monday, January 30
Palm Coast Community Center**

Agenda

- 1 – Call to order
- 2 – Roll call
- 3 – Minutes of last meeting
- 4 – Treasurer's report
- 5 – Membership report
- 6 – City grant report
- 7 – 2012 Society schedule
- 8 – Nominating Committee report
- 9 – Election of 2012 officers/directors
- 10 – 2012 officers comments
- 11 – Member comments
- 12 – Next meeting date
- 13 – Adjournment

Give the Gift of History for the Holidays

We have a few copies of IMAGES OF AMERICA: PALM COAST, by Art Dycke, Palm Coast City Historian, for \$21.95. This is a 128-page picture history from the community's beginning in 1968 to 2003.

ALAN SMOLEN: FATHER OF PALM COAST, 1975-1985, also authored by Mr. Dycke, is available as well. In 138 pages of text and photos, it tells the story of the man who shaped the development of Palm Coast in his years as president of ITT Development Corporation. It also presents a fairly complete history of the Palm Coast community until 1985. Older residents can relive the "good old days" and newcomers can learn how Publix and the I-95 Interchange became fixtures here. This book sells for \$15.

Both books can be purchased for \$35, including mailing.

Contact Art Dycke, 446-8636, for additional information. Or email the Society at artpchistory@bellsouth.net or mayorjim@cfl.rr.com.

City Historian

Art Dycke

Society Officers – 2011

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Norma Kendrick, Executive Secretary

Society Mission

*The collection, preservation, and dissemination
of material related to the
City of Palm Coast and its people*