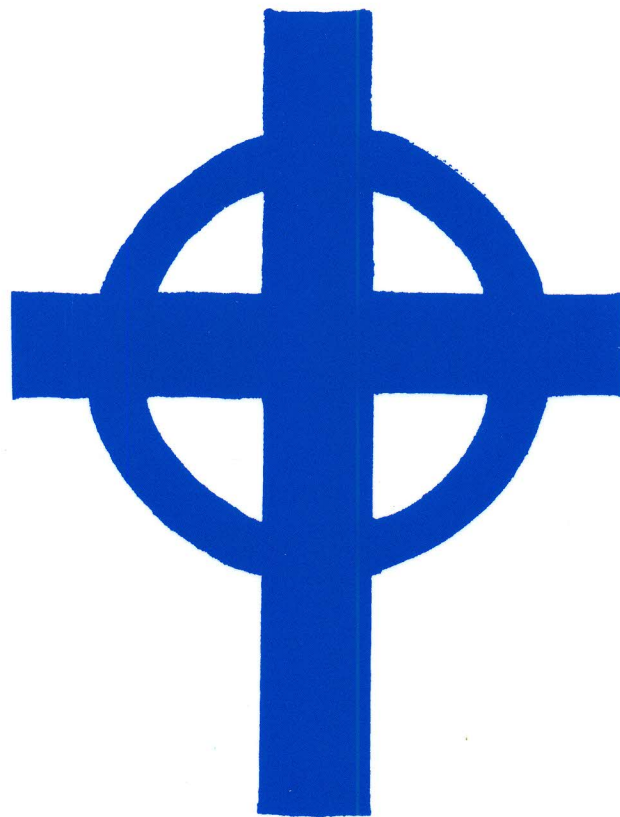


To Be Continued...



A PERSONAL HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ARCADIA, FLORIDA

BY TED LAND

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION

When you see a turtle on top of a fence post, chances are someone helped him get there.

There are so many folks who helped me with the project which I am in the process of completing that I cannot possibly list them all. Each one who spoke an encouraging word, who told me a story, who asked how the history was coming, each of you deserve my thanks.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to the Session and the Presbytery, for allowing me to take a sabbatical.

I am grateful to my colleague in ministry, R.J. Leek, not only for assuming the full load during my sabbatical time, but for his excellent work in designing the cover for this book.

My wife, Polly Land, was my research assistant, my proof reader, my mainstay and comfort. She was with me every step of the way, and I can never thank her enough.

Mike Pooser, Margaret Way, Calvin and Genie Martin, all supplied more material, more good stories, than I could find time or space to include. They should each one write their own histories, from the wealth of knowledge and memory they possess. Many thanks to each of you.

I drew heavily on the work of those who had written previous histories: Dorothy Sharpe, Margaret Hays, and Ruth Yama. The archives at Montreat were helpful, but no more than the material already existing in our own church library.

Marcia Brown, our church secretary, Mac Martin, Centennial Committee Chair, indeed, the whole Centennial Committee, deserve special thanks for the work in support of all of the activities of the Centennial.

Finally, I must give thanks to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who called me to be your pastor, who established this church, and has preserved it for a century of worship and service in this place. To Him be the glory, the power, the dominion and the praise.

Yours in His service,

Ted W. Land

July, 1998

BORN IN A STORM

The First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia, Florida, was founded on August 28, 1898. It was truly born in a storm. So severe was the weather on that hot summer Sunday that only five persons were able to gather for the organizational meeting of the church. Those five, and they alone, constitute the charter roll of the church. On that day when the life of the church commenced, two were elected as elders and two were elected as deacons. The only one not chosen to serve in an elected office was the only woman present, Mrs. Sarah Green. Elders chosen that day were Dr. James MacFie and Colonel C.D. Douglas. Deacons were W.H. Shedden and Solon Evans.

Organized by the Home Mission Board of the Presbytery of South Florida, of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, a part of the turmoil that surrounded the birth of the church was concerned with its very identity.

Presbyterianism in the United States of America has never been a unified faith. American Presbyterians brought with them the divisions between covenantors and dissenters from the birthplace of Presbyterianism, Scotland. Thus, there have existed, side by side, two streams of American Presbyterianism from the birth of the nation. One, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, has formed the mainline of American Presbyterianism. The other, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, has existed as an ecclesiastical anomaly, small, sheltered, almost unknown. Ironically, one of the "backwaters" where the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church has thrived is the Highland Ridge of Florida, with most of the Presbyterian churches in Highlands County being A.R.P. churches.

In the early nineteenth century, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was born out of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The nineteenth century also saw the division of American Presbyterianism into the so called "Old School" and "New School" Assemblies, and the formation of the United Presbyterian Church of North America.

The major division in American Presbyterianism took place in 1861, fueled by the fires of the Civil War. Most of the presbyteries and churches in the South joined together to form the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States. Sadly, the treaty of Appomatox Court House which ended the Civil War did not end the rift in American Presbyterianism which the war had forced open. One hundred and eighteen years after General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant in Virginia, the Presbyterian churches north and south became one in a meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.

In her history of the Arcadia church, written one hundred years after Appomatox and eighteen years before Atlanta, Dorothy Sharpe wrote:

"A few years before the present Presbyterian church was begun, a group of nine people organized as the result of a series of evangelistic services which were held in the county court house and were conducted by the synodical evangelist, the Reverend H. Keigwin.

When a vote was taken to decide which ecclesiastical body the group would unite with, there was a disagreement among the members. An independent position was maintained, and, as result, the organization went to nothing for lack of support."

The five who met with Henry Keigwin on August 28, 1898, were committing themselves to be members of the "northern" branch of the Presbyterian tree, which body had commissioned Keigwin with the creation of Presbyterian churches in the developing Florida frontier.

Ironically, Keigwin, a short man, was long-legged enough to straddle both sides of the ecclesiastical fence, having been educated in institutions related to both the U.S.A. church and the U.S. church. Ordained in the latter, he switched from the "southern" church to the "northern" church when he began his home mission work in 1892.

Some might call Henry Keigwin the founding father of the Arcadia Church. Indeed, it was his labors that established Presbyterianism in DeSoto County, both here and in Punta Gorda, which was a part of DeSoto County until 1921.

If one man can truly be called the founding father of Presbyterianism in Arcadia, it was certainly Dr. James MacFie. A practicing physician in Arcadia, and a native of Scotland, he had come to Florida by way of Canada. He was determined to have a Presbyterian Church here in Arcadia.

It may have taken a Scotsman, born into the Presbyterian faith, and not an American, but a Canadian transplant, to bridge the gap that would have existed in the hearts and minds of people to whom the wounds of the "War Between the States" were recent and fresh.

The Baptist Church had been established a few years earlier, as had the Methodist Church. Indeed, Elizabeth Baptist Church, an African American congregation, predates the founding of the Presbyterian church in Arcadia. Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church had been established seven years before the Presbyterian church was organized.

Lest one forget, the establishment of Arcadia as a city and DeSoto as a county had happened less than a decade before Keigwin began his evangelistic efforts in this area. The area was a frontier, a frontier of faith as well as of civilization, and Arcadia, born on the banks of the Peace River at the site of the settlement known as Tater Hill Bluff, was an infant as a community.

The coming of the railroad had opened this frontier, and the county seat, recently moved from Pine Level of old Manatee County was the right place for new churches to develop. That Keigwin began his services in the Court House shows his awareness of the importance of establishing a Presbyterian church in the seat of government of this new county, as well as the lack of church buildings in the community.

The evangelistic services of 1898, which led to the organization of the church on August 28, were held in the building of First Baptist Church. Indeed, prior to the organization of the Presbyterian congregation, an agreement was entered into on June 1, 1898, to use the small Baptist sanctuary built on the corner of Polk and Hickory Streets on alternate Sundays, with the Presbyterians to pay one half of the upkeep of the building.

It is interesting to note that only the five who braved the storm and were actually there on August 28, 1898, are recognized as charter members of the congregation.

There were others who played a vital role in the life of the church in its early years. These included A.M. Smith, Dr. and Mrs. C. H. Smith, John McIntosh, Dr. Blair, and his three daughters, Sally, Mary and Wilsie, and Mrs. Laura Craig and her son, James Craig, who operated the Arcadia House, the first major hotel in town.

By the year after the foundation of the church, a pastor, C.H. Ferran, had been called, and his name appears, along with those of Dr. MacFie, Colonel Douglas, L. King and T.D. Bourland as trustees of the church upon the deed for the lot acquired by the church in December of 1899.

That lot would be the site of the first sanctuary, which was begun early in 1900. Completion of that construction was delayed until a manse could be completed for the pastor.

About that time, C.H. Kirkpatrick, a carpenter and builder, had moved to Arcadia, with his family. He was responsible for the completion of the manse, at the cost of \$750, and construction on the sanctuary continued as time and money permitted.

C.H. Kirkpatrick was elected to serve as an elder in the church, and in that role represented the church at the meetings of Presbytery for many years. He also served on committees of Presbytery.

An attempt was made to incorporate the church in 1900, but paperwork was never completed.

In 1901, Miss Ellen Armstrong, daughter of R.B. Armstrong, an elder and long-time clerk of the Session of the church, presented a pulpit Bible for use in the sanctuary, which was obviously in use by that time.

By the end of 1905, church membership had reached thirty-seven. Dr. MacFie, the founding father of the church, had relocated to Fort Meade, where he and his daughter, Laura, played a vital role in the Presbyterian church there. In the 1965 history, Dorothy Sharpe notes that Laura MacFie Varn, at the age of 83, was still serving as President of the Women of the Fort Meade Church.

It is interesting to note that in 1905, the congregation voted for the first of several times to institute the practice of term eldership, electing C.H. Kirkpatrick and Hugh McL. Martin as elders.

This is not the last time those two names would be linked in the history of the church, for C.H. Kirkpatrick, Jr., would marry Marie Martin, daughter of Hugh Martin, and both would contribute much to the life of the church.

1905 was the year of the great fire which destroyed much of downtown Arcadia, including the courthouse in which the first services by Reverend Keigwin were held. Many of the records from the early days of the church are missing, and may be assumed to have been destroyed in that fire. Remarkably, the sanctuary and manse of First Presbyterian Church appear to have escaped damage.

Thus, the church born in a storm was spared by a fire.

GROWING IN MANY WAYS

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia was growing in many ways. In 1906, a Sunday School was organized, with C.H. Kirkpatrick as its first superintendent.

On April 9, 1906, the Ladies Aide Society was established, with Mrs. D.L. McSwain as president. In the 1965 history, Dorothy Sharpe notes:

"This was the beginning of a long and devoted service to the church by this lovely lady. She served faithfully in many capacities and was an inspiration all through the years to the young people in the church."
(page 11)

That heritage of faithful and inspirational service has passed down to the fourth and fifth generations, as descendants of Dr. and Mrs. McSwain continue to be a vital part of the church to this very day.

Mrs. McSwain also organized the choir in the church at that time, and played the piano to accompany the group.

In November of 1906, the sanctuary was dedicated in a service that was reported in the newspaper of the day, The Champion:

"The dedication exercises at the Presbyterian Church on last Sunday morning, November 18, 1906, were pretty and impressive.

The church had been beautifully decorated with flowers and evergreens and a large congregation was present to help dedicate the house for religious uses.

The choir was well trained by Madams Williams and McSwain and the music was pronounced fine, especially the duet by those ladies. They sang, 'Peace Be To This House.' Rev. Keigwin wrote a special hymn for the occasion, and it was sung by the congregation at the service." (Found in Sharpe, 1965, page 12.)

By this time, C.H. Ferran had moved on to Lake City, Florida as pastor, and Henry Keigwin was serving the church as pastor, which he would do until 1909.

On April 7, 1907, the first baptismal service in the sanctuary was held, with Mabel and Rena Armstrong, Lillian and Marie Martin, Edwin and True Hollister being administered the sacrament. On May 19, 1907, Gordon Henry McSwain, son of Dr. and Mrs. D.L. McSwain, was baptized, reportedly the first infant to be baptized in the sanctuary.

1907 marked the increase in membership to 64, with services now every Sunday instead of twice a month. The envelope system was adopted for collection of the pastor's salary, with Mr. Peck Green, Mrs. Emma Wey being appointed to assist the deacons and the treasurer in the collection. The Board of Home Missions was providing \$150 a year towards the pastor's salary.

The minister was making \$360 per year, and it was voted to increase that amount by \$150.

During his entire tenure in Arcadia, Henry Keigwin continued his role as home missions secretary for Presbytery, and in 1909, he asked for a leave of absence to present a plan of sustenance of presbytery to the churches. He took two months to do this, with Reverend J.W. McNary filling the pulpit and receiving his salary in his absence. Reverend Keigwin returned in April, only to resign on May 2.

It is difficult to determine either from the historical records or the minutes of the meeting what the mood of the Arcadia church was at this time, or what the attitude of the church was towards the Presbytery.

Henry Keigwin had served both the church and the Presbytery long and well. He was sixty-six years old at the time he left the Arcadia pastorate, and would die three years later in Punta Gorda, where he went to supply the pulpit when he left Arcadia.

It appears that there was a structural change taking place in the presbyteries of the Synod of the South, with the presbyteries being consolidated. East Florida and South Florida Presbyteries, which Keigwin had served, were apparently being combined into a larger Presbytery of Florida.

It has been suggested that the salary supplement which the Arcadia church had enjoyed during its first decade of existence was coming to an end. For whatever reason, the Arcadia session petitioned to be transferred from the Presbytery of Florida of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Northern) to the Presbytery of St. Johns of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. (Southern). Of historical interest is that First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland, had recently taken the same action.

This did not come with no cost. According to Dorothy Sharpe's history, "Several members contributed moneys to pay off the loan on the building which the mission board had advanced for construction of the church and the manse." (Page 15)

The Presbytery of St. Johns, meeting in Dade City Presbyterian Church on April 12, 1910, added Arcadia to the list of churches, enrolled Elder C.H. Kirkpatrick as a commissioner, and put him on the Finance Committee of Presbytery.

Rev. T.J. Allison came to supply the Arcadia church, and to begin a work at Wauchula. A member of Asheville Presbytery, he was enrolled in St. Johns on April 11, 1911, noting that he was receiving an annual appropriation of \$200 from the presbytery for his services. His total salary was \$480 per year.

Following Mr. Allison's resignation a year later, Reverend R.T. Bell came to serve the church, at a salary of \$900 per annum.

A significant event which occurred during Mr. Bell's tenure was the chartering of a "Christian Endeavor" chapter early in 1915. Dorothy Sharpe writes:

"This proved to be a very productive training ground, for from the ranks of these young people came the future teachers, deacons and elders of our church. During these formative years of their lives, The Christian Endeavor trained them to step forward and become dedicated disciples of Christ." (Page 18)

March 31, 1915, fifty three new members were added to the church role, a record that remains unchallenged, and no doubt the result of Christian Endeavor.

The minister was then making \$75 a month. The next year, it was increased to \$100, all to be paid by church funds.

As will be demonstrated in the chapter devoted to ministers, the lines between the northern and southern branches of the Presbyterian church were blurred by the ministers of the Arcadia church, with most of those during its first quarter of a century serving on both sides of that ecclesiastical Mason Dixon line. After nine years of service to the church, R.T. Bell resigned, and left the Presbyterian ministry.

His successor, the Reverend P.W. DuBose, began his ministry in the fall of 1921. This was the year that the Ladies Aide Society became the Women's Auxiliary, with Mrs. D.L. McSwain once again serving as President. According to the report at the end of the year, the church had seven elders, seven deacons, 183 communicant members, and 116 on the roll of Sunday School.

The growth of the Sunday school caused the church to purchase the Steele home, adjacent to the church property, to be used as an education building.

On a statistical note, the minutes report that morning worship attendance was 60%, evening worship 70%, and Wednesday evening attendance 30%.

When Reverend DuBose departed after less than three years, the church had a difficult time finding a pastor. Two calls were issued, and both ministers came, preached, and left without accepting the call. In spite of that, less than a year elapsed before J.J. Martin was called to be pastor.

THE BEST OF TIMES AND THE WORST OF TIMES

The "roaring" twenties were a time of growth in Florida, and Arcadia was not immune to the land speculation and the "tin can tourists" which were the first wave of "snowbirds" or winter visitors.

Under J.J. Martin's leadership, Christian Endeavor was revitalized, under the guidance of Mrs. Frances Platt. Adrian Petry would begin a twelve year term as Sunday School Superintendent. Dorothy Sharpe assumed the responsibility of teaching the children's class that Miss Ada Alexander had led and would keep teaching for fifteen years, never missing a Sunday. During most of the twenties, Elder S.R. McChesney would serve as Clerk of the Session, until his death in 1930. During the twenties and thirties, Edith Zimmerman Petry would be the church pianist.

The stock market crash and the bursting of the land speculation bubble in the late nineteen twenties brought hard times to Florida, as it did to the rest of the nation. By 1931, it was necessary to reduce the church budget, and the pastor was paid only a partial salary that year.

In 1933, a meeting was held of Elders and Deacons to attempt to revitalize the Board of Deacons, which was as depressed and moribund as the economy, and to address the money problems that beset the church.

A congregational meeting was held on April 23, and three new deacons were elected, namely Dr. C.H. Kirkpatrick, W.A. Neal, and W. L. Wood. Reverend Martin offered to resign at this meeting, but the congregation declined his request. No solution was found for the financial dilemma.

Slightly more than a year later, on August 19, 1934, Reverend Martin again requested that the pastoral relationship be severed, so that he could accept a call to become pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. At that time, that church was one of the largest and most prestigious in the Synod of Georgia.

Not only did the church lose its beloved and devoted pastor in 1934, but two key lay leaders departed this life. Dr. D.L. McSwain, who had served as a trustee and a deacon from the infancy of the church, and C.H. Kirkpatrick, who had served as an elder for almost three decades, as well as being a trustee and Sunday School Superintendent, both died. Their sons, Dr. Gordon McSwain, and Dr. C. H. Kirkpatrick, would continue their legacy of service to the church.

The leader who would follow J.J. Martin into the pulpit of the Arcadia church was Vance A. Gordon. He and his wife, Sara, and their children, filled the manse with love and joy, and brought light to the darkest of times in the Arcadia church.

Things were so bad that the passing of the plate was omitted from the worship services, to save embarrassment for those who might not be able to contribute. A collection box was placed at the entrance to the church, for those with funds to donate.

In the autumn of 1935, an attempt was made to organize a men's group, but it failed for lack of interest.

The following year, the Women's Auxiliary was transformed into the Women of the Church, the name it would bear until reunion almost half a century later.

On June 20, 1937, Edith Petry would resign as pianist, to move to northern Florida. There she would become a post master, continue her work in the church, and become revered in her community. She returned to Arcadia for the ninety-fifth anniversary celebration, and died shortly thereafter. Following her funeral in Valpariso, interment was in Oak Ridge Cemetery, in Arcadia.

Along with her resignation came that of Adrian Petry as Sunday School Superintendent.

These two leaders were replaced by persons of talent and dedication. Mrs. Gordon McSwain became the church musician, a task she would fulfill for four years until World War II intervened. Following the war years, she would re-assume that position and keep it until her death. The Sunday School Superintendent elected in 1937 was Bruce L. Davis. Mr. Davis was a beloved teacher, elder, leader, who along with his wife, Louise, were vital parts of the life of the church for many years.

1937 marked the return of the church to aid-receiving status, as a request was made of Presbytery for \$300 per year to help pay the pastor. The collection box was removed and plates were once more passed in the worship services.

The following year, a Boy Scout Troop was organized, led by Reverend Gordon, Bruce Davis, and E.H. Vance.

Nineteen hundred and thirty nine saw church services discontinued during the pastors vacation due to a lack of available pulpit supply ministers and a lack of funds to pay them.

Rally Day kicked off the church program year on October 1, and covered dish suppers were instituted to increase fellowship in the church. The Home Mission Board asked if the church was able to sustain itself, and it was not, so aid from Presbytery continued.

In 1940, two elders were elected at a congregational meeting in April, namely Marshall Whidden and W.L. Mattison. Surprising all present, the pastor submitted a resignation at that meeting, but it was rejected unanimously.

Early in 1941, the church asked the Home Mission Board to suspend the aid that had been received during the depths of the depression. Having made it through the worst of times financially, the church looked forward to better days. Yet no small part of the economic prosperity that made the church able to support itself came from the economic upswing of the community brought about by the opening of Carlstrom and Dorr Fields as training bases for aviation cadets.

On July 31, 1941, Reverend Vance Gordon left the Arcadia church to assume the pulpit of the Murray Hill Church in Jacksonville, Florida. Reverend Gordon served that church for 28 years, until his retirement. He and his wife, Sara, were much beloved in Arcadia, especially by those who were young people in the church when he was actively involved with the Boy Scout troop, and the youth of the church were always welcomed into their home. Sara Gordon's last visit to Arcadia before her death was in the summer of 1993, when the church celebrated its 95th anniversary.

During the 1980's and early '90's, it was not unusual to have couples in their sixties or seventies stop by the church office to visit. They would tell of being married, in the manse or in the church, by the minister of the Presbyterian church, when the groom was stationed at one of the local air fields. Many of the brides rode the train for days to be able to see their beloved before they "shipped out", and many of the marriages were spur of the moment things. That they had lasted for forty years and more is testimony more to the power of love and to the blessing of God than to the minister who presided over their nuptials, and yet they would ask of the ministers whereabouts, if he were still living.

A few of these, several British, were married by Vance Gordon. A surprising number were married by the man who followed Vance Gordon, a young minister named A.R. Martin, who came as a bachelor, married while pastor here, and left to become a chaplain in the Army fighting the Second World War. Ironically, after Reverend Martin's departure, the pulpit was supplied by Chaplain Shonfult, of the local air base. Only Sunday evening services were held until a new pastor could be called.

During the year 1942, due to failing eyesight, Elder R.B. Armstrong resigned as Clerk of the Session. He had held that position since 1920. A servant of the church and of the community, he had been a faithful leader throughout his term of service.

During A.R. Martin's pastorate and the vacancy that followed, the manse was rented to help make up for the housing shortage created by the war effort.

In April, 1944, a call was issued to J.J. Martin, asking him to return from Savannah, and he did, being installed as pastor here on July 23.

Perhaps because of the increased population during the war years, perhaps because of the good economy, perhaps because in time of war people turn to God, the First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia grew dramatically during the 1940's, reaching 180 members with 140 in Sunday School.

A second hand organ was purchased in 1947, marking the first time the church had anything but a piano to accompany its singing, and a new organ was purchased the following year.

As the 1940's came to a close, the church was abuzz with talk of new building, with the need for a larger sanctuary seeming to be of prime importance.

BUILDING FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

As the 1940's drew to a close, there was a shift in the economic base of the community. During the war years, the air fields, with their cadets, instructors, support staff, had brought prosperity and population to the county. But the end of the war brought all that to an end. Through the direction of a state senator with a deep concern for the community, the air bases became state property, and came to house mental patients. That man was G. Pierce Wood, and the mental hospital that exists in DeSoto County today is named in his honor.

In the early days of the mental hospital, there were two separate campuses, one at Carlstrom Field, south of Arcadia, and the other at Dorr Field, east of town. One housed the male patients, the other the female patients. Later, the populations would be combined at the Carlstrom site, and the Dorr site would become first a facility for the mentally retarded, and then DeSoto Correctional Institution.

It was inevitable that a man with a compassionate, pastor's heart like John James Martin would be drawn into ministry to these less fortunate folks who came into the sphere of influence of the Presbyterian church.

Very soon after the establishment of the state mental health program in the county, J.J. Martin became "Chaplain Martin" as well as "Pastor Martin," though folks in the town and at the hospital usually just called him "Reverend Martin."

Initially, he was part of a corps of ministers who served as volunteers. Then he became a paid part-time coordinator. Finally, he became the paid full-time chaplain.

In October of 1949, J.J. Martin submitted his resignation as pastor of the church. The congregation refused to accept his resignation. Three months later, he was named full-time chaplain at the hospital, continuing as pastor of the church.

Those who remember those days know that J.J. Martin never neglected one "flock" to minister to the others, but served both, diligently, with devotion. He was a pastor, and a shepherd of his sheep.

A month after his assumption of the chaplaincy, a building committee was formed, and an architect hired. An overall building plan was presented, showing an education building, a fellowship hall, and a new sanctuary.

A young married couples Sunday school class was formed and Sunday School attendance soared. This led to a shift in priorities, so that instead of the new sanctuary that many had wanted, an education building was constructed. The old house bought from the Steele family was removed from the lot after being sold to Louis Morgan, and construction was begun.

During the time that construction was underway, Sunday School was not discontinued.

Classes met in the council chambers of City Hall across the street from the church, in the first floor of the Masonic Lodge next door to the construction site, in the parish house of the Episcopal Church a block away, and on the porch and in the parlor of the manse.

By the time the building was ready to house the classes, the Sunday School had grown to over 200 students, more than the membership of the church at the time.

The Women of the Church were instrumental in raising funds for the building program. They held rummage sales in the Masonic lodge on a monthly basis, contributing all of their moneys raised to the fund. This came over the initial objections of Reverend Martin, who being of the old school felt that the church should not engage in "fund-raisers." He was convinced that the sales would allow needy people to purchase clothing and household goods at reduced prices without having to accept charity, and went along with the idea after that.

The Senior Ladies Sunday School Class pledged to donate a penny a meal to the cause.

The Christ family business, Christ Lumber Company, was the contractor for the building, and several of the members of the family were also members of the church. The brick building they constructed has poured concrete walls that are so solid that more than forty years after the building was occupied, it is nearly impossible to drill a hole in the walls. The building was completed in early 1952, and thirty-five years later was designated the J.J. Martin Building, in honor of the one under whose leadership it was erected.

It took only five years for the church to retire the mortgage on the building, and in December of 1957, the mortgage was burned and the church voted to acquire additional property on Hickory Street. This constituted the old McChesney house and land west of the manse, and the purchase was completed the following year. Membership had grown to 238, though Sunday School enrollment had dropped to around 120.

During the 1950's a youth choir and a youth fellowship were organized, a Men of the Church organization was put in place, raising money for an air conditioning system for the church under the leadership of John Treadwell.

At a congregational meeting held on the second Sunday of September in 1959, a vote of confidence was taken in favor of Reverend Martin continuing as pastor and chaplain of the state mental hospital.

1960 saw the election of Mrs. Calvin Martin as choir director. This continued the family tradition as she was the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Gordon McSwain.

A nursery was added during the morning worship hour to accommodate the babies and small children of the congregation.

During the 1950's, a son of the church, Joel Mattison, son of Elder W.L. Mattison and his wife Millie, had been preparing for a dual career, first graduating from seminary and then from medical school. In 1961, he and his wife were making preparations to join the staff of Dr. Albert Schweitzer's famous clinic in Africa. The church honored them with a dinner and presented Dr. Mattison with a blood pressure cuff and stethoscope to be used in his work.

During this time, Reverend S.C. Henderson, a retired missionary to Chile, and his wife came to live in Arcadia. Their presence enriched the lives of those who knew them, and Reverend

Henderson frequently taught classes and even filled the pulpit.

1963 saw J.J. Martin reach the compulsory retirement age of 70, and his leaving of the pastorate was followed soon after by his relinquishing of the chaplaincy at the state hospital. In his second round as pastor of this church, Reverend Martin served more than nineteen years. Combined with his nine plus years earlier he served this church for the better part of three decades.

As J.J. Martin was being honored for his years of service at his retirement, another faithful servant of the church was also recognized. Millie Mattison was presented with an Honorary Life Membership by Westminster Presbyterian Women. Millie had served as an officer in local, Presbytery, and Synod women's organizations, and had been a dedicated leader in Synodical training school, making it possible for many from the Arcadia church to participate with her.

In accepting the honor, she uttered these prophetic words:

"I have tried to make it a practice of saying 'yes' to the Lord when He calls me.
He has led me in many thrilling adventures for Him."

As you will read later, perhaps her most thrilling adventure would come as she continued to follow where God called her.

The era of greatest building in the history of this church was to take place in the last half 1960's.

The pastor who came in April of 1964 was Drennon Cottingham, a man of mature years with a family of four children, but only in his second pastorate, just a few years out of seminary. He brought with him education and experience in engineering and construction that contributed to the zeal already in the hearts and minds of the people to move forward into the future.

That future was to include the construction of a new manse and of a sanctuary, the latter to be built at a cost in excess of \$100,000, on the west side of the educational building.

In order to make way for the sanctuary, the manse had to be built first. A lot on West Imogene was purchased for \$3,000, and work was begun. William McAnly, known to everyone as "Slim", whose wife Margaret would serve as an elder and W.O.C. president in later years, was the contractor who erected the dwelling place.

That the manse was designed with the Cottingham family in mind can be evidenced by a view of the plans, which refers to a large bedroom as "the girls dormitory," with a closet for each of the three Cottingham daughters, and a smaller bed room as "the little boy's room."

Most of 1965 was devoted to fund-raising and approval of plans for the manse, with ground broken on November 7. The manse would be completed and occupied the following June. In spite of this concern for the work of the church at home, the work of the church overseas was a concern, for sponsorship of a missionary couple to Brazil, Rev. and Mrs. Robert M. Lytton, was undertaken. A Men's Rally for the District was held in Arcadia, and it was noted in a local newspaper report that this was: "an experiment in men's work in that no type of rally such as this had ever been held."

This was also the year that Dr. C.H. Kirkpatrick, beloved "Dr. Kirk," was honored with election as Deacon Emeritus. Mr. Leroy Mullihan had been designated as the church's first Elder Emeritus the year before.

The following year, the Arcadia church would become one of the sponsors of a Presbyterian retirement home for the elderly, located in Lehigh Acres, and to be known as Sunshine Villas. Reverend Cottingham and an elder designated by the session served as members of the board of directors of this corporation.

In July of 1966, beloved elder W.L. "Scoots" Mattison would die. There was a suggestion made that his widow, Millie be immediately named to succeed him. Instead, she was elected to a full term on the Session, taking office in 1967. This made her the first woman to hold the office of Ruling Elder in the Arcadia church, and one of the first in Westminster Presbytery.

1966 would also see the first volume of the history of this church completed by Dorothy Sharpe, and dedicated at a special celebration held on August 28, the anniversary of the founding of the church.

Though the need for a sanctuary was still great, there was a movement in 1966 to build a new fellowship hall first. This was voted down, and planning and fund raising for a new sanctuary continued.

It was reported in February of 1967 that \$36,000 was in the bank and \$37,000 pledged and that First Federal Savings and Loan would provide financing for the rest of the money needed to build the sanctuary at 6% interest over a 20 year period. The total cost was to be \$110,000, plus approximately \$25,000 for furnishings and other improvements.

In April, the Masonic lodge property adjacent to the education building was purchased for \$6,000.

In the first month of 1967, two faithful servants of the church were called to their heavenly reward. Mrs. Amos Way, known to all by her good works and long service in the W.O.C., died on the 7th day of January, and then on the 23rd, Elder Emeritus Leroy Mullihan departed this life. Mr. Mullihan and his wife had just been honored with a donation to the building fund in their name by one of the Sunday School classes.

Plans and publicity for the new sanctuary continued throughout 1967, beginning with an informational dinner in February. Changes in plans were approved by the congregation at a meeting in September, and it was hoped that bids would be let soon.

All of the work of the Building Planning Council and the Building Committee, two separate and distinct bodies that joined together to make things happen, culminated with the ground-breaking ceremony on May 26, 1968. The members listed in the program of that day were: Mr. C.S. Hays, Chairman, Mrs. Margaret McAnly, Dr. Frank Gutteridge, Mrs. Millie Mattison, Paul Whitlock, Miss Margaret Way, Donald McKay, and Dr. Calvin Martin. Representing the Women of the Church was Mrs. Louise Davis, the session, Mike Pooser, the Board of Deacons,

Charles Nesmith, and the Presbytery Executive Secretary Sam McCammon. Present for the groundbreaking were the architect, Henry L. Roberts, and general contractor, Raymond F. Driggers. Also turning ceremonial shovelfuls of dirt were the pastor, Drennon Cottingham, his wife, Vergie, and Dr. Fred Williams, pastor of First Baptist Church.

A highlight of the construction of the church was the raising of the steeple in November, when a bell imported from Belgium was placed far above the ground. This "d" carillon bell was donated by long-time church members Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Tidwell.

That bell would ring to summon worshippers for the first time on January 26, 1969. A dedication service was held on March 3, and moderators of the presbytery, synod, and General Assembly took part in the service, along with pastor Cottingham and retired minister J.J. Martin. Many of the furnishings of the new sanctuary were given as memorials.

A beautiful memorial register was presented in memory of Mrs. J.L. Dishong. The pulpit, two clergy chairs, and communion table were given in memory of W.L. Mattison by his family and friends. The flower stands were given in memory of C.H. Smith by Grace Smith. A lighted cross behind the choir was given in memory of Dr. and Mrs. D.L. McSwain by Dr. and Mrs. Gordon McSwain.

With its soaring white pine cathedral ceiling, its rose-colored hammered glass windows, its shining white furnishings and blue carpeting and pew cushions, the new sanctuary created a sense of pride and prosperity within the hearts and minds of all who worshipped therein.

The new sanctuary was truly a building for the kingdom of God.

A DECADE OF CHANGE

The nineteen seventies were a decade of change in America, with the Viet Nam War and Watergate leaving indelible marks on our nation's history.

Several people who had left indelible marks on the First Presbyterian Church in Arcadia departed from the scene in the first year of that decade.

In January, Millie Mattison, continuing to pursue God's call in her life, left to move to Atlanta to become a member of the staff of the Office of Women's Work of the General Assembly. She was honored with a reception in January and in April was recognized as "elder in absentia."

She had paved the way for the ordination of women to office in the Arcadia church, and in her footsteps followed Margaret Way, ordained a deacon in 1969. It would be 1975 before the church would install its second woman elder, Evelyn Chaput, who had served previously as an elder in New Jersey. Margaret Way was also ordained an elder that year, and Pauline Rushing and Sara York were ordained as deacons. By 1977, five of the twelve members of the Board of Deacons would be female.

At the same time that Millie Mattison was honored, "Dr. Kirk," beloved deacon emeritus C.H. Kirkpatrick, M.D. was honored as deacon "in absentia." He soon thereafter was absent in the body and present with the Lord.

July 17, 1970, the Reverend J. J. Martin died in Bardstown, Kentucky. A memorial service was held in the church here, and a memorial resolution was presented by Elder Charles Weaver. Presbytery Executive Secretary Edward Campbell and Father Massie of the local Episcopal Church conducted the service. A portion of Rev. Massie's comments at that service appear in the chapter of this work devoted to the ministers who served the church.

In December, 1970, Drennon Cottingham requested that his pastoral relationship with the church be dissolved, and the request was granted. Despite his success as a builder of buildings and a leader of the church, his last year was marked with internal conflict, which had led to the church taking the action on March 22, 1970 of doing away with rotating classes of elders and deacons and essentially naming all who had ever served in those offices and presently belonged to the church as officers. There were thus 20 deacons and 17 elders, including the aforementioned "in absentia."

After a remarkably short search, during which the assistance of a commission of Westminster Presbytery helped abbreviate the process, a minister was elected pastor of the church on February 21, 1971. The Reverend Robert A. Pfrangle, D.D., brought wisdom, maturity, and stability to the position. His greatest asset was probably his lovely wife, Mamie.

In the interim period between Reverend Cottingham's departure and Dr. Pfrangle's arrival, Reverend Clayton Crawford, of Lakeland, provided excellent leadership as interim pastor, and was beloved by the congregation, participating along with Rev. Sam McCammon, Dr. Frank Anderson, and Dr. Joel Mattison, in the installation service of Dr. Pfrangle.

Change continued in the life of the church, as two long time leaders, Dr. and Mrs. A.D. Migliore moved to Orlando. As a parting gift to the church, they presented the American and Christian flags that still are displayed in the sanctuary.

Reverend S.C. Henderson died in 1971, ending a long retirement in which his presence had blessed the church and community. On the very next day, Reverend Vance Gordon would die in Jacksonville. In writing of them in Volume III of the History of First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia, Florida, Margaret Hays expressed herself thus: "their influence and guidance toward our church will never die." (Page 8)

Dorothy Sharpe had been honored in 1970, recognized for her service in the Sunday School where she had taught from 1926-1970, save for the war years. In 1971, she unearthed a beautiful silver communion pitcher, chalice, and plate, believed to have been used in the first communion service in the church. The pitcher was engraved with the name of the First Presbyterian Church, Seneca, Florida, and the date 1887. Both Seneca, Florida and that church are no longer in existence. Sadly, a burglary on Easter Sunday, 1990, resulted in the loss of these irreplaceable treasures.

On February 27, 1972, a new piano was dedicated in the sanctuary, purchased by memorial gifts honoring Reverend J.J. Martin. Margaret Way had been instrumental in raising these funds. The sanctuary and the music program was also enriched during 1972 with the gift of an echo speaker for the organ, given by Dr. Gordon McSwain in memory of his parents.

Membership was increasing, and the assistance of James Doom, an architectural consultant used throughout the General Assembly, was requested in planning a fellowship hall.

1972 also marked the church's first full participation in the every-family subscription plan of Presbyterian Survey, our denominational publication. A quarter of a century later, that publication became Presbyterians Today, and each family in the church still receives a copy monthly.

1973 saw planning continue for the fellowship hall. John Turner was honored as Elder Emeritus, and three elders who had served the church long and well were memorialized.

Argil Patrick Holloman, better known as "Pat," had served the church as an officer and as treasurer for many years, coming to Arcadia after World War II, as an administrator at the State Hospital. He had died September 22, 1971. His widow, Elmena, had been a member of the committee which landscaped the education building, manse, and sanctuary, and she had been very much involved in the design of the last. His son, David, and daughter-in-law, Kay, also serve as officers in the church.

Marvin Tidwell, who had died on March 18, was also memorialized. He and his widow, Lessie, had given the bell which still rings every Sunday to call the church to worship and prayer. Their son, Marvin, Jr., a 1941 graduate of DeSoto High School, who would go on to earn his Ph.D., is now a retired professor at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee, where he followed in his father's footsteps as an elder in the church for many years.

Ironically, both Mrs. Holloman and Mrs. Tidwell, in their nineties, live in the home of Reverend and Mrs. Bert Galloway of First Baptist Church.

Chesterfield Smith Hays, who died in December, 1972, had also been a longtime Elder, and had been a faithful member of the choir. The annual Christmas concert was dedicated in his memory in the year of his death.

A.M. Lockwood was honored as Elder Emeritus in 1974. Many remember him best as the man who directed traffic outside the church on Sunday mornings. His service was more than that, as this honor indicates.

Changes continued in 1974, with the addition to the church staff of Candice Reid, as Director of Christian Education. Under Candy's leadership, programming for children and families would expand and increase, with the establishment of craft programs and a preschool program being among her many lasting accomplishments.

The church returned to the rotating system of officers in 1974, reducing the number of elders and deacons to twelve and fifteen, respectively. The latter was soon reduced to twelve.

1975 saw two very different men stand in the Arcadia pulpit as guests. Dr. Lawrence Bottoms, moderator of the General Assembly, spoke on February 3, with a question and answer period following. Dr. Bottoms was the first moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to be of African American ancestry. His writings had been used for a number of years in church school and women's work.

During the summer of that year, Dr. and Mrs. Pfrangle and Reverend and Mrs. James Aitchison of the Broomhill Presbyterian Church in Glasgow, Scotland, exchanged pulpits. The friendships that the Aitchisons formed would continue until his death twenty years later.

Mrs. Gordon McSwain, beloved "Mammie Lew," was honored in 1975 for her thirty-five years of service as organist. She had actually begun her service in 1937, as church pianist, and did not begin to play an organ until 1947, because the church didn't have one, but honoring her was certainly appropriate. She would continue in the role of church organist until her death in 1988, being honored in 1987 for her fifty years of service.

The Bicentennial year of 1976 was celebrated with an 18th century communion service, followed by dinner on the ground with many of the members of the church dressing in period costumes. As Margaret Hays wrote in her description of the events, "Many a long dress and colonial hat were spotted on the merrymakers as they ate and played appropriate games on the lawn." (Vol. III, page 13.)

Two weeks later, the pulpit was filled by Dr. Andrew Herron, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Glasgow, Kirk of Scotland. This continued the warm connection begun the previous year with the pulpit exchange.

A new seminary graduate filled the pulpit on August 8th and 15th. Millie Mattison had answered God's call one more time, and had completed her Master of Divinity degree at Columbia Seminary on June 6, 1976. Her career in ministry will be detailed in another chapter, but her presence in the pulpit here was a blessing to all, and a time of great pride and celebration.

Millie was the oldest person ever ordained by the Presbyterian Church, U.S., and since that denomination ceased to exist with reunion in 1983, her record will forever remain.

For twenty years, services from the Presbyterian church and brief devotional messages by pastors Martin and Cottingham had been broadcast over the local radio station as a part of the program of the DeSoto County Ministerial Association. The churches of the community had been rotating the broadcast responsibility since 1956, with each church broadcasting its services one or two months out of the year. In 1977, with the adding of an FM signal to the local radio station, First Presbyterian Church began broadcasting the Sunday morning service each week, for shut-ins and those unable to attend worship. This has continued to the present day, not without problems and changes.

Plans continued for the new fellowship hall, with drawings displayed and a finance committee appointed.

The Reverend Clayton Crawford was honored with a resolution adopted by the Session on February 1, 1978. The Session joined with the governing bodies of more than twenty churches of Westminster Presbytery in which Reverend Crawford had served as interim to honor him.

At its April meeting, the Session honored Miss Martha Cole, Registered Nurse, upon her retirement from the local hospital. For the last 29 years of her service, Miss Cole had worked in the obstetrical department of the hospital, and had participated in the delivery of countless babies, each of whom benefited from her tender care. In the mid-nineties, Miss Cole returned to her native state of Alabama, to live with a nephew in the town of Red Bay, but she continues her church membership and support here in Arcadia as of this writing.

In July of 1978, the Finance Committee for the new fellowship hall and renovations of the Christian Education Building brought forward a plan that was adopted at a meeting in September, authorizing the borrowing of up to \$200,000 at 9% interest over a 25 year period.

However, 1978 was a year in which the church dealt with what Margaret Hays describes in her volume of church history as "The Unified System For Church Officers Controversy."

Remember that from the earliest of times, the church in Arcadia had switched back and forth from a rotating system of elders and deacons to a non-rotating system. After many years of rotating classes, in 1970, all officers were elected as "permanent" officers. They were permanent for four years, and then rotation returned.

In a unified system, the offices of elder and deacon are in fact combined into the office of elder, though it is often perceived that the office of deacon is eliminated. In a meeting held on October 8, 1978, the congregation voted by 48 for to 38 against to adopt a unified system. The 48 members voting in the affirmative were approximately 20% of the total membership at the time, and thus a "silent majority," which had not been present at the meeting, became a vocal majority.

expressing dissatisfaction with the change. At its November session meeting, the session voted to call the congregation to meet, and ask that the action be rescinded, and officers be elected as previously done. This was enacted promptly.

November of 1978 saw the church's first pictorial directory distributed. The Advent Season was a particularly lively time, with the youth group, under the guidance of Candy Reid, D.C.E. providing "Advent Bags" to each family in the congregation, filled with activities and readings for each day of the season of preparation for our Savior's birth.

The Senior High youth also played a significant part in a mission project that began the 1979 year. A 2¢ per meal offering was begun for the Lenten season, raising money for world hunger to be donated as a part of the Easter Offering, our denominational part of the One Great Hour of Sharing. During the 1970's, the church also supported missionaries to Africa, Reverend and Mrs. William Pruitt. Bill and Virginia Pruitt had visited in 1977 on their way to a mission year in Zaire, and in 1979, returned to tell of their ministry.

On May 20, the congregation rejected a proposal to purchase the duplex building on North Orange Avenue from Trinity United Methodist Church for \$65,000.

After a year of deliberations, the committee studying the Unified System of Officers recommended that the form of government, retaining the board of deacons as well as the session, be retained.

In the 1970's, the church had grown in numbers, in witness, in mission, and in program. There had been many changes. Leadership for those changes had come from the pastor, Robert Pfrangle, and the Director of Christian Education, Candy Reid.

On November 4, 1979, at a congregational meeting, Dr. Pfrangle requested that the pastoral relationship be dissolved on December 31st, so that he could be honorably retired, having reached the age of seventy years.

A resolution by the Session was read at the worship service on December 23rd, and an open house on December 30th honored Bob and Mamie Pfrangle as they completed their loving service to this church, and a decade of change saw as its final change the retirement of the "Commander" of the "ship" of the church. More of the details of Dr. Pfrangle's ministry, before and after his service here, will be found in the chapter devoted to ministers of the church.

Under his leadership, the church grew from 200 members in 1970 to 263 members at the close of 1979. The growth in stewardship in that decade is perhaps more of a sign of the strengthening of the church under Bob Pfrangle's leadership. In 1970, budgeted expenditures were \$34,067.25. The 1980 budget, adopted shortly before Dr. Pfrangle's retirement, amounted to \$101,050.

Robert Abbott Pfrangle was honored by Westminster Presbytery upon his retirement. He had represented the Presbytery at the 1977 General Assembly, serving as Moderator the same year. He had increased the connectional relationship between the local church and the larger church in a positive way, so much so that Elder Bill Williams was elected to represent the church at General Assembly in the mid-seventies, and Wilda Davis was elected as Youth Delegate to General Assembly in the fall of 1979.

At the retirement service, Mike Pooser, speaking for the Arcadia church, made a comment that was quoted years later at Dr. Pfrangle's funeral by Edward Humphries, long time Presbyterian Stated Clerk. Mike said, "He made Presbyterians out of us."

Perhaps the greatest change that took place in the decade of change was this awareness, which included participation by folks of all ages in the Worship and Music and Christian Education conferences at Montreat, North Carolina, in the camps and conference ministry at Cedarkirk, which also began in the seventies, in the frequent visits of A.T. and Doris Brown, staff at Cedarkirk, to the Arcadia church.

At the beginning of the decade, the Arcadia church hosted a meeting of Westminster Presbytery, to "show off" the new sanctuary. Barbecued ribs and swamp cabbage were the menu for the day, and twenty-five years later, people were still talking about the good food and the hospitality of the meeting, and every time that Presbytery has met in Arcadia since, ribs have been served.

In the mid-nineteen seventies, when Charles E.S. Kraemer was moderator of the General Assembly, he was quoted in an interview as saying that Presbyterians resist change more than they do the devil. Despite this truth, a decade of change left the Arcadia church ready for the eighties.

AND YET MORE CHANGE

If the seventies were the decade of change, then the eighties were the decade of even more changes. The year of 1980 began with the staff of Presbytery, namely John McLeod, Charles Davis, and Edward Humphries, Executive, Associate, and Stated Clerk, respectively, filling the pulpit.

Dr. C. Grier Davis, retired President of Montreat, came to serve as interim pastor from February 1 to the end of April. He was followed by Reverend Alex Stenhouse, a retired minister living in Lakeland who had spent many years in service with the Salvation Army.

By mid-year, the search committee had completed its assignment, and submitted the name of William Robert Kendall to be the next pastor of the church, and he was duly elected on July 13. Like his predecessor, he was a tall, imposing figure, and like Dr. Pfrangle, preferred to be called Bob.

Prior to Reverend Kendall's coming here, he had been associate pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Lakeland. That was his first position following ordination, but he had a long career in ministry with Campus Crusade for Christ before that.

Two purchases which would greatly enrich the program of the church were made during the interim between pastors. One, the duplex on Orange Avenue, had been rejected the year before. At the price of \$50,000, it appeared more a bargain than at the \$65,000 figure previously recommended. Sunday School rooms, office space, meeting room space, in that facility has proved invaluable to the church over the past years.

The second purchase was a fifteen passenger Ford van, which increased participation in innumerable events for youth and adults. Transportation to choir and crafts programs, taking groups to meetings and conferences, rallies and workshops, the van served well into the nineties, before being designated for use by the Boy Scout troop. When the Scout troop merged with the one at the Methodist church, the van was donated to Cedarkirk, and was used in the camp and conference ministry to transport canoeists for a year or two. It still serves as a valuable source of replacement parts for the other vans operated by Presbyterian Camp and Conference Ministry.

During the 1970's, the Weekday Pre-School, Choir and Crafts Program, Happy Timers for older adults, Pairs and Spares for younger adults, had all blossomed and flourished under the leadership of Director of Christian Education Candy Reid. In December of 1980, she resigned to move on to a larger work in North Carolina. That most of the programs she was instrumental in founding continue and have increased is sufficient tribute.

Janice O'Connor, a member of the church who had been teaching in the pre-school program, was asked to serve as director of the pre-school in her absence. This began a process of advancement for Janice that continues to this day.

A system of elder and deacon visitation by districts, a new committee structure, new wedding and funeral policies, all were adopted in the first year of Bob Kendall's ministry, as the church organized itself for mission.

Building plans, and detailed financial projections, were prepared as the officers investigated the prospects for the proposed fellowship hall.

At a meeting held on St. Patrick's Day, the Session adopted the following motion:

"That we proceed with the stained glass windows, and that no budgeted moneys be spent on them, that all windows be designed in the Apostles Creed motif, and all windows be done at one time with the money from subscriptions..."

It would be nearly nine years before this project would culminate.

The topic of Reunion with the "northern" church was very much before the church in 1981, so much so that Reverend Kendall chose to pursue it as his project for the completion of his doctoral program at Pittsburgh Seminary. In his work, entitled "A Study of a Southern Presbyterian Church Struggling with Reunion," he interviewed the officers of the church and twenty randomly selected members.

Meeting on May 3, the congregation elected Hugh Rushing, Eugene Wey, and Hugh Martin Elders Emeriti, the last posthumously. Resolutions were read and adopted acknowledging the diligent and faithful service of each.

At the July session meeting, a committee chaired by John S. Maassen, III, brought forward the name of Mary Addie Mewborn to be Director of Christian Education. It was unanimously voted to employ her in that capacity.

1981 also saw Westminster Presbytery, by a vote of 128-47, vote to become a union Presbytery with West Florida Presbytery of the UPCUSA. Thus, the Arcadia church became a member church of a Presbytery connected to both the Northern and Southern streams of American Presbyterianism.

February 15, 1982, saw fourteen adults join the church, with eight affiliate members recognized. Affiliate membership of winter residents had begun in the sixties under Drennon Cottingham's leadership, and continued throughout Dr. Pfrangle's ministry, and on into the '80's.

In the summer of 1982, several youth of the church attended the youth conference at Montreat, and also visited the World's Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee, under the leadership of DCE Mary Mewborn.

November saw ten more new members join the church at a Stated Session meeting. With the normal losses due to death and removal, the church ended 1982 with 297 active members, a record high. Total expenditures for the year almost reached \$120,000, also a new high.

During Reverend Kendall's tenure, each year funds were received and designated for the new building fund, so that a considerable sum was accumulating towards the realization of the long-awaited facility. Most of those funds came from members, but annual gifts from the Louie Morgan Foundation were also of a tremendous help. Those foundation grants for building and maintenance continue to the present time.

The calendar year 1983 saw Reverend Kendall become Doctor Kendall, with the completion of his dissertation and the awarding of his Doctor of Ministry degree from Pittsburgh Seminary.

Members continued to be added to the church at almost every monthly meeting of the Session. At the June 27, 1983 Stated Meeting the following motion was adopted: "that it would not be appropriate to renew the contract of Miss Mary Mewborn, DCE, at the conclusion of her contract year and further that Miss Mewborn be afforded an opportunity to tender her resignation. That resignation was shortly forthcoming. It was also moved at that meeting that Janice O'Connor be hired as Interim Coordinator of Christian Education, on a half time basis.

Janice O'Connor would have the "interim" struck from that title, and would serve the church as its educator for the next ten years. During that time, she would attend workshops, seminars, training events, and increase her knowledge and abilities, to become one much in demand in Florida presbyteries and indeed through the synod as an expert in early childhood education. Her work with the pre-school remained her first love, but the work with other educational programs of the church did not suffer under her leadership and direction. Her husband, Bob, who served the church as an elder during her tenure, was transferred by the State Department of Corrections, with which he made his career, and Janice left Arcadia to join him and their children in a new life in 1993.

During the years that Bob Kendall was pastor here, his wife, Joan, was a very active leader in the Women of the Church. In 1983, she headed the Fall Festival. This event was a very successful arts and crafts fair that raised funds for a variety of projects over the years, including furnishings for the church office, for children's Sunday school rooms, as well as programs such as Project Hope, our local senior citizens support program.

During 1983, Southwest Florida Union Presbytery undertook a study of its boundaries. The Arcadia Session studied the issue, and communicated its desires to the Presbytery Council in a letter dated October 25. That letter urged reconsideration of the boundaries between the proposed new Presbyteries, to a line following the Manatee-Hillsborough County line. Prophetically, when the creation of two new Presbyteries occurred several years later, that was the line that was followed.

Incidentally, the big news in Christendom in 1983 caused the Presbytery to drop the word "union" from its name, for at long last, Presbyterians North and South were re-united into one denomination, now known as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) This marked the third denomination in the history of the Arcadia church. Founded in the old Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, then moving to the Presbyterian Church, United States, it now celebrated the reunion of those divided long before its birth by the bitterness of the Civil War.

The church had been a member church of South Florida Presbytery, Florida Presbytery, St. John's Presbytery, Westminster Presbytery, Southwest Florida Union Presbytery, and now simply Southwest Florida Presbytery. On January 1, 1990, it would become a part of Peace River Presbytery.

Synod connections have also changed, from the Synod of the South of the old U.S.A. church, to the Synod of Florida of the P.C.U.S. Presently, we are a part of the Synod of the South Atlantic, but do not be surprised if that does not change before too many years pass. The present synod includes all presbyteries in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

After such an eventful year as 1983, it is not surprising that when one reviews the minutes of the Session and Congregation for 1984, not much noteworthy took place.

All that would change in 1985. But before 1984 ended, the church suffered a great loss. Gordon McSwain, M.D., the first "little boy" baptized in the sanctuary of First Presbyterian Church, died in December. A life-long member of the church, a deacon, and elder, a choir member, he was the son of Dr. and Mrs. D.L. McSwain. His mother and father before him had been leaders in the church, his wife, Lew, had been the organist for forty-five years or so at the time of his death, and his daughter, Genie Martin, had been choir director for more than twenty years.

The night before he died, "Dr. Mac" had sung with the choir in its annual "dress rehearsal" for the Christmas concert at G. Pierce Wood State Hospital. He had spent a pleasant evening afterward at his daughter's home, eating chili, and discussing DeSoto County history with long-time friends and fellow choir members, including Bill Williams and Rusty Garner. Thus, 1984 ended on a sad note.

At a called meeting of the Session held on February 10, 1985, Dr. Kendall requested that the congregation be called to meet two weeks from that day, to act upon his request that the pastoral relationship be dissolved so that he might accept the call of Westminster Church, New Port Richey, Florida. The congregation complied with the request on February 24th.

The next evening, at a Stated Session meeting, it was voted to secure the services of the Reverend Rodger B. Sillars as interim pastor.

Rodger Sillars, a small, dapper, astute man, and his lovely wife Esther, began ministry in Arcadia in March, and remained until the pulpit was filled in November. Reverend Sillars had taken early retirement from a large church in Buffalo, New York and had come to live in Lakeland, Florida, where he remains as of this writing. In retirement, he specialized in interim pastorates in Southwest Florida. Indeed, at the time that Bob Kendall was called to Westminster, New Port Richey, he was serving there, so in essence, they swapped pulpits.

During his time in Arcadia, Rodger Sillars saw it as his task to prepare the way for the one who would follow him, and did so in a most excellent way. He instituted the practice of having each Sunday's sermon duplicated so that those who were absent from worship could pick it up the next Sunday, which continues to this day.

Reverend Sillars served as interim at Lehigh Acres after his tenure here, and as interim Stated Clerk of Southwest Florida Presbytery when Edward Humphries retired. He praised the Arcadia church publicly as having the best music program of any church he had ever served, and once described it as "the only church in the Presbytery that knows what it really means to be a church." Sadly, Esther Sillars died in 1996, after a long illness.

A Pulpit Nominating Committee was elected, with Mike Pooser as chair, and the Church Information Form was completed and mailed to the Atlanta office of the General Assembly.

The old computer system in Atlanta was being shut down so that all records could be transferred to the new General Assembly offices in Louisville, Kentucky, but a large batch of Personal Information Forms of ministers who were computer matches with this church were sent out in the final days of the Atlanta office.

One of the forms that came was that of Ted Land, then serving as pastor of the Montgomery, West Virginia Church, and the writer of this history. Needless to say, the Land family visited Arcadia in August, 1985, the congregation met and unanimously called me to come on September 15, and the Presbytery approved my coming on September 26. My ministry here began on November 1.

I am forever grateful to the Lord God Almighty for my calling here, to the members of the search committee who brought me here, and to the large delegation from this church which came to Forest Hills Church in Tampa to welcome their new pastor to Florida.

And now it's my turn to write about the history that I helped make.