

Historical Facts

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF KEY WEST, FLORIDA

As the 800-plus residents of the Island of Key West prepared to observe the birth of Christ in the year 1842, the First Baptist Church was born.

The organizational meeting was held in the home of a Mr. Breaker who had contacted a number of people of Baptist beliefs and also some unaffiliated persons who had a history of Baptist background or who had expressed a preference for the Baptist faith.

The date was December 20, 1842, Tuesday, and the first worship services were conducted on Christmas Day, Sunday, with the Rev. Charles Lewis conducting the services.

Early in 1843, after his ordination in Mobile, Alabama, Mr. Breaker became pastor of the church.

The church became affiliated with the Massachusetts Baptist Assembly in 1843 and was a part of this brotherhood until they became a part of the newly organized Southern Baptist Convention in 1845.

In 1876 Rev. Wood, a retired U. S. Army Colonel, who had been called to the ministry after his retirement, came to Key West on a visit and accepted a call to become pastor of the church. It was under Rev. Wood's leadership that the church established the first mission work in Cuba since both the Home and Foreign Mission Boards were unable to help with the work. Rev. Diaz, a Cuban Christian became the first pastor in Cuba with the Havana Opera House being purchased as the first house of worship. Today Home Missionaries, Dr. Caudill and Rev. Fite remain imprisoned in Cuba, but many Cuban Christians are still strong in the faith.

In 1886, a conflagration which destroyed a major portion of the city completely burned the church building. The church was also to suffer loss by fire in 1956.

Another difficult blow came in the 1909 hurricane which did extensive damage to the church buildings and, unable to make repairs, the church sold the property to the Home Mission Board and remained a mission until 1922.

First Baptist Church has sponsored mission work at Marathon, presently at Big Coppitt and earlier a Spanish-speaking work that was to grow into the White Street Baptist Church. This church has also given the property for the work at Big Pine.

The present educational building was constructed in 1958 replacing the building destroyed by fire in 1956.

The church has also purchased two dwellings on the corner of Fleming and Bahama Streets and one on Simonton Street.

Our present pastor came to us in December 1967 from the Palm Heights Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas.

Note: This omits the involvement of L.F. Breaker's work in starting the 1st Bapt. Church of Key West.