

MIS INFORMATION!

LEWIS FREDERICK WAS ORDAINED BY THE
CHURCH IN CAMDEN, S.C. TO PREACH & WITH
HIS SON J. H. BREAKER, HE STARTED THE
1ST BAPT. CHURCH.

THE BAPTIST CHURCH

Key West, Florida

In the minutes of the great revival year of 1842 of the Stonington Union Association appears the following letter from the church in Key West, Florida:

"Key West, Florida - In the month of October last (1842) a number of brethren of the Second and Third Baptist Churches, in Groton, together with some of the Methodist friends, were providentially directed to this Island, a place of much iniquity. Bro. C. C. Lewis, a member of the Third Church in Groton, soon commenced preaching, which, in connection with the labors of his associates, was soon blest with the accompanying influences of the Holy Spirit, and many were turned to the Lord. Bro. Lewis was ordained by the brethren, not by a line of succession as claimed by some, but by higher authority, and soon had the privilege of baptizing believers in Christ for the first time on this Island. On the 11th of March 1843, a covenant and articles of faith were adopted and the organization took place as a visible church of our Lord Jesus Christ. May heaven smile upon this church continually."

From Groton, Connecticut, 1705 - 1905 by Charles R. Stark; p. 185.

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In 1847 it was reported to the association (Stonington Union Association) that slavery existed in the church at Key West and Deacon Albert Edgcomb and Revs. A. G. Palmer and Erastus E. Denison were appointed a committee to inquire into the matter and report at the next annual meeting. The committee reported in 1848 and the record states:

"After a somewhat protracted discussion (though in a Christian spirit) the following resolution was offered and adopted, and ordered printed in the minutes of the association:

"Resolved - That in view of the fact as presented in the report of the Committee that slavery does exist in the church at Key West, and that the holding of slaves does not disqualify an individual for membership therein, said church be dropped from membership in this Association."

Ibid p. 424-5

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"The earliest recorded data of any Baptists meeting for worship in Key West, was on December 20, 1842, when 'agreeably to appointment, after prayer and deliberation, the brethren met at the residence of J. H. Breaker for the purpose of ordaining Brother Charles C. Lewis to the gospel ministry. Prayer was offered by Brother Breaker on behalf of the candidate, during which the laying on of hands was performed by Brothers Elam Eldredge, J. A. Wolfe and O.T. Braman. Charge was then given by Brothers Breaker and Asa Sawyer, and the right hand of fellowship by all the brethren present.' "

"This method of ordination was not strictly in accord with Baptist usage. After leaving Key West, Rev. Mr. Lewis was pastor of the Asia Minor Church, as it was locally designated, but properly, the Second Baptist Church of North Stonington, Conn. At the first meeting, this church acquainted the North Stonington Baptist Association with the manner of Mr. Lewis' ordination, and inquired if a reordination would be necessary. The old fathers after mature consideration, decided that Mr. Lewis was scripturally and regularly ordained, and thus placed the stamp of regularity on the acts of the little band of Baptists on the island, and established Mr. Lewis' title to being the first pastor of the Baptist church in Key West.

As there were no Baptist churches in Florida with which the Key West church could be associated, they applied for membership in the North Stonington, Conn., Association, and were willingly received. For many years they annually corresponded with this association, until it was ascertained that the church in Key West had a member who owned slaves, and they were notified that if they permitted slave owners to be members of their church, they could not continue their membership in the association. The Baptists here saw no reason to exclude from membership a person who was holding property sanctioned by the constitution and laws of the United States and the State of Florida, and upon their refusing to comply with this demand, were dropped from the North Stonington Union Association.

Subsequently the church sent Pastor-elect J. H. Breaker to Mobile for regular ordination. On December 23d of the same year they met for covenant meeting at the residence of Mr. J. H. Breaker, who was chosen clerk. Articles of faith and covenant were read, and ten persons examined and received for baptism, Catherine and Lavinia Johnson, John Pent, William Richardson, John Park, Reason Duke, Druscilla Duke, Mary Arledge, Martha B. Arledge and Susan Sands, who were baptized on Sunday, Christmas Day, 1842. This was the first baptism by immersion performed on the island.

The formal constitution of the church took place March 11, 1843. Six persons, members of churches in Connecticut, Mr. J. H. Breaker, Mr. Ben Sawyer, Mr. O. T. Braman, Mr. J. A. Wolfe, Mr. Asa Sawyer and Mr. Elam Eldredge, with several others, solemnly entered into a covenant as the Key West Baptist Church.

The first celebration of the Lord's Supper by the Baptists occurred March 26, 1843. There is no record of the election of any pastor at this time, but the records state that 'in April 1843, Elder Lewis left the church to go north on account of the ill health of his wife, and the church was without a pastor.'

From Key West, the Old and the New by Jefferson B. Browne; published by the Record Co. at St. Augustine, Florida in 1912; p. 43-44.

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