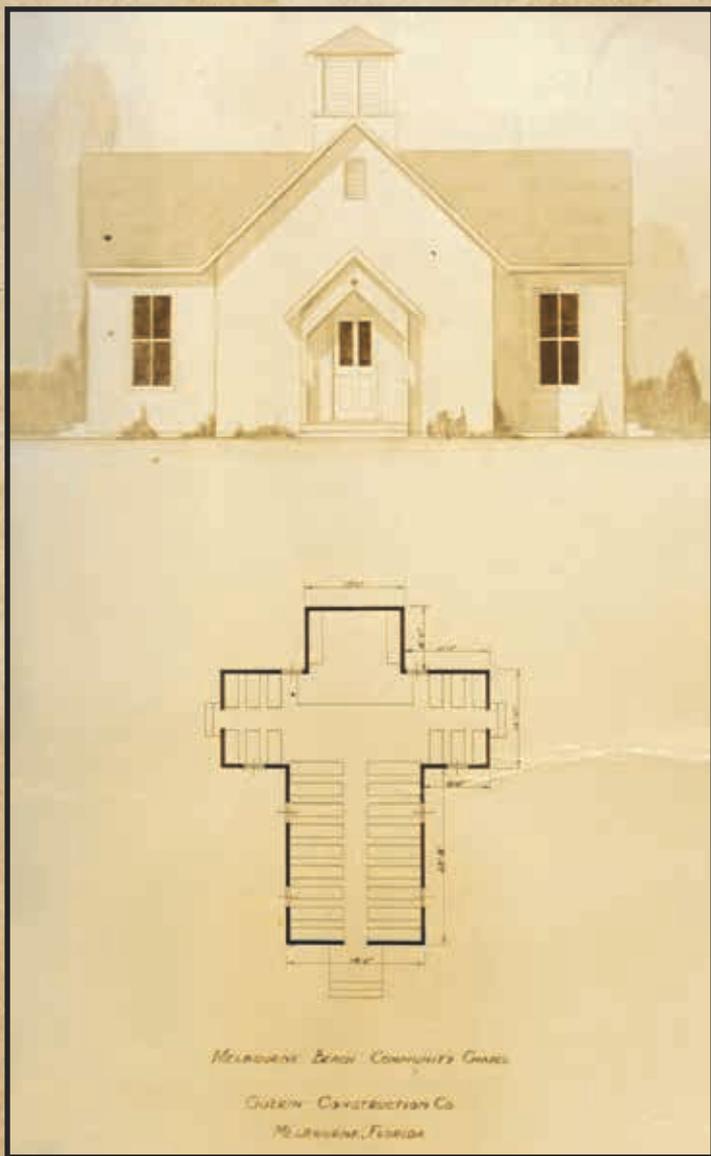


# The Community Chapel of Melbourne Beach Celebrating 125 Years



In 1889, residents of Melbourne Beach met and joined together to form The Melbourne Beach Union Sabbath School. They held their meetings in the first house built in Melbourne Beach, Myrtle Cottage, which was the private home of Miss Grace Cummings and her mother. It was decided that the Sunday School would cross all denominational lines and become non-denominational. It was the intention of the Sunday School members to have a more permanent home.



In 1890, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Whiting donated the land for a church at the present site. They stipulated that the land would revert back to their family if the Chapel ever aligned itself with any Sectional or Denominational Church. Miss Grace Cummings collected \$200 from the members to purchase the lumber to construct the Chapel building. The building of the Chapel was completed in January 1892 under the supervision of Rufus Beaujean, whose great grandson, Dennis Meehan, is still a very active member of the congregation.

The first service in the Chapel, known as The Melbourne Beach Sunday School was held January 10, 1892, making it the oldest church on the barrier island. This service was led by S.M. King who was the elected superintendent of the Sunday School. The assistant superintendent was Mr. Henry Whiting. Secretary and Treasurer was Miss Grace Cummings. There were 24 people at the first service and 72 cents was collected in the offering. Services were held in the afternoons during the winter months with mainland ministers rotating their services.

Life was hard for these pioneers who settled among scrub palmettos, wild animals, snakes and mosquitoes. Transportation to Melbourne Beach was by ferry and a barge across the Indian River. A handcar on tracks the length of Ocean Avenue provided transportation to the beach. There was no indoor plumbing; water was supplied from tanks which collected rainwater or artesian well water. The Chapel had no stove to provide heat, and two weeks after the opening service, cold weather forced the worshippers back to Myrtle Cottage. The Chapel had no screens on the windows until 1895, and the congregation had to endure mosquito swarms and other bugs or meet in Myrtle Cottage. Sunday School minutes reported, "nine members of the M.B.S.S. met in the Chapel this morning, but the mosquitos had taken such complete possession, it was deemed advisable to adjourn to 'Myrtle Cottage', where the windows and doors were well protected."

On November 28, 1892, the congregation paid E. C. Cummings \$10 for an organ. During the early years of the Chapel, they were fortunate to have 3 ladies who could play the organ; Mrs. R.W. Beaujean, Miss Sue Hopkins, and Miss Grace Cummings. At one service it was

reported, “there was no one to play the accompaniment of the hymns; and the singing, in consequence, was not very edifying.”

In 1894, Miss Cummings was appointed a committee of one to purchase a lamp, table and chairs. In July, 1896, the trustees estimated the cost of a ceiling for the Chapel to be \$100. Miss Eliza J. Lee, a friend of the Sunday School, offered to donate \$70 for that purpose, providing the Sunday School would assume the payment of the balance. The ceiling was finished on September 20. On March 27, 1898, the Constitution and By-Laws of the Chapel were approved.

In 1924, a hurricane knocked the Chapel off its foundation. The repairs and the placement of the building on concrete piles were to cost \$2,000. This was a sum the Chapel could not afford. The Board of Trustees and its chairman, Eva Sweet-Winter conveyed the Chapel and its property to the town of Melbourne Beach via a quit-claim deed. Temporarily, seasonal worship services and Bible studies were conducted at the Women’s Club, now the Community Center. In 1927, services were resumed in the Chapel. In 1937, the Town of Melbourne Beach deeded the Chapel back to the Community Chapel of Melbourne Beach, a Florida corporation.

The Reverend Walter Lanphear became the first salaried minister in 1929, although he only conducted services during the winter months. Dr. Vincent R. Booth succeeded Rev. Lanphear. Dr. Booth served from 1939-1943. During Rev. Booth’s ministry major renovation was made to the Chapel. The original Chapel measured 24 feet long and 17 feet 3 inches wide with a seating capacity of 70. Transepts to the east and west and a Chancel to the north was added, forming a Latin Cross. This addition doubled the seating capacity to 140. The interior walls and

ceiling of the original Chapel were covered with knotty pine, stained and varnished to match the new addition. There was a rededication of the reconstructed Community Chapel of Melbourne Beach on Easter Sunday April 5, 1942.

Miss Trowbridge, a retired school teacher, taught Sunday School. Her Sunday School class took as a project to raise money to buy a bell for the Chapel. They raised \$50.00. That money was set aside until there was enough money to purchase a bell. It wasn't until the 1940's that the children's dream of a bell for the chapel was realized.



The ministry of each retired minister serving the chapel brought fresh perspectives and fulfillment to the congregation. While their tenures were all too brief, their great wealth of experience have been and are an incalculable asset to the Chapel and the community. Rev. William Sanford followed Dr. Booth from 1943 -1944.

Dr. John Dunning served from 1944-1951. During his service, electrical lighting was added to the Chapel and sidewalks were laid. Dr. Alfred Randall served from 1951-1952. Dr. John Gordon was minister from 1952-1955. The Chancel window was dedicated in 1955 to Mrs. Eva Sweet-Winter. Dr. Frederick Stamm was minister from 1956-1957. In 1956, Mrs. Harriet Irvine gave the house and property across Ocean Avenue to the Chapel. This property eventually became the site for the Roy M. Terry Center for Christian Fellowship.

Dr. James M. Robinson served from 1957-1966. During Dr. Robinson's tenure, leaks from flood waters and termites prompted the Trustees to launch a "Save the Chapel Campaign". These funds were used to raise the Chapel two feet above the existing level, by constructing

a new block foundation to support the walls of the Chapel. In addition, 60 loads of fill dirt were brought in, beams were replaced or repaired, entrance steps reset and sidewalks raised where necessary. Dr. Robinson began communion services on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Envelopes were introduced for church tithes rather than



random weekly donations. During this time air conditioning was added.

After Dr. Robinson's resignation and death, Reverend Claude Fausnaugh served from 1966-1969. The 75th anniversary of the Chapel was celebrated at the Melbourne Beach Community Center in January 1967. A Communion table was placed in the Chapel in Dr. Robinson's memory. The wooden Bible rack for displaying the Bible on the Communion Table was made by Rev. Fausnaugh.

A robing room was added to the building and a new organ was installed memorializing Dr. Robinson, Mrs. Chalmers and Mrs. Eva Sweet Winter. Mrs. Winter served as a trustee from 1913 -1955, was the organist and was the person who loaned the money to the Chapel in the "Save the Chapel" campaign. Continuing renovations included restrooms.

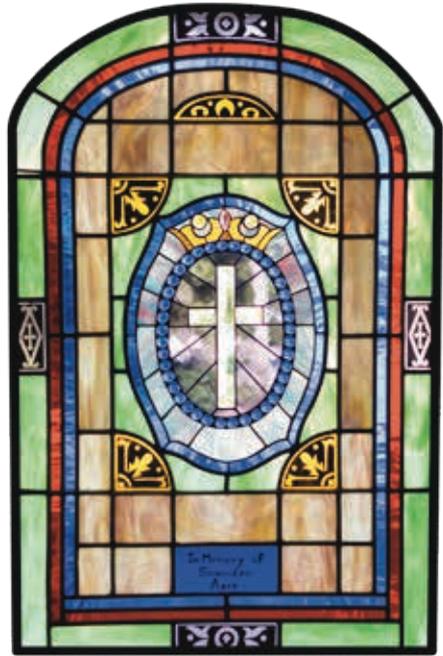
In 1969, the Chapel trustees called Reverend Jason Harbert to the Chapel. In 1979, the Hood family donated four stained glass windows for the nave (the original part of the Chapel). Along the east wall is the "Woman at the Well" and "The Lost Sheep". On the west wall is "Madonna" and "Christ at Gethsemane". To memorialize Jason and Barbara Harbert, "The Harbert Memorial Tower Carillon" was given by their daughter.

In 1981, Rev. Arthayer Sanborn was appointed interim minister and served through January 1982. A unique and greatly enjoyed feature of his ministry was his information about the origins and history of the hymns used in service.

Retired Chaplain of the Air Force Academy and Chief of the Chaplains of the United States Air Force, Major General Roy M. Terry, conducted his first service

at the Chapel on February 7, 1982. Under his ministry, year-round services were initiated. He also initiated Maundy Thursday Communion service, the Advent Wreath with candle lighting, and the Bible study preceding church service for the weeks before Christmas and Easter. He chose the theme of the stained glass Gospel windows in the transepts which were dedicated April 28, 1985.

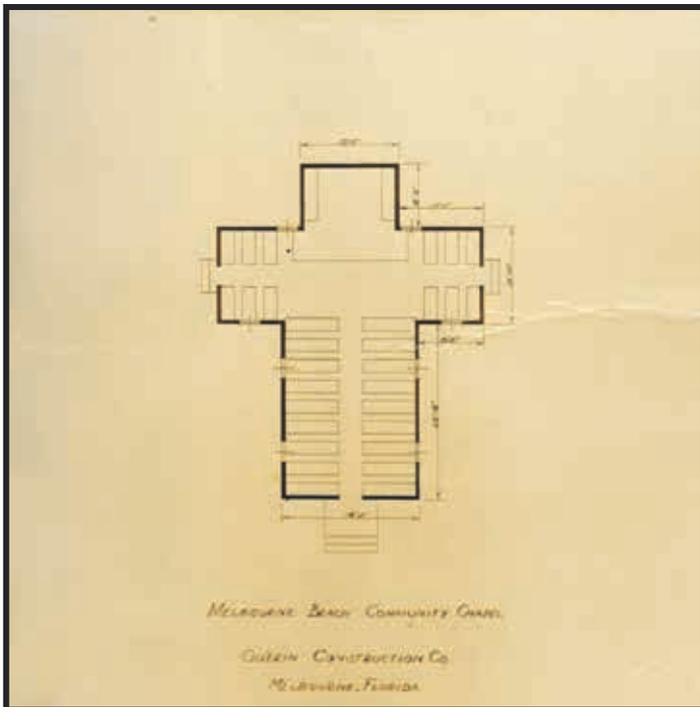
In 1987, vinyl siding was added to the exterior of the Chapel because the original pine clapboards would no longer sustain paint. Before becoming ill, Chaplain Terry's dream was to build a fellowship hall. Dr. Paul C. Allen, Associate Pastor, performed services at the Chapel during Chaplain Terry's incapacitation and death. Dr. Allen declined the appointment as pastor because of his age. He continued as the Associate Pastor for many years.



On February 5, 1989, Lt. Col John Rasberry, retired Air Force Chaplain became the youngest chaplain at age 58 to assume duties at the Chapel. In 1990, Chaplain Rasberry wrote to the congregation, "In our church, we value the freedom of the individual which we experience in the Holy Spirit. We feel comfortable in expressing different beliefs, ideas, and opinions. No one feels pressure

to accept a particular theological tenet or specific scripture interpretation. We agree on the basics of the Christian Faith, but differ on the peripheral matters. Yet, there is unity in our diversity.”

The Lund property to the north of the Chapel had been acquired to build a fellowship hall. Due to town codes, the property could not be used for that purpose. In 1990, as a condition of the sale of the Lund property, a wall was built on the north boundary line of the Chapel property as a privacy barrier. It was designed and built by members and friends of the Chapel. The design incorporated the shape of a Latin cross, which reflects the shape of the interior of the Chapel.



January 10, 1992 marked a joyous occasion for the Chapel – its 100th anniversary! Chaplain Terry’s dream had become a reality. The dedication of the Roy M. Terry Center for Christian Fellowship, across Ocean Avenue from the Chapel, was the first event of the Centennial Celebration. The building was a culmination of several years of efforts to secure a place for the congregation to become a more cohesive unit providing Sunday School classrooms, office space and a fellowship room. The completion of the Terry Center was due in large part to a generous contribution from Mildred Ziegenhein. The celebration continued throughout the year with special services and social events. The highlights included the publication of a special edition of a Chapel history and pictorial directory, an historical pageant, and a dedication of the Chapel’s placement in the National Register of Historic Places.



With the new found gathering space came an expansion of traditions and activities. A birthday party is held every January to celebrate the founding of the Chapel on January 10, 1892. In the spring the community looks forward to the annual Yard Sale. Members enjoy the fellowship as they collect, sort and price items in prepa-

ration, but it also provides an outreach and service to the neighbors. The Lenten season, with special Good Friday and Easter services, brings a special time to rededicate and to celebrate the Resurrection with the community. An Open House is held at the Chapel each Melbourne Beach Founder's Day. A patriotic program marks the Fourth of July. Decorating for the Advent season helps prepare for the special Christmas Eve services which are enjoyed by many in the community.

The reach of the Chapel goes beyond its walls into the community including the sandwich ministry for local day workers, weekly food collection for the Sharing Center, and dinners for The Haven, a home for abused and neglected children. The Chapel also provides monetary support for many local charitable organizations. Assistance has been provided to many communities across the U.S. and internationally for natural disasters and missionaries.

The Sunday School children participate in the annual Melbourne Beach Christmas Parade, collect money for missions with a Penny Drive, and serve a Pancake Breakfast to the congregation. The Chapel also sponsors a chapter of Young Life for junior high students in the community.

In 1994 the Women of the Chapel purchased a new carillon for the Chapel. It sends out hymns to the neighborhood at noon and evening and has since been modernized to include digital recordings. The windows in the east and west transept doors and the front door were dedicated in 1996. The door windows in the transepts were designed to complement the four Gospel windows. The front door window symbolizes the angel as the defender of Heaven and the Christian faith. A new organ was installed in 1999, made possible by a large donation from the Women

of the Chapel.

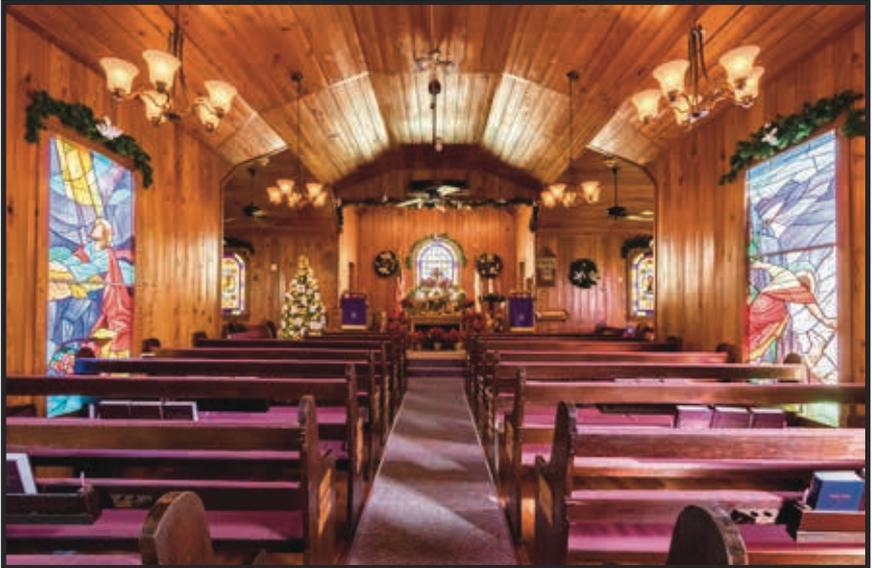
The house that had been the “birthplace” of the Chapel was vacant for a number of years before burning down. The Chapel pursued purchasing the Myrtle Cottage property located to the east across Pine Street to add parking which had become a major issue. It took much effort to purchase, resolve a property line dispute, design and obtain permits, but the parking lot was finally opened for use in 2003. A Florida Heritage Site plaque stands on Ocean Avenue to commemorate the Myrtle Cottage lot’s significance to the town and the Chapel.

On January 1, 2000, the world entered a new millennium and the Chapel began a new era. Chaplain John Rasberry decided to retire. He and his wife, Joy, had served faithfully for eleven years. Through the efforts of the search committee, Chaplain John Secret and his wife, Pat, began their ministry. Lt. Colonel Secret brought with him his experience as an Air Force Chaplain following in the tradition of General Terry and Lt. Colonel Rasberry.

In 2004 the decision was made to do some major restoration and renovation to the inside of the Chapel following the reroofing the year before. Much of the original wood flooring, which had been carpeted, was restored and refinished to its original beauty with new carpeting installed where needed. The pews, which are the original ones, were reupholstered. The mountings of the stained glass windows had deteriorated so they were tightened and waterproofed. Also, major tree trimming and new landscaping were accomplished.

Just as the newly refinished pews were brought over from the Terry Center and reinstalled, Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne hit Melbourne Beach. The 112 year old Chapel stood tall sustaining only minor damage;

however, the Terry Center suffered catastrophic damage. The flat roof failed and consequently almost everything on both floors was damaged by the water or subsequent mold. Most of the valuable artifacts and vital records were rescued, but the inside was totally destroyed. After a year of hard work on the part of so many in the congregation, the Terry Center reconstruction was completed and was



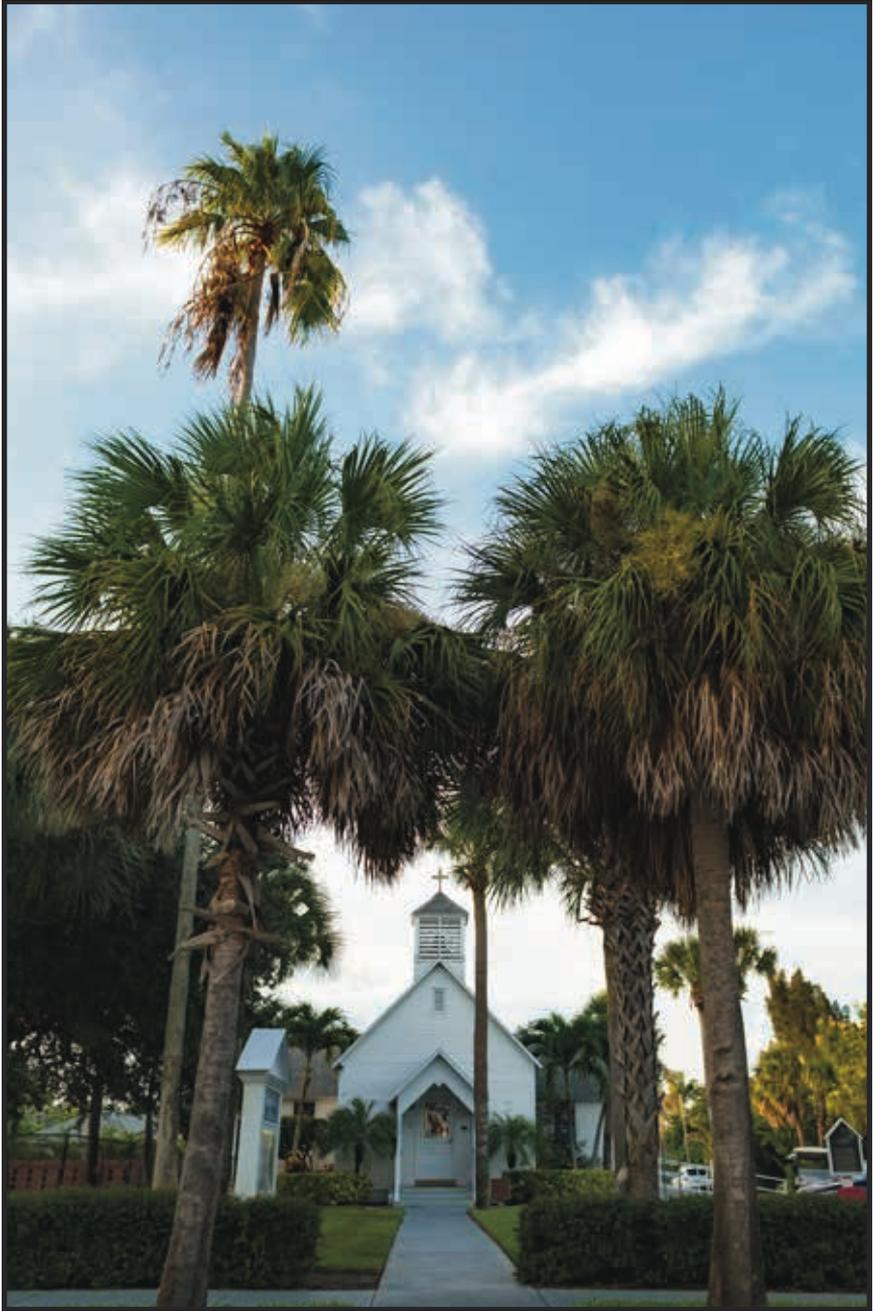
rededicated on September 18, 2005.

Right after the hurricanes, out of the need to find creative ways to continue the mission of the Chapel, the Women's Community Bible Study was started. Pat Secret enlisted many from the congregation to present a series that touched many women in the community. Because of overwhelming interest in the Bible Study, it is held in the town's Community Center. It has continued on as a special tradition of the Chapel's presence for many women in our area. During the 125th celebration the Bible Study will have its twelfth season.

In 2012 with a gift from the Pauline Brown Trust the last of the long overdue updates to the Chapel building were completed. The two bathrooms and bride's room were remodeled in keeping with the interior décor. The robing room was refurbished in 2015 to provide the final piece of updating. Two new signs at the Chapel and Terry Center have helped make the community aware of ongoing activities.

The Chapel and congregation have faced many transitions throughout its 125 years. As Chaplain Secret wrote,

*“The enduring commitment over the years of an emerging faithful core continues to make the chapel a vibrant place where God’s presence and power is experienced. Many are drawn initially by its history and architecture, but soon are touched by the closeness and love of the people and the exalting of Christ. In a transitional time of cultural change and significant economic downturn, God continues to meet the need through the ministering gifts and servant leadership of His people...the vision of in-reach and out-reach has not diminished. The Lord continues to raise up those to serve and lead in the body ministry that edifies one-another.”*



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