



St. Andrews Episcopal Church  
Little River, Florida 1898–1910

# a Little Story about a Little Church on a Little River

*by Robert Adams Burr*

With unbridled optimism, a handful of pioneer families set out to bring an Anglican church to their emerging settlement of Little River before the turn of a new century.



standing in front of St. Andrews Church in 1903 (left to right) were the Burr children, Margaret and Dick in front; Mrs. B.C. DuPont, Mrs. E.D.V. Burr and Mrs. Amos B. Cutler in the middle; Mrs. T.A. Winfield, Mary Douthit, Mrs. Littlefield and the minister Mr. Cameron.

The story of St. Andrews Episcopal Church is brief, as was its existence on the open prairie at 80th street and NE 2nd Avenue near the banks of Little River. Short-lived, but demonstrative of the spirit and resolve of these hearty settlers who endeavored to bring civility and a sense of community to an otherwise desolate South Florida.

The evolution of Dade County from pioneer frontier to international metropolis begins with the establishment of the first schools, churches, stores, businesses and homesteads necessary to sustain settlement. Laura Conrad Patton wrote of the early history of the Episcopal Church for Tequesta, the Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida in 1964.

According to her account, among the first church buildings in Dade County was Lemon City Methodist Church at NW 61 Street (an Indian trail) and NW 5th Avenue. The first service was given on the second Sunday in April, 1893.

Also in 1893, the Episcopal Church sent Bishop William Gray to Miami in order to canvas the population and begin the work of building missions and churches. He was the guest of Mrs. Julia Tuttle during his brief stay. He held his first service at the Lemon City School on the corner of NW 60th and 4th Avenue on April 30 of that year, including a baptism, a confirmation and a celebration of Holy Communion. The result of his efforts were the establishment of Dade County's first three Episcopal congregations: Coconut Grove, Miami and Lemon City.

The Reverend Doctor Gilbert Higgs of Key West, serving as the Archdeacon of Monroe, Lee, and Dade Counties also made frequent visits, hosted by Mrs. Kirk Monroe, Miss McFarland and Mrs. Tuttle. On the evening of January 31 of 1894, he visited Lemon City, accompanied by Mr. Gary Niles, returning for services again February 4th. Bishop Gray returned to Lemon City again on March 8, 1985, baptizing two children and confirming one adult.

The first recorded marriage by an Episcopal clergyman in Dade County occurred in Lemon City on February 15th, 1896 at the Hotel Connolly between Eugene Lee and Marion McDonald by Bishop Gray. Episcopal services had been held infrequently, sometimes at the Methodist Church in Lemon City, whenever a clergyman could visit.

By December of 1897, regular Sunday evening services were being held in Lemon City by Rev. James O. S. Huntington at the old school house, attracting about 50 people on average. As the railroad stop nearby was named Little River, so the name of the mission was changed from Lemon City to Little River.

Also in December of 1897, the Trinity Church building in Miami was framed and almost ready for services. With no glass in the windows, the congregation placed cheesecloth in the window frames. They like to refer to their building as the “Church of the Holy Cheesecloth.”

On January 30, 1898 Bishop Gray returned to Little River Church to confirm nine persons, among them, Julia Tuttle. At this time, initial efforts to organize the Episcopal church began at Little River. Two lots were donated by William I. Peters and Iona Peters at NE 2nd Avenue and 80th Street, just south of the river, thanks to the energetic enthusiasm of Mr. and Mrs. Turner Ashley Winfield, stalwart supporters of the church building effort. The Winfields financed the construction of this first building, and were later repaid by the congregation and friends of the church.

In May of 1898, Bishop Gray visited Miami principally to sort out the finances of the Trinity mission. On May 26, he sent a messenger to Little River to inquire as to the progress of the church building and whether it was ready to accommodate a minister and congregation for services. Mrs. Winfield replied with an invitation urging him to come right along — the building will be ready. She immediately hired a carpenter, fetched her husband and Mr. Edward DeVere Burr and the three of them spent the day finishing the pews and installing little back rests and other finishing details. Services were held on Sunday, May 28 — and so the Episcopal Church in South Florida celebrated the occupation of its second building.

Edward Burr’s wife Lucy was an ardent supporter of the church and the Burr children, Margaret, Dick and Mary, grew up with the fledgling congregation. The donation of the first altar was a small, elegant table brought from Virginia by Lucy when she arrived in Florida in 1893. This lovely piece of my great-grandmother’s furniture is still in my home today.

Church bazaars were a traditional method of earning funds to improve and maintain the church. Lucy and daughter Margaret were talented and prolific producers of arts and crafts suited to such endeavors.

In 1902, the church property at Little River was given to the Missionary Jurisdiction of South Florida and the name of the church was changed once again — from Little River to St. Andrews.

In 1903, Reverend Dwight Frederic Cameron from Geneva, Switzerland was placed in charge of missions around Miami. At 28 years old, he was the first young man to serve the Episcopal Church in South Florida, his predecessors being men well into their age of retirement.

The old photo of the St. Andrews, with Reverend Cameron standing beside some of the first families of the church, was taken in 1903 before the hurricane of 1904 destroyed the building. After that tragic event, services were held in the McDonald Hotel in Little River while the dedicated congregation set about rebuilding. By the 15th of August, 1904, the lumber necessary to reconstruct the church had arrived.

An urgency was created by the imminent wedding of Senie Douthit, who insisted on being married in the Episcopal Church. The walls went up quickly, the floors were in place and window openings were prepared. The glass had not arrived, so palm fronds were tacked across the openings in a decorative manner. White sheets were used to cover the isles and the rostrum. On October 25, 1904, Father Fuller performed the ceremony.

Another hurricane in 1906 further damaged the church building, blowing the structure off its foundation. While some urged the church be moved to a new location, Bishop Gray made the decision to put the building back on its foundation as no funds were available for other options.

Bishop Gray was present on March 12, 1910 for the last service at St. Andrews. The upstart neighborhood of Buena Vista was growing rapidly and its new Church, Holy Cross, was growing in a robust manner. The St. Andrews building remained in a state of dis-repair until the decision was made to bring it down on March 23, 1912.

Some of the Episcopal pioneer families from St. Andrews at Little River began attending services at Holy Cross Episcopal Church on NE 36th Street, including the Burr family. Lucy and Margaret attended faithfully every week for decades -- Lucy until her death in 1950 and Margaret until she passed away in 1971.

Other families in the Arch Creek neighborhood gathered together to start the Union Congregational Church in Arch Creek in 1912, which remains to this day the first and oldest church in the area.