**How did the Episcopal Church come to Florida?**

The Diocese of Florida has its origin in the raising of the American flag over Florida in St. Augustine on July 17, 1821. The next day the town fathers got together and wrote to Charleston for “an academy, a library and a Protestant church.” We don’t know if a school marm or a librarian ever came, but while the Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries declined to come south in the middle of a yellow fever epidemic, a 61-year-old Episcopalian missionary named Andrew Fowler answered the call. When he arrived in October, they refused to land the ship. The Rev. Fowler demanded to be put ashore where he held services the next day and began giving last rights to the dying, both Protestant and Catholic.

**How did Trinity Parish end up on the plaza across from the Catholic Basilica?**

The first American mayor, James Grant Forbes, had grown up in St. Augustine during the English period (1763-1783). His dad, the Rev. John Forbes, was the Church of England vicar the entire 20 years of English occupation. The building they worshipped in was taken apart brick by brick by the Catholics when the British left and re-assembled on the Rev. Forbes’ homestead as today’s Basilica. When you take the Basilica tour the tour guide will tell you that the Episcopalians built upon the site of their bishop’s house and they would like the land back. Mayor Forbes effectively said to the Catholics, “You took *my* dad’s house for *your* church, so I’m taking *your* dad’s house for *our* church.” (You can’t make this stuff up.) Trinity has been the recipient of two acts of U.S. Congress giving Trinity the land on the Plaza in perpetuity after the Catholics sued us to get it back. (Fr. Tom Willis at the Basilica is a friend so we rib each other about this.)

**Why the name Trinity Parish Church?**

When the Rev. Fowler departed in 1823, there still was no church building, but they had incorporated the parish and pur­chased the lot on the southeast corner of King and St. George Streets. By 1827, the “Church Lot” had been se­cured through an Act of Congress, and the Vestry could now concentrate on building a church. The Rev. Raymond Henderson came as a missionary to Trinity Parish in January 1829, and quickly made his presence felt in St. Augustine.  His enthusiasm and fund-raising efforts were rewarded in 1830 with the erection of *“a very neat building of hewn stone, in the Gothic order.”*Services were held in the building the first Sunday in June 1831, but the church wasn’t consecrated until June 5th, 1834, when they rushed to install windows for the visit by the Rt. Rev. Nathaniel Bowen, Bishop of South Carolina. Until after WWII Trinity Parish was known by that simple name. The Catholic Basilica across the plaza is listed in city directories as “The Church of St. Augustine.” Apparently, it was unnecessary to say more. The early 1800’s was a time when the Episcopal Church was still finding its way theologically. There was a good deal of Unitarianism in the early Episcopal Church and naming the church “Trinity” said, “orthodox in theology” and calling it “parish” gave a hint that Trinity was an early adherent of the Oxford Movement that emphasized the catholicity of our reformed-catholic faith.

**Has anything significant happened at Trinity or is it another one of those “In 1821 on this spot nothing happened” places?**

Trinity is an interesting church with an interesting history. During the Civil War the Southern vestry insisted that the Union General occupying Fort Marion escort the rector with Union sympathies to the town gate and sent him north. They allowed him to keep his horse.

In the Civil War the final General fighting for the Confederacy, Edmund Kirby-Smith surrendered his sword to Union General, Edmund J. Davis, future Governor of Texas. They had both been baptized in our font and were boyhood friends.

After the war, the ladies in our church evangelized the Cheyenne warriors kept in St. Augustine in the 1870s. One of the warriors, David Pendleton Oakerhater, became the evangelist who converted the Oklahoma Territory and is the first Native American included in the Episcopal calendar of saints.

Trinity ran afoul of Henry Flagler when the vestry wouldn’t let Flagler buy the church and move us to a fancier one (as with the Presbyterians and Methodists). Flagler became so angry he gave the Catholics a clock and bell tower designed to look like the old British clock tower in front of the original English period church.

Trinity has one of 40 signed Lewis Comfort Tiffany stained glass windows known to exist. Tiffany raced his yacht in St. Augustine, and often lost to our senior warden, banker, George Gibbs. (Henry Flagler was also a regatta casualty of Mr. Gibbs.)

Trinity's church was greatly expanded in 1902, and our first rector to serve more than a decade, Rev. Louis Fitz-James Hindry, began his 33-year rectorship as the building opened.

In our more recent history, Trinity was the one White church in St. Augustine to seat African Americans in the summer of 1964 while Dr. King was in St. Augustine spurring the passage of the Civil Rights Act. (This cost our minister, one of our most effective rectors, Rev. Charlie Seymour, his job). We were also the church where virtually everyone in the Athalia Ponsell Lindsley murder “Bloody Sunday” trial (victim, accused, lawyers and judge) all were members (which cost us another minister). In the late 1990’s Trinity acquired the old Walgreens building behind the church (the site of the sit-ins during the summer of 1964). The back of the building is our fellowship hall and the front is income producing property. We will use the income of this building to plant new churches in St. John’s county when the loan is paid off in less than six years.

Much has happened at Trinity and God continues to bless Trinity Parish with a growing congregation and a sense of commitment to spreading the Good News of Jesus and working for the good of our community. The risk-taking missionary spirit of Rev. Andrew Fowler is alive and well in St. Augustine!

