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## THE LAST SHALL-BE FIRST: NORTHERN METHODISTS IN RECONSTRUCTION JACKSONVILLE

by JOHN T. FOSTER, JR., AND SARAH WHITMER FOSTER

**D**URING Reconstruction, many northern men and women contributed to Florida's social, political, and economic life. Their efforts— and those of the northern institutions and organizations that supported them— provided immediate assistance to the needy and resulted, as well, in the establishment of churches, schools, and other institutions that endured the test of time.

Nonetheless, most Floridians have gained only a one-dimensional understanding of the contributions of Northerners during Reconstruction, usually through the highly critical eyes of historians such as William Watson Davis. Of them, Davis, a disciple of Columbia University's Dunning School of Reconstruction historiography, wrote: "The failure of the Republican government was . . . incident to the operations of a lot of self-seeking, reckless, shrewd, and grafting politicians, who were in local politics for all they could squeeze out of it, who controlled, by fair means or foul, the ignorant and often vicious negro majorities and therefore controlled the government and therefore the public purse-strings."<sup>1</sup>

Within the past two decades, a number of revisionist historians have examined Davis's assessment. Most notably, Jerrell H. Shofner's work, *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877*, has reviewed the complicated nature of the Reconstruction era and described the good intentions of Northerners such as Governor Harrison Reed.<sup>2</sup> Others have begun to note

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1. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1964), 685.
2. Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (Gainesville, 1974). Richard Nelson Current's *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers: A Reinterpretation* (New York, 1988) also examines Reed's career.

the significant contributions of blacks to the period and to analyze the destructive impact of Democratic Redemption upon substantive Republican initiatives.<sup>3</sup> The lives and work of Northerners of the period, though, remain a territory largely unexplored.

Insight as to the contributions of Northerners may be glimpsed from an examination of the Florida work of the Methodist Episcopal Church, often called the northern Methodist Church. Based upon church policy promulgated during and soon after the Civil War, Methodist ministers from the North involved themselves in every aspect of Reconstruction life— religion, education, civil rights, economic development, and politics. From a base in Jacksonville, these individuals— principal among them the Reverend John Sanford Swaim— achieved important successes and exerted a lasting influence beyond that justified by their small numbers.

The Methodist Episcopal Church— as opposed to the separate Methodist Episcopal Church, South— supported the Federal government during the Civil War, and, as the struggle continued, it increasingly became “political.” By the war’s end, the church was a powerful force in national affairs. It was the nation’s “largest and wealthiest denomination,” and it published numerous newspapers and magazines, among them the New York *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Quarterly Review*.<sup>4</sup> At the commencement of its publication, the *Christian Advocate* had “the largest circulation of any weekly newspaper in the world.”<sup>5</sup> Exercising its influence during the early years of Reconstruction, the church endorsed the Radical Congressional leadership and sought the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson. Its bishops championed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution.<sup>6</sup>

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3. As to blacks, see Joe M. Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* (Tallahassee, 1965; reprint ed., Tampa, 1973); Peter D. Klingman, *Josiah Walls: Florida's Black Congressman of Reconstruction* (Gainesville, 1976); James C. Clark, “John Wallace and the Writing of Reconstruction History,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67 (April 1989), 409-27; and Canter Brown, Jr., “Where are now the hopes I cherished? The Life and Times of Robert Meacham,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 69 (July 1990), 1-36. As to Redemption, see Edward C. Williamson, *Florida. Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893* (Gainesville, 1976).
  4. Donald G. Jones, *The Sectional Crisis and Northern Methodism: A Study in Piety, Political Ethics and Civil Religion* (Metuchen, NJ, 1979), 29-30.
  5. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1972), XV, 306.
  6. Jones, *Sectional Crisis*, 299.

The northern Methodist Church accepted a responsibility for Reconstruction far greater than simple political involvement. Some of its ministers already were at work in the South prior to the end of the Civil War, but in late 1866 its bishops had adopted a broad program of action. First published on November 15, 1866, as a statement from the Board of Bishops, the program acknowledged that emancipation had given the church a "fearful responsibility." It reviewed the failure of southern states to take steps toward meeting the needs of freedmen and concluded: "Colored children are growing up in utter ignorance. . . . Christian philanthropy must supply this lack. Religion and education alone can make freedom a blessing." Accordingly, the church authorized the construction of schools for freedmen across the "whole territory of the South" and designated as the "channel" for its work the Freedmen's Aid Society. Collections for the society were solicited, and teachers were asked to volunteer. "The school must be planted by the side of the church," the statement asserted, "[and] the teacher must go along with the missionary." As to timing, it stated, "The emergency is upon us, and we must begin work now."<sup>7</sup>

Instrumental to the church's efforts and to those of the Freedmen's Aid Society were its pastors in the South. They were organized by conferences, and Florida was included in the South Carolina Conference. The "Presiding Elder" of the South Carolina Conference, before his death on September 3, 1871, was Timothy Willard Lewis.<sup>8</sup> By 1868 his district included thirty-six circuits, 120 "preaching places," 140 preachers, and 15,000 church members.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the northern Methodist preachers, including Lewis, already had worked in the South for a considerable time when the church's program was announced in 1866. Some were hardened by their experiences. By the summer of 1865, for example, Lewis had concluded of white Southerners: "To a man they loathe our Northern idea of liberty and equal rights before the law. . . . The colored people will form the only material for the M. E. church as a rule." As to the future, Lewis found hope in only two alternatives, "death and immigration." Death, he felt,

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7. New York *Christian Advocate*, November 15, 1866.

8. *Ibid.*, October 12, 1871.

9. *Ibid.*, May 21, 1868.

would remove Southerners incapable of change, while immigration hopefully would bring into the region Northerners with more flexible attitudes.<sup>10</sup> Lewis's beliefs foreshadowed the course that was to be followed by his ministers.

When Presiding Elder Lewis reported his views in the summer of 1865, John Sanford Swaim already was working for the church in Florida. Born in Chatham, New Jersey, on May 1, 1806, Swaim had served as an ordained minister for over thirty years.<sup>11</sup> His career had been a distinguished one and had led to his selection in 1856 as conference delegate to the church's supreme governing body, the General Assembly.<sup>12</sup> Late in 1862, however, Swaim's daughter died of tuberculosis, and thereafter the minister's own health declined.<sup>13</sup> By the spring of 1864, due to respiratory problems, he had been classified among the inactive clergy.<sup>14</sup> The condition persisted until his death a decade later.<sup>15</sup>

The decline of Swaim's health coincided with the beginnings of an effort by New Jersey Bishop Edmund S. Janes to send disabled clergy to warmer climates. Hoping that the southern environment would prove more healthy for his ministers, Janes assigned them to serve as pastors to Federal troops and to freed blacks. In 1864, he included Swaim in the program and posted him to Jacksonville.<sup>16</sup> Swaim was joined there in August by his brother-in-law, Wesley Robertson, who also was a disabled minister. Unfortunately, Robertson's presence in Florida was brief. He contracted typhoid fever and died on November 3, 1864.<sup>17</sup>

That Swaim would be sent as far south as Florida was unusual. Prior to the war, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had exercised a "monopoly" over Methodism in the state. When the

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10. *Ibid.*, June 8, 1865.

11. *Minutes of the Newark Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1876* (New York, 1876), 52.

12. For additional biographical information on Swaim, see John T. Foster, Jr., and Sarah W. Foster, "John Sanford Swaim: A Life at the Beginning of Modern Florida," *Methodist History* 26 (July 1988), 229-40; Matthew Simpson, *Cyclopedia of Methodism* (Philadelphia, 1882), 393.

13. *New York Christian Advocate*, January 22, 1863.

14. *Minutes of the Newark Conference*, 52.

15. John Sanford Swaim diary, 1866-1867, collection of the authors (hereafter, Swaim diary).

16. *Minutes of the Newark Conference*, 52.

17. *The New Jersey Conference Memorial, Containing Biographical Sketches of All Its Deceased Members* (Philadelphia, 1865), 511.

denomination split over the issue of slavery in 1844, for instance, all thirty-two preachers in the conference that included south Georgia and Florida joined the new southern church.<sup>18</sup> Even during Reconstruction, as one historian has reported, “[most] northern missionaries confined their energies north of a line running east and west through Atlanta.”<sup>19</sup>

Tentative steps toward a northern-church presence in the coastal Southeast had been taken in the autumn of 1862 when Timothy Willard Lewis was appointed to the South Carolina Sea Islands. Lewis had organized a church at Beaufort and preached to Federal troops in both South Carolina and Florida.<sup>20</sup> The numbers of those who followed in Lewis’s steps never were great, however. One scholar estimated that, from 1865 to 1873, “the rock bottom guess was fifty [northern ministers]” joined southern conferences of the church. Given that fact, ministerial positions often were filled with former pastors of the southern church, many of whom had been Unionists. In Georgia, for example, Methodist Episcopal ministers born in the South outnumbered their northern counterparts thirty-five to six. Even so, power within the northern Methodist Church in the South remained in the hands of northern preachers, and, in the words of church historian Ralph Morrow, “presiding elderships and pastorates of the largest churches were [filled] with Northerners.”<sup>21</sup>

John Swaim, of course, was a northern minister, and his potential for leadership and influence was enhanced by that fact. Other factors assisted him, as well. Of particular importance were his relationships within the hierarchy of the church. Based upon personal acquaintance, he maintained direct correspondence with church bishops and, in turn, was the recipient of their financial and personal support. Some church leaders sought out Swaim for personal consultations. Bishop Baker and Presiding Elder Lewis did so in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1866. Lewis earlier had met with Swaim in Jacksonville. The discussions

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18. Charles T. Thrift, Jr., *The Trail of the Florida Circuit Rider* (Lakeland, 1944), 97.

19. Ralph E. Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction* (East Lansing, MI, 1956), 41.

20. New York *Christian Advocate*, February 19, 1874.

21. Morrow, *Northern Methodism*, 48-49, 54.

ranged from Swaim's relationship with the church in New Jersey to "all missionary affairs."<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, Swaim's posting at Jacksonville enabled him to know well most of the state's early and important Republicans. Specifically, he was friends with Florida's first Republican national committeeman, Calvin L. Robinson, and with future governors Harrison Reed and Ossian Bingley Hart.<sup>23</sup> When the Union Republican Club of Jacksonville, precursor of the Florida Republican party, was organized in Hart's law office on April 4, 1867, Swaim likely was present. He was admitted to full membership on May 9, 1867.<sup>24</sup> Swaim eulogized Hart at his burial seven years later.<sup>25</sup>

Swaim's ministry at Jacksonville evolved through several distinct phases, and the first was considerably more humble than his later role as intimate of Florida's most influential politicians. When he arrived in Jacksonville in 1864, the town presented, in one resident's words, "a most melancholy sight."<sup>26</sup> Successive occupations by Union and Confederate forces had left it a shambles, with many of its homes, businesses, and churches burned by one side or the other. In February its Union occupying forces had suffered defeat at the Battle of Olustee, and in August they again were defeated at Gainesville. In certain respects Jacksonville was a town under siege, and the morale of its garrison, many of them black, could not have been high.<sup>27</sup>

In Jacksonville, Swaim served formally as a member of the United States Christian Commission, an interdenominational, voluntary organization whose work was "similar to that of chaplains."<sup>28</sup> In that capacity he preached to mostly black troops. Among those attending his church in November 1864, for in-

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22. In 1866, Swaim received almost \$4,000 in bank drafts from Bishop Baker. In a cash-starved economy the amount was significant. Swaim diary, entries of May 14, June 4, 1866, and January 2, 1867.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Peter D. Klingman, *Neither Dies Nor Surrenders: A History of the Republican Party in Florida, 1867-1970* (Gainesville, 1984), 17; "Constitution and Proceedings of the Union Republican Club of Jacksonville," misc. mss. collection, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

25. Jacksonville *Tri-Weekly Florida Union*, March 24, 1874.

26. Jacksonville *Tri-Weekly Florida Sun*, January 29, 1876.

27. James Robertson Ward, *Old Hickory's Town: An Illustrated History of Jacksonville* (Jacksonville, 1982), 139-50.

28. Frederick Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, 1974), 243.

stance, were soldiers of the Third United States Colored Troops of Pennsylvania and the Thirty-Fourth and Thirty-Fifth United States Colored Troops.<sup>29</sup> Some services likely were segregated by race, but as late as March 4, 1866, Swaim noted an integrated congregation.<sup>30</sup>

During this early period, Swaim performed a ministry of mercy for 3,300 former Union prisoners of war from the infamous camp at Andersonville, Georgia. During the closing weeks of the conflict, these men had been shipped back and forth across south Georgia and north Florida. First, they had been ordered to Thomasville, but were returned to Andersonville. Soon after arrival, they again were carried to Thomasville, then forwarded to Tallahassee and, ultimately, east to the rail junction at Baldwin. There, the Confederate guards learned of General Joseph E. Johnston's surrender of the Army of Tennessee to General William T. Sherman.<sup>31</sup> Abruptly, the southern commander, James Ormond, decided to abandon his prisoners.<sup>32</sup>

News of the presence of the Union prisoners reached Jacksonville's Federal occupying forces on April 28, 1865, and a train quickly was dispatched to bring them into town.<sup>33</sup> During "five to twenty-five months" imprisonment, they had been exposed to weather and to "smoke from pitch pine fires." Their skin was "blackened," and their "wretchedness" further was accentuated by an "absence of the razor and of combs and brushes." Many who arrived at Jacksonville "were without shirts" and some had no pants. Not a few were clothed only by "a very shabby pair of drawers." Physical appearance was not their only problem. The symptoms of scurvy were epidemic, brought about by a diet of "2 inches of bad bacon and a pint of coarsely ground corn

29. *History of the Ebenezer United Methodist Church* (Jacksonville, 1982). Jacksonville's Ebenezer United Methodist Church was founded by John Swaim as the Zion Methodist Episcopal Church.

30. Gerald Schwartz to John T. Foster, March 19, 1863, collection of the authors; Swaim diary, entry of March 4, 1866.

31. Newark *Daily Advertiser*, May 30, 1865.

32. Alice Strickland, "James Ormond, Merchant and Soldier," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 41 (January 1963), 220. See also Ovid L. Futch, *History of Andersonville Prison* (Gainesville, 1968), 116.

33. After the prisoners arrived in Jacksonville, Union officers asked to meet their Confederate counterparts at White House, just west of Jacksonville on the Florida, Atlantic and Gulf Central Railroad line. The purpose was "to receive receipts for the prisoners." According to James Ormond, the meeting with the Union officers ended up a "jolly and merry" party." Newark *Daily Advertiser*, May 30, 1865; Strickland, "James Ormond," 220.



meal, cob and all." Common also were "sore and swollen feet and limbs . . . [and] sore hands and lips." Reportedly, "one poor fellow ha[d] a portion of his face eaten away."<sup>34</sup>

Swaim cooperated with Union officials in receiving and caring for the prisoners. A bath in the St. Johns River came first for many. According to the minister: "[The] commissary sent out an abundance of good soap: then the Quartermaster issued clothing, and they were clad from head to foot. Stacks of old and tattered duds were piled beyond the camp, and for more reasons than because they were dirty, were burned." Once clothed and fed, the men who were able sought information and an opportunity to contact their loved ones. They especially wanted news of the many Union victories "of which they had heard little or nothing." Swaim's office was "thronged, till everything in the shape of book or tract or paper was given out." When the men began writing letters, he quickly handed out his complete supply of 1,000 envelopes and then pleaded with local merchants for the donation of additional writing materials.<sup>35</sup>

Not all the former prisoners were so lucky as to be able to read and write. When transports from Hilton Head and Port Royal carried away the bulk of the men on May 16, 200 remained behind at Jacksonville. Most were "too ill to move." Within two weeks, "thirty died, and quite a number were deemed past recovery." Their deaths were a blow to Swaim. "It is sad to know," he wrote, "that so many, after enduring terrible treatment, should die, just now, as they were beginning to have the hope of seeing home."<sup>36</sup>

With the departure of the prisoners, Swaim's life and ministry changed. The war had ended, and the remaining occupation troops for the most part were withdrawn. His attention, necessarily, turned to Jacksonville's civilian population, white and black. On February 18, 1866, he and Presiding Elder Lewis organized the Zion Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>37</sup> When its trustees were elected on May 8, they included— in addition to Calvin Robinson— three blacks, Lyman A. Anders, David Pettie, and Alex

34. Newark *Daily Advertiser*, May 30, 1865.

35. Ibid.; United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC, 1880-1901), series 1, XLVII, part 1, 166-67.

36. Newark *Daily Advertiser*, May 30, 1865.

37. *History of Ebenezer United Methodist Church*.

Loften. Anders was a local minister; Pettie was a carpenter; and Loften had been a property-owning freedman in Jacksonville before the war.<sup>38</sup>

At this early date Swaim already evidenced a sensitivity to and concern for the desires of the blacks with whom he worked. In selecting the site for the church, he sought the advice of Anders.<sup>39</sup> When he bid the work, Pettie was invited to participate.<sup>40</sup> Later in the year when the trustees made a decision against Swaim's advice, he followed their wishes. "We could not do what we wanted," he noted in his diary.<sup>41</sup> Such behavior contrasted with that of missionaries in other parts of the South. Blacks at Hampton, Virginia, for instance, usually were not consulted. The town's Hampton Institute, alma mater of Booker T. Washington, had been envisioned as a "white school for black students, requiring no input from the black community."<sup>42</sup>

With Anders's help, a site for the church was selected at the corner of Ashley and Hogan streets. On May 22, 1866, construction was begun, and for almost a month Swaim carefully supervised every detail of the building. When problems developed because the carpenters "cut the wrong stuff," Swaim was on hand to keep the work moving along. By June 15 the rafters were in, and the workers "went to boarding up the gable ends." Nine days later he recorded: "I went and opened Sunday School in the new church. There were 18 boys and 31 females. Sunday School was followed by preaching by Brother John Earl. It was a good meeting and a good congregation. At 3 o'clock, I preached a dedicatory sermon on 'I will glorify' to a fine congregation. There was good attendance— a pleasant affair. The collections and subscriptions totaled \$97.65. In the evening, Brothers Wright and Johnson spoke to a larger congregation. Twenty-five or thirty came to the altar for prayers. It was a memorable day for the black people of Jacksonville."<sup>43</sup> Significantly, Swaim had shared the pulpit that day with local blacks, including Louis Wright, the church's steward.

38. Swaim diary, entry of May 8, 1866.

39. *Ibid.*, entry of May 22, 1866.

40. Pettie's bid came in \$50 higher than that of competitor Glenn Simmons, and, as Swaim noted in his diary, "Brother Simmons got the job." Swaim diary, entry of May 21, 1866.

41. *Ibid.*, entry of November 9, 1866.

42. Robert F. Engs, *Freedom's First Generation* (Philadelphia, 1979), 147.

43. Swaim diary, entries of May 22, 23, June 15, 24, 1866.

Reflecting the northern church's interest in education for freedmen, Swaim broadened his community activities beyond preaching and church building. Even before adoption of the bishops' statement in November 1866, he was visiting area schools established by a secular freedmen's aid society, the National Freedmen's Association of New York. By May 1866 he had extended his efforts out of Jacksonville and had visited the association's schools and teachers at Gainesville. Back home, he took personal responsibility the following winter for reserving firewood for Jacksonville's black schools.<sup>44</sup>

Already Swaim was developing a philosophy closely aligned with that of his presiding elder, Timothy Willard Lewis. He saw around him the many needs of the community and its citizens, white and black. He felt also the hostility of many whites. As was noted not long after: "The work [of the northern Methodist Church] was despised and rejected by [white] Southern people generally. Public sentiment was fiercely antagonized to it."<sup>45</sup> From the experience, the minister forged a personal commitment to changing Florida.

Swaim's goals, in line with Lewis's ideas and the agenda of his national church, were two-fold. First, he sought a state "founded on the eternal principals of freedom and equal rights." The key to that goal— after enactment of the First and Second Reconstruction acts guaranteeing blacks the vote— was to attract enough Northerners to the state to ensure a Republican majority. "We want a few thousand more Yankees to outvote them," he wrote a New Jersey newspaper, "and hold them as a helpless minority, and then we can manage things for the real advantage of the country."<sup>46</sup> Educational opportunity was the second of his goals and was intended to reinforce social and political change. "Free schools must go hand in hand with free labor," he asserted, "if the South is to compete successfully with northern and western portions of the republic."<sup>47</sup>

As mentioned, Swaim was involved deeply with Florida's new Republican party. Unlike some of his contemporaries, however, he believed that forging a multi-racial voter coalition required

44. *Ibid.*, entries of May 12, 14, 1866.

45. *Methodist Quarterly Review* 54 (January 1872), 105.

46. Newark *Sentinel of Freedom*, January 7, 1868.

47. *Ibid.*, July 7, 1868.

easy accessibility to political office for blacks, as well as for whites. "It would be a mistake to suppose there is no practical [black] talent here," he informed friends in New Jersey. "There may be very few polished experts in parliamentary practice, but there is a good deal of that which is an excellent substitute— sound, sterling common sense." Also unlike some of his fellow Northerners, the pastor favored prominent office for capable southern loyalists. He worked particularly to forward the career of Jacksonville native Ossian B. Hart who, Swaim believed, "[was] one of the ablest lawyers in the state."<sup>48</sup>

Central to Swaim's conception of Florida Republican politics was immigration of Northerners to the state. To inform prospective settlers of its virtues, he commenced as early as 1865 writing articles for New Jersey newspapers.<sup>49</sup> For those interested in agriculture, he described opportunities in winter vegetables, citrus, and timber. For the ill and indisposed, he wrote about "the' healthiest climate in the whole land."<sup>50</sup> In all, eleven separate articles were published in the Newark, New Jersey, *Sentinel of Freedom* during 1865-1868. Each was reprinted in the *Newark Daily Advertiser*, doubling their impact.<sup>51</sup>

A close relationship had existed for decades by the 1860s between many Jacksonville residents and New Jersey, specifically the Newark area. United States District Judge Philip Fraser, for example, was a native of Elizabeth, New Jersey.<sup>52</sup> Ossian Hart's wife, Catherine, was from Newark. Her uncle, Obediah Congar, also a former Jerseyite, was Jacksonville's mayor in 1844, as was Fraser in 1855.<sup>53</sup> Building upon those and similar connections, Swaim's articles likely stimulated tourism and, perhaps, some immigration. The year after the last of the articles was published, a visitor to St. Augustine found: "Not less than ten persons from Newark were at the Florida House at one time. Throughout the

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48. Ibid.

49. John T. Foster, Jr., Herbert B. Whitmer, Jr., and Sarah W. Foster, "Tourism Was Not the Only Purpose: Jacksonville Republicans and Newark's *Sentinel of Freedom*," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 63 (January 1985), 318-24.

50. Newark *Sentinel of Freedom*, January 7, 1868.

51. Foster, Whitmer, and Foster, "Tourism Was Not the Only Purpose."

52. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 4.

53. [Emma F. R. Campbell], *Biographical Sketch of Honorable Ossian B. Hart, Late Governor of Florida, 1873* (New York, 1901), 5; T. Frederick Davis, *History of Jacksonville, Florida and Vicinity, 1513 to 1924* (Jacksonville, 1925; reprint ed., Jacksonville, 1990) 293.

state Jersey men may be found at almost every hotel and boarding house.<sup>54</sup> In 1870, another man observed: "New Jersey is well represented at every point [in Florida], and Newark has her proportion of sons and daughters to do her credit. No less than six Newarkers are in [Green Cove Springs] at present."<sup>55</sup> Mandarin, north of Green Cove Springs, also boasted the winter homes of many Northerners. While the most famous of them was Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the community included a number of Jerseyites.<sup>56</sup>

Swaim's attempt to promote Florida may have influenced the authors of Florida's Constitution of 1868 to create a position of state commissioner of lands and immigration. His friends and fellow-Jacksonville Republicans Harrison Reed and Ossian Hart were instrumental in drawing the document.<sup>57</sup> Reed's first two addresses as governor touched upon the subject, and his commissioner, J. S. Adams, quickly was ordered to "prepare a pamphlet of 100 to 150 pages, setting forth the resources and advantages of every portion of the state."<sup>58</sup> Swaim's letter-writing campaign ended just as Adams's work began.

Whether Swaim's attempts to induce immigration were successful or not, Jacksonville grew rapidly in the late 1860s, and soon it was one of the state's largest cities. By 1874 Republican Congressman William J. Purman had described it as "an enterprising Yankee town in the South" that was "really a Northern city in a Southern latitude."<sup>59</sup> With the growth, the numbers of white northern Methodists increased, and a new church was organized with Swaim as its pastor. Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church's first board of trustees was selected in February 1870 and included Swaim, Robinson, and Hart. Two lots were purchased at the corner of Laura and Monroe streets, and a small, two-story frame sanctuary and parsonage was erected. The church's appearance was spare, and evergreen branches, rather than plaster, covered its walls for Swaim's first sermons.<sup>60</sup>

54. Newark *Sentinel of Freedom*, March 23, 1869.

55. *Ibid.*, February 1, 1870.

56. *Ibid.*, April 23, 1873, March 3, 1874; Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 77.

57. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 182-83.

58. Florida *Senate Journal* (1869), 10.

59. Quoted in Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 264.

60. The first Trinity M. E. Church building was destroyed by fire in 1880. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 22, 1949; *A Brief History of Snyder Memorial United Methodist Church, 1870-1970* (Jacksonville, 1970), 2.

Although Trinity M. E. Church's congregation was white, the interests of its pastor and members extended to the needs of Jacksonville's blacks. Pursuing the second of his long-held goals, the need for educational opportunities, Swaim made the church available for night classes for blacks not long after it was opened. The courses offered were intended to prepare blacks for the ministry and were taught by the Reverend Samuel B. Darnell and his wife. "We have our college and theological seminary already started," a supporter boasted in July 1872.<sup>61</sup>

In 1873 the school's backers added courses for blacks interested in teaching. By late spring, with Swaim's support, a meeting was called to formalize its organization. On that occasion and with Swaim serving as chairman, trustees and officers were selected for the Cookman Institute, "the first school of higher education of Negroes established in the State of Florida, and for a long time . . . the only school of its kind in the State."<sup>62</sup> The institution's leadership included local northern Methodists such as Robinson and Hart, and national Methodist Episcopal figures Bishop Matthew Simpson and the head of the church's Freedmen's Aid Society, R. S. Rust.<sup>63</sup>

Cookman Institute grew rapidly in the years following its organization. An 1876 visitor traveling with Rust found it thriving. "There are sixty pupils, part of them boarders," he reported, "and there is a need for a building to accommodate a hundred and fifty to two hundred pupils." A student selected "randomly" from the algebra class displayed knowledge "that would have done credit to pupils in any of our schools of the North."<sup>64</sup> Twelve years later the institute's student population had increased to a combined total of 167 in its academic and normal departments, and the curriculum included preparatory studies in "law, medicine and the ministry."<sup>65</sup> One historian of Florida schools concluded that its students received an "excellent" preparation and went on to careers "in all sections of the South." Among its graduates were "four leading colored physicians in

61. New York *Christian Advocate*, August 1, 1872.

62. Ibid., June 12, 1873; Jay S. Stowell, *Methodist Adventures in Negro Education* (New York, 1922), 77-78.

63. New York *Christian Advocate*, June 12, 1873.

64. Ibid., March 2, 1876.

65. George Gary Bush, *The History of Education in Florida* (Washington, DC, 1889), 26; Stowell, *Methodist Adventures*, 79.



Cookman Institute, Jacksonville, c. 1898. This building, destroyed in the Jacksonville fire of 1901, was located at the corner of Hogan and Beaver streets. Reproduced from *The Bi-ennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida for two years, 1898*. Courtesy Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Archives.

Jacksonville” and “L. W. Livingstone, U. S. Consul to Haiti.” Bishop Abram Grant of the Florida African Methodist Episcopal Church “began to read his primer at Cookman.”<sup>66</sup>

Although Jacksonville’s northern Methodists were deeply interested in black education, their contributions extended as well to public schooling for white children. T. Frederick Davis has noted that Duval High School opened in 1875 with John Swaim’s son, Matthias Freeman Swaim, as its first principal.<sup>67</sup> Another local historian has suggested that previous to that date a public elementary school known as the Duval Graded High School was in operation.<sup>68</sup> Likely, the school actually was a secondary school as early as September 30, 1874, when the younger Swaim was

66. J. Irving E. Scott, *The Education of Black People in Florida* (Philadelphia, 1974), 41; W. N. Harshorn, *An Era of Progress and Promise* (Boston, 1910), 183.

67. Davis, *History of Jacksonville*, 420.

68. James C. Craig, “Florida’s First High School,” *Papers of the Jacksonville Historical Society* 3 (1954), 100.

appointed "Principal of Duval High School." The appointment was a popular one, and the local newspaper described Swaim as "a gentleman of fine education and culture [who] will fill the position with honor and dignity."<sup>69</sup>

The hopes placed in Matthias Swaim's abilities were realized. Two years later, another Jacksonville paper noted that the public schools were held in "high esteem by the people, proof of the ability of the management."<sup>70</sup> An 1888 assessment of high schools in Florida found the few that existed during the 1870s to be of a quality that could not be "compared favorably with schools in the other states." The report added, however, "An exception to that should be made for the high school in Jacksonville." The quality of its programs was "scarcely inferior to the colleges of the state."<sup>71</sup>

This story of educational development reveals a pattern that also occurred in the building of the city's northern Methodist churches. Florida's Methodist Episcopal Church, in fulfilling its institutional commitment to education, put the "last first" and the "first last." At a time when institutions of higher education were scarce, the church founded Cookman Institute before Duval High School, although both opened in the same building, Trinity M. E. Church.<sup>72</sup> It also ensured that both were led by competently trained M. E. ministers. Samuel Darnell was a graduate of Drew Seminary, now Drew University. Matthias Swaim, also a northern Methodist minister, studied at Pennington Seminary, presently a New Jersey preparatory school.<sup>73</sup>

Jacksonville's northern Methodist ministers implemented church programs, but their concerns and actions often predated official policy. John Swaim's involvement in black schools, for example, came before the formation of the Freedmen's Aid Society and the bishops' November 1866 statement of policy. The ministers' actions also at times went far beyond their clerical

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69. Matthias Swaim served at Duval High School into the 1876-77 school year. He remained in the community through 1878, but his whereabouts thereafter are unknown. Jacksonville *New South*, September 30, 1874; Jacksonville *Florida Union*, October 3, 1876; Jacksonville *Daily Sun and Press*, March 7, 1878; Duval County, Marriage Records, Book 4, 832 (available on microfilm at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee).

70. Jacksonville *Florida Union*, October 3, 1876.

71. Bush, *History of Education*, 30.

72. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 22, 1949.

73. New York *Christian Advocate*, March 6, 1873.



duties in the interest of carrying out those policies. Timothy Willard Lewis was advocating immigration in 1865, and, within months, Swaim was publishing articles in the hopes of stimulating northern interest in Florida. Active involvement in politics was a logical, if controversial, next step.

These institutional and personal actions significantly affected Jacksonville and the state of Florida. Both Jacksonville churches established by John Swaim continue in operation. Zion M. E. Church today is Ebenezer United Methodist Church, and Trinity M. E. Church is Snyder Memorial Methodist Church.<sup>74</sup> Cookman Institute in 1923 was combined with a Daytona Beach school and today is known as Bethune-Cookman College.<sup>75</sup> Duval High School was so successful that, in the 1920s, it was replaced by three new schools.<sup>76</sup>

As to the state, northern Methodists helped bolster its depressed Reconstruction economy through their work for immigration and tourism. One of Swaim's obituaries even credited him as "largely" responsible for the "influx" of tourists.<sup>77</sup> Church member Calvin Robinson was eulogized for contributing to the state's growth by attracting "loans and permanent investments."<sup>78</sup> Two other members, Harrison Reed and Ossian Hart, were elected governor and today are regarded as outstanding leaders of the period.

Clearly, the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Northerners it sent to Florida, such as John Sanford Swaim, made positive and permanent contributions to the state. Generations have benefited from their efforts to link religion, education, and politics during a troubled era, and Floridians will continue to do so for generations to come. Despite these facts, many modern Southerners continue to view them simply as "carpetbaggers." This stereotype, beyond being shallow and misleading, is an injustice to these men and women and hinders our understanding of Reconstruction in Florida.

74. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 22, 1949.

75. Scott, *Education of Black People*, 42, 55.

76. Duval High School held its last commencement on June 9, 1927. During 1926-1927, Robert E. Lee, Andrew Jackson, and Julia Landon high schools had been constructed. Earlier in the 1920s, Kirby Smith and John Gorrie high schools also were established. Jacksonville Historic Landmarks Commission, *Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage: Landmarks for the Future* (Jacksonville, 1989), 120, 133, 198, 269, 369.

77. *Minutes of the Newark Conference*, 52.

78. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 5, 1887.