

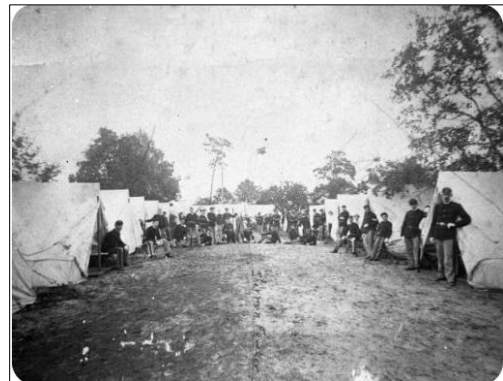
## Union Occupation of Palatka 1864: St. Mark's Episcopal Church Palatka (est. 1853)



The American Civil War was a four-year war (1861-1865) between the United States or “the North” and 11 southern states that seceded from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America. The war began on April 13, 1861 when Confederate forces fired on Ft. Sumter, South Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

On March 9, 1864, a Union expedition left Jacksonville during the night traveling up the St. Johns River to occupy Palatka. For two rain-drenched days, Colonel William B. Barton, and his Barton's Brigade of soldiers from the 47<sup>th</sup>, 48<sup>th</sup> and 115<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry together with the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts African American Volunteer Regiment and the Rhode Island Artillery traveled aboard the ships, *Maple Leaf*, *General Hunter*, and *Charles B. Houghton*.<sup>2</sup> The ships traveled at night to avoid enemy sniper fire and hoping to miss Confederate torpedoes suspended just below the river's surface.<sup>3</sup> Two gunboats led the way.

Upon docking at Palatka, the troops walked through the streets without any confrontations. The men found only a half-dozen families with houses still in good condition.. Prior to the war, there were approximately six hundred people living in Palatka but, as the conflict began, the majority of them closed their homes, stores and businesses and fled. Refugees camped in the woods or found shelter nearby or found passage on ships leaving the town.<sup>4</sup> At the time



Civil War Palatka. c. 1864-65.. Photo courtesy  
Diane Luke

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<sup>1</sup> “The War Commenced,” *New York Times*, April 13, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> Schafer (2010), *Thunder on the River: The Civil War in Northeast Florida*, 204.

<sup>3</sup>On March 31, 1864, some of the soldiers at Palatka were ordered to leave for Jacksonville and departed at 11:15 pm on their earlier transport, the side-wheeler *Maple Leaf*. With the boat's running lights turned off for security reasons and crewmen standing watch, the ship traveled directly into the path of a Confederate planted torpedo mine at Mandarin Point. The ship sank and four crewmen were killed. Today the Jacksonville Museum of Science and History maintains a permanent exhibition of more than 3,000 well-preserved artifacts from the sunken ship.

<sup>4</sup> Schafer (2010) *Thunder on the River*, 204-210.

of the 1864 Occupation of Palatka, there were only two mules and a cart left in town and those belonged to pioneer settler Robert Boyd and his wife Mary.

In 1864, the city of Palatka was chosen as a camp by the Union forces in Florida because of its position on the St. Johns River which enabled observation and control of the water traffic of ships and cargo. The location was an excellent choice as named by the Native Americans “Pilatka” or “Pilo-taikita” from the Seminole language that translated as the ”crossing point” between Palatka and East Palatka. The settlement of Palatka began as a trading post for the frontier newcomers and their Seminole Indian neighbors.<sup>5</sup>

#### 1864: ST. MARK’S EPISCOPAL

During the Union Occupation of Palatka from March 10 until April 17, 1864, the soldiers of Barton’s Brigade set up their camp and tents on the grounds and occupied the buildings at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church and the Bronson mansion.

Chaplain John R. Bowles, an African American clergyman from Ohio, joined the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts volunteer regiment on March 27, 1864. Chaplain Bowles led worship services in St. Mark’s each Sunday and two or three times in the evenings, attended funerals, visited the sick and distributed the camp mail. Later Bowles opened an evening school in the chapel for those who could not read or write.<sup>6</sup>



Chaplain John R. Bowles.  
Photo courtesy Burt Wilder  
Papers, Cornell University

During the civil war, St. Mark’s church was badly damaged: Union soldiers used the church building to hold meetings, stable their horses (hoofprints were found in the wood flooring and the east wall near the altar), and accommodate officers’ barracks and quarters. The outside belfry tower became unsafe, and the bell was placed in an aisle of the church. The St. Mark’s bell was used as the city fire alarm before the war, during the war and after the war. When the soldiers were ordered to evacuate Palatka and vacate St. Mark’s church, the Union soldiers took the church’s Bible and



St. Mark’s Church Palatka. Photo by  
Mathew Benjamin Brady, c.1870. Photo  
courtesy Canadian Centre for Architecture,  
Montreal, Quebec.

church register with them. In 1906 a commanding officer of those troops sent St. Mark’s another Bible to replace the one that was taken.<sup>7</sup>

The first church to be built in Palatka, St. Mark’s

<sup>5</sup> Swanson (1967), *Pilo-taikita: a History of Palatka*, 1-2, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Trudeau (1996) *Voices of the 55<sup>th</sup>: Letters from the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteers, 1861-1865*, 69-92, 99, 129, , 225, 207-228.

<sup>7</sup> Davis (1919) *A History of Saint Mark’s Church, Palatka, Florida*; Dowda (1939) *History of Palatka*, 26;

Episcopal Church, was completed in the spring of 1854. Residents in the town followed the leadership of **Elizabeth Moseley Haughton**, the daughter of the first elected governor when Florida became a state in 1845, and decided to organize and build a church. The vacant lot on which to construct the church was donated to St. Mark's by **Judge Isaac Bronson and his wife Sophronia**, who owned several blocks of land at downtown Palatka and who built what is today's Bronson-Mulholland House.<sup>8</sup>

The drawings for the church were hand-drawn by New York architect, Richard Upjohn who created the Carpenter Gothic style church and even published a pattern book of four church designs for communities to build their own structure. Upjohn founded the American Institute of Architects. St. Mark's was the first Carpenter Gothic Church in Florida before the Civil War.<sup>9</sup> "Carpenter Gothic" means that the style of the church was "Gothic" like the stone cathedrals and steepled churches in England but "Carpenter" meant that frontier communities like Palatka could harvest trees from their local forests, send the lumber to the sawmills in town, invite their friends and neighbors who were carpenters, framers, painters, roofers, and craftsmen and women to build pews and altar rails and decorate the church.

The founding members of St. Mark's Episcopal Church at Palatka were early leaders of the new state of Florida and included **U.S. Judge Isaac Bronson**, its first elected **governor William D. Moseley** who began Florida's public education system; **Judge Benjamin A. Putnam** for whom Putnam County is named; **Mayor James Burt** who supervised construction of the church building and created the original map of Palatka in order to sell real estate lots as settlers moved to the town; **Dr. George Hawes** was the medical doctor in town and senior warden of St. Mark's; **Marcellus Williams** was a surveyor who studied with George Washington's nephew and later surveyed all of southern Florida to the Everglades; **George Fairbanks**, historian and one of the founders of the University of the South; and **Sheriff Robert Boyd** who was one of the first settlers in 1841 and built one of the first three houses with glass windows. When the presence of soldiers in Palatka was anticipated, Boyd's wife **Mary Boyd** [who was the first person to be confirmed at St. Mark's] hid the communion silver chalices, plates, and pitchers by burying them in her rose garden until the war was over.

In 1862 **Mary Boyd** is also credited with saving the town from destruction by gunfire when Union gunboats began coming up the river to Palatka. As the Union commander was preparing to burn down the town, in her 1917 remembrance, Mrs. Boyd said, "If no man dares to go [talk to the Union commander], I will see what a woman can do." She waved a white handkerchief of truce as eight guns fired over her head and then negotiated a cease-fire with the Union leader who congratulated her for her "best day's work in saving lives and property."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> St. Mark's Episcopal archives.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon (2013) *Heart and Soul of Florida: Sacred Sites and Historic Architecture*, 165.

<sup>10</sup> Swanson (1967) *Pilo-Taikita: a History of Palatka, Florida*, 169-172; Alvers (2003). *In Remembrance of Me: St. Mark's Episcopal Church: 1853-2003*.

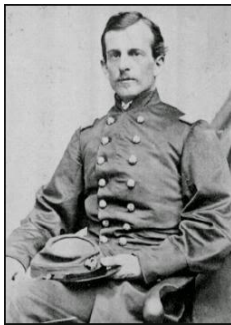
## 1864: THE OCCUPATION OF PALATKA

During the Union Occupation in 1864 Palatka was described as a beautiful spot with a “delightful healthy climate and pure water [that] rather spoiled us.” The orange groves near the camp were loaded with ripe oranges, rare flowers were blooming luxuriantly, the moss drapery that hung from the live oaks made comfortable beds, and pigs and chickens which had not deserted the town with its other residents, and cows straying loosely outside the lines, were put in requisition for the use of the troops.

“The Union soldiers were put in charge of making the defenses, which were a line of heavy earth works they built surrounding the town. Three batteries were thrown up, guns were mounted in them, the wood was cut away to clear the view, and the place was put in a good condition for defense. During the Union Occupation of Palatka there was only a skirmish or two with the pickets and several alarms occurred, but the enemy kept usually out of sight.<sup>11</sup>

## EQUAL PAY

When first recruited, the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts African American Volunteer Regiment had been promised status equal to all other Union soldiers that they would receive the same pay, rations, and clothing as white troops and equal protection in the face of the enemy. While the men of the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts left their state well equipped as soldiers, they were informed that they would receive only ten dollars per month, minus three dollars for a clothing allowance. White privates received thirteen dollars a month, plus three dollars for clothing allowance.



Col. Alfred S. Hartwell.  
c. 1860s. Photo  
courtesy of the Burt  
Green Wilder  
Collection, Cornell  
University

While they were at Palatka, the soldiers of the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts wrote letters to their sponsors, supporters and legislators arguing for equal pay. Their commanding officer was Harvard graduate Colonel Alfred S. Hartwell who throughout his leadership of the 55<sup>th</sup> had growing concern about the inadequacy of pay given to the African American soldiers. Hartwell petitioned his superiors and the War Department to attain equal pay for his regiment.<sup>12</sup>

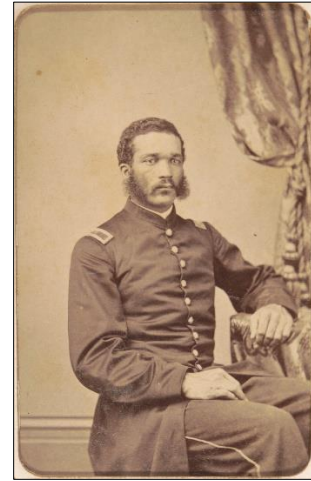
The men of the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts continued their letter writing campaign. Finally, on August 22, 1864, the War Department sent word that all African American troops would be compensated with equal pay, retroactive to their date of enlistment. On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1864, the U. S. Government awarded them equal pay.

On April 17, 1864, the Barton’s Brigade of soldiers suddenly left Palatka for other postings in the war. The soldiers of the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts went on to participate in the Battle of Honey Hill and the James Island Last Fight for Charleston and Reconstruction

<sup>11</sup> Dhalle (1995) *History of the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry*; Fox (1868) *Record of the Service of the 55<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Massachusetts*. 25. Reid, ed. (2010), *Practicing Medicine in a Black Regiment: The Civil War Diary of Burt G. Wilder, 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts*.

<sup>12</sup> Dhalle, *History of the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts*.

service in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Three of the Union soldiers who had been posted at Palatka were the first African Americans to become commissioned officers as Second Lieutenants: Sergeants James M. Trotter, John F. Shorter, and William Dupree.<sup>13</sup>



*Second Lieutenants James M. Trotter, John F. Shorter and William Dupree (left to right). Unknown author c. 1860s. Photos courtesy Burt Green Wilder Collection, Cornell University*

#### PALATKA POST-WAR

On April 19, 1865, word came of the assassination of United States President Abraham Lincoln and by the end of April the major Confederate armies had surrendered.

Immediately after the War, **Elizabeth Moseley Haughton** assembled the St. Mark's congregation from their encampments in the woods and neighboring counties and held a thanksgiving service for their preservation with the lay service read by James Burt. In 1882, St. Mark's Episcopal Church started St. Mark's Academy school for boys, both White and Black. Today the Academy building is located in the Parish Hall at 312 North Second Street.<sup>14</sup>

#### **St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

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<sup>13</sup> Trudeau, *Voices of the 55<sup>th</sup>*, 17-29, 81-92. 223-233.

<sup>14</sup> Alvers, *In Remembrance of Me*.