

Portuguese Immigration to Jacksonville In 1849

The story behind the Portuguese settlement in Jacksonville forms one of the most interesting chapters in Jacksonville history. This story is a unique episode in the history of Portuguese immigration to the United States, and the "Exiles of Madeira" show a striking parallel to the Pilgrim Fathers of Plymouth.

The story begins some eleven years before the "Portuguese Exiles" came to Illinois. In 1828 Robert Reid Kalley, a twenty-nine-year-old Scotchman, started for a mission field in China. Before the trip was well begun, his wife, who accompanied him, became seriously ill so that they decided to land at the first port that their vessel touched. This happened to be Funchal, on the Island of Madeira.

Although Mr. Kalley had no commission to work there, he decided to make Madeira the scene of his labours. He opened a free hospital in Funchal, which helped him to gain a strong hold upon the people. To the people who sought him for the healing of their bodies, he gave his spiritual message. He soon extended his efforts in another direction. He found that the people were largely illiterate and unable to read the Scriptures. This fact caused him to open a school for the islanders. At first Dr. Kalley's teachings he also instructed the people in the meaning of the Bible. This instruction produced some mental difficulties. The people of the Island had heard only the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, and quite naturally, some of them went to the priests with difficulties.

In 1840 the Bishop said he would like to see a copy of the Bible that was being put into the hands of his people. A copy was gladly sent to him. On the 21st of May he placed it in the hands of three canons of the Cathedral of Funchal and appointed them as a commission to examine it and to report to him as to its correctness or incorrectness. Two years and four months later afterward he published a pastoral in which he stated that the commission had reported "that there was scarcely a verse or any chapter either of the Old or New Testament which was not more or less notably adulterated," and he added that he "excommunicated ipso facto all who should read those Bibles."

At once Dr. Kalley made a verse by verse comparison of the Edinburgh and Lisbon editions of the Gospel of St. Matthew and found them identical. This led to trouble which was not to cease for over a decade.

There existed in Funchal a little Scottish church for the worship of the British residents of the island. This church and the free exercise of their religion was guaranteed to them by a treaty between Great Britain and Portugal. A new minister came out from Scotland in 1843 to take charge of the church. One Sunday when he was about to administer the Lord's Supper, two Portuguese converts, Nicolos Vieira and Francisco Pires Soares, came to him requesting permission to partake of the

communion. Dr. Kalley warned them of their peril, but they persisted. After examination by the Protestant ministers, they were admitted to partake of the supper.

Four days later they were brought before the magistrates charged with apostasy. They were discharged by the court, but were excommunicated on the following Sunday. Another attempt was made to arrest them, but they were hidden by their friends and continued in hiding for six months. At that time orders arrived from Lisbon putting a stop to the persecution. The arrest of Vieira and Soares was the beginning of a persecution whose thrilling episodes are many.

Mob Violence ensued, directed especially against Vieira, who was now teaching a school at his own home. Vieira was forced to flee to the mountains and his family and pupils were arrested. He himself escaped to Demecara, where he eventually joined his family when they stopped in route to Trinidad.

Finally Dr. Kalley was arrested under an obsolete Law of the Inquisition, enacted in 1603. He was convicted and imprisoned for five months. After his release he left the island for a visit to Scotland, stopping at Lisbon in route.

The missionary activity at Madeira during Dr. Kalley's absence was due to the missionary zeal of William Hepburn Hewitson, acting under a commission from the Free Church of Scotland. Mr. Hewitson was a brilliant scholar who had wrecked his health by too much study. He resolved to devote his remaining energies to missionary enterprise in a field where he might have some chance to regain his health. Madeira was the place.

In Madeira, Mr. Hewitson started the organization of a church of the *Madeirenses*. He wrote: "The time may not be far distant when I shall be obliged to leave Madeira by the strong arm of persecution, and it would be a great comfort to the afflicted church here....to have the prospect of so soon receiving the ordinances at the hands of one of their own number."

The organization of the church was actually accomplished on May 12, 1845. On the very day of its accomplishment Mr. Hewitson wrote: "The horizon is becoming more and more cloudy. Two or three days ago at a dinner party the Bishop of Madeira declared extermination war against the Bible. He said that he had all the authorities on his side, and he was resolved to put down all dissent from the Roman Catholic Church."

Now the officials were seeking cause for the arrest of the missionary. He was warned by the police to discontinue his meetings under threat of arrest, so he held them at night. On one of these meetings he writes: "This night we are at eight o'clock to 'keep the feast' in secret, with closed doors and windows, in our own dining room, with this poor and persecuted little flock of Christ. The service, if discovered will send his dear servant to prison, but the Lord is his keeper."

Then Mr. Hewitson became ill, and in May 1846, he left Madeira with the intention of returning in a few months. Before Mr. Hewitson's departure Dr. Kalley returned. The excitement caused by Mr. Hewitson's illness and Dr. Kalley's return was increased in June by the release of a number of the converts who had been in prison for months.

The Imparcial a newspaper edited by the brother-in-law of the governor in 1843 "openly recommended the cudgel, as the best means of convincing the country people of the truth of their religion, because they were not accustomed to arguments, but could understand the power of the stick." The gallows and the stake were at another time recommended in it "as the only remaining cure for heresy."

The columns of this newspaper constantly filled with attacks on Dr. Kalley's followers. These attacks had been compiled and published as a pamphlet, under the title "An Historical Review of The Anti-Catholic Proselytism Carried on by Dr. Kalley in Madeira since October 1838." It was published by subscription, and copies of it were carried to Lisbon by the Bishop. Dr. Kalley wrote a reply to the pamphlet, which was printed in Lisbon and circulated there and in Madeira in July, 1846. This open controversy seems to have been the match which touched off the explosion."

The first violent outburst occurred on Sunday, August 2, 1846. The Misses Rutherford, two English ladies, lived in the island and sympathized with Dr. Kalley's work. On the same date mentioned they allowed a group of *Madeirenses* to use a room in their house. About thirty or forty assembled under the leadership of Arsenio Nicos da Silva, to hold a prayer meeting and to read a letter which had come from Mr. Hewitson. But news of the meeting spread, and a mob gathered outside.

When the meeting ended about half-past twelve, da Silva and a few others broke through the mob and escaped. The rest, mostly women, had to remain. The police had been around all day, but made no attempt to break up the mob. At sunset they withdrew. About eleven o'clock the mob invaded the grounds and prepared to attack the house. They finally broke into the house and began a search for the islanders who were hidden in its most remote parts. At last they were found and dragged into the garden amid blows and threats. When the murder of the converts seemed imminent, the would-be murderers were interrupted by the tardy arrival of the police. The mob was quickly broken up and the frightened converts escorted home.

The mob violence did not end there. Threats continued throughout the following week and grew more fierce. The mob watched Dr. Kalley's house and subjected all who came and went to insult and abuse. On August 8, Dr. Kalley received an anonymous letter exactly detailing the plans of the riot which took place the next day.

On August 9, 1846, the great raid occurred. The native converts and Dr. Kalley were subjected to attack. *The Madeiras* fled to the mountains. Dr. Kalley became aware of a plan to take his life, and with the utmost secrecy, he and his family fled on board one of the British ships lying in the harbor of Funchal. Dr. Kalley was finally carried on board disguised as a female invalid. His house was burned together with a collection of ten thousand books in his library.

The next day, the Misses Rutherford and others who were identified with Dr. Kalley also took refuge on board the ship. The invalid Miss Rutherford died as a result of the excitement. No punishment or penalty was inflicted upon the persons who were guilty of the persecuting the converts. During the week of August 2-9 the mob turned its fury against the native converts.

Violence continued until there was nothing to do but to flee. On the evening of the fifth many houses were plundered by bands of marauding ruffians, and sixty or eighty of the converts were compelled to leave their homes and pass the night in the

mountains. Night after night these bands continued to repeat their desolating work; till, on the Sunday, many hundreds of Portuguese subjects had fled for their lives. The mob had broken open their doors, and destroyed their windows; furniture and other property, trampling under foot the grapes and corn of those who possessed vineyards and gardens. When the work of destruction was done in the town and neighborhood, the ruthless persecutors followed the scattered flock to the mountains.

The persecuted *Madeirenses* sought refuge on the ship "William of Glasgow" which had received Dr. Kalley and their other English friends. This ship had come by arrangement with the planters of Trinidad who were greatly in need of laborers. On August 23, 1846, the "William of Glasgow" began her voyage to Trinidad. Two hundred and eleven refugees left on the ship, but in all a thousand or twelve hundred went into exile in Trinidad and other islands.

Mr. Hewitson described the material condition of the exiles in Trinidad as follows: "On their arrival, a considerable number of them were engaged by planters to labor on sugar estates. Some of these were placed on an estate situated in the neighborhood of marshy ground, and as might have been expected, were soon prostrated by an attack of fever, which in several instances terminated in death. A speedy removal of all who survived from the pestilential neighborhood, in which they had been so unhappily located, to the more salubrious air of the capital was found to be necessary.

Already it was found that Trinidad could not be their permanent home. Plans were made for a new migration, this time to the United States.

Early in 1849 arrangements were made with the American Hemp Company for the settlement of the exiles in Illinois. The place selected was on the Meredosia and Springfield Railroad at Island Grove, about midway between Springfield and Jacksonville. The exiles left Trinidad that year, and started on their way to the United States. Then they landed in New York, but, to their disappointment, were forced to stay there a few weeks because cholera had broken out.

Finally on Tuesday, November 13, 1849, 350 of them led by Daniel M. Lanthrop of New York, reached Jacksonville. They were welcomed by a committee consisting of President Julian M. Sturtevant, D.D., of Illinois College, Grover Augustus C. French, and Reverend Albert Hale of Springfield.

On November 28 of the same year (1849) eighty more came to Jacksonville under the leadership of Reverend J. M. Gonsalves. A few settled in Waverly, and the remainder in Jacksonville and Springfield.

"As a rule they came here poor in purse but rich in determination. They all managed as soon as possible to acquire a piece of ground, no matter how small, which they can call their own, and they cultivate this with all the care and diligence they formerly bestowed upon the little patches of earth between the rocks and hills of their rugged native isle. As a class they are industrious, frugal, upright, peaceful, law-abiding citizens and may be found in all trades and professions to which they readily adapt themselves... Many of the older class maintain the peculiarities of their native land, but the younger portion more readily than any other of our foreign born citizens; adapt themselves to the customs, manners, and habits of their adopted

land.... Their girls are for the most part sweet singers and many of them quite beautiful, their dark complexion betraying their Arab or Berber blood."

On November 24, 1849, a Portuguese Sunday School was organized in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church. Reverend T. M. Glover, D.D. was the pastor at that time.

On the 25th day of May 1850, the Portuguese Church of Jacksonville was organized by Reverend A. DeMattos, of the Free Church of Scotland. Their first house of worship was dedicated August 19, 1853, by Reverend Robert F. Kalley. In 1854 the church was divided, and the second Portuguese church was organized in 1855, but the church building was not completed until 1863.

Reverend A. DeMattos continued pastor for the First Portuguese Church until 1869. Reverend McKee succeeded him as pastor till 1872, when Reverend Henry Vierende of West Indies became pastor.

The best known minister of the Second Presbyterian Church was Reverend Robert Lenington, who, beginning in 1862 served the church at three different times covering a total period of sixteen or eighteen years. These pastoral ministrations were separated by seventeen years of missionary service in Brazil.

The second Presbyterian Church was divided about 1874, and a third church, the Central Portuguese Church, was organized and ministered to by Reverend I. N. Pires until 1887, when the Central and First Portuguese Churches were united under the name of the United Portuguese Church with Reverend I. N. Pires as pastor. He continued a very useful pastorate until March 1896, when he was stricken by death.

In October 1900, the two Portuguese churches were united under the name of the Portuguese Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville. It was also decided to discontinue the use of the Portuguese language in the services of the church at the time this union was formed. In June 1901, Reverend Roger F. Cressey was called to the pastorate.

Today the original Portuguese Church is the Northminster Presbyterian Church located on Fayette and Court Streets.

As written by Ardeen DeFrates, for an essay contest in 1946. Please inquire if you would like copy of her bibliography.

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**Jacksonville Area Genealogical & Historical Society(JAGHS)
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