

History of St. Joseph Parish, continued.

1925-2003

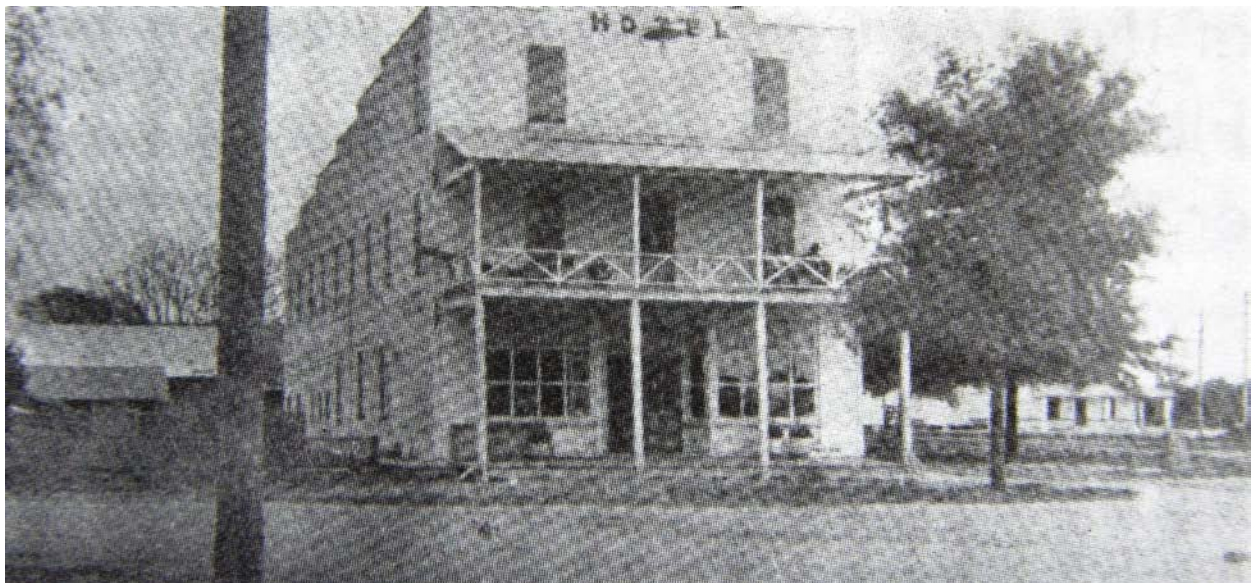
Two Early Catholics



Matthew J. Smith, one of the first parishioners, was only 21 when he arrived in Winter Haven. He had traveled by railroad as a stowaway in a hay car, traveling from Holdridge, Nebraska where he had been living for a year. According to his daughter, Mrs. Mary Fagan, he was a grammar school teacher, an instructor in penmanship in a business school and a traveling salesman in Missouri where he had been born. Another story describes him traveling to Florida with a friend but without a ticket. Whenever the conductor would approach, Matt would throw a canvas over himself to avoid detection.



Before he married and before St. Joseph became a mission church, Smith lived at the Keefe Hotel on 5th Street and Avenue A.



Later this became the site of Thornton Furniture. To attend Mass, Smith would walk to Auburndale from the hotel to catch a train to Lakeland. He would remain in Lakeland until seven p.m. to catch a train back to Auburndale and then walk back to the hotel. Sometimes W. H. Keefe, the owner of the hotel and one of the first parishioners, would offer the hotel as a site for the Mass. Matt Smith and Will Keefe became lifelong friends.

Another early parishioner was Frank Goodman, Sr. who came to



Lake Alfred with a law degree in 1913 from Fargo, North Dakota. Once here, he worked with the Florida Fruitlands Company, a company owned by the settlers from Fargo. Naturally enough, Lake Alfred was first incorporated under the name of Fargo. (It was also known as Little Armenia, Chubb and Bartow Junction because of the railroad.) Traveling the muddy road on horseback between Lake Alfred and Winter Haven led Goodman to convince the

citizens of Lake Alfred and Winter Haven that a passable clay road should be built. Both communities contributed funds for the road, and men from both locations worked from their separate ends to connect the towns. Mr. Goodman's son would later become the first priest ordained from St. Joseph.