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Homely Rector's photo paid to roof church

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FERNANDINA BEACH --- The original roof on historic St. Peter's Episcopal Church here was paid for by an unique method: Money was raised through the sale of pictures of the Rector at that time; he reportedly was one of the homliest men in these parts --- nevertheless, his photographs sold and a roof was had!

On June 14, 1858, the Rev. Owen P. Thackara, Rector of Trinity Church, St. Augustine, organized a Missionary Post here. A few months later, the Rev. J. H. Williams became the first rector of St. Peter's at a salary of $600 a year. The Rev. Mr. Thackara returned as Rector of the church he founded, in 1859, and stayed until 1886.

The parish emerged from the Civil War in a broken and discouraged condition. The church had been occupied by Federal troops, and many of its possessions were lost or destroyed. Later the original building was used by the Bureau of Freedmen Refugees and Abandoned Lands. In 1866 it was restored as a church, and the silver that had been in safe-keeping at the Custom House was regained.

The original structure burned in 1892 and the present St. Peter's Church, at the corner of Atlantis Ave. and N. 8th St., was built in 1893. A Tiffany window was dedicated to the memory of Drs. Herndon and Wellford, two young men who lost their lives combatting the yellow fever epidemic in 1878.

The neo-Gothic church is a gray stucco edifice with high, narrow stained-glass windows, a red slate roof, and dormers. A rosette window adorns the front of the church. An Italian marble font was donated by Dr. Hanckie of Charleston, S.C., in 1870, who, as a visitor, attended services and observed the Rector administering baptism from a common china bowl.

The deep-tone bell in the tower was given as the first of a proposed set of chimes and was installed in 1902. A sum of money was left later by a former parishioner, Mr. Finn, to complete the chimes, but the tower was found unsafe to support the extra weight and the chimes were installed in the organ instead. The bell in the original building came from one of the pre-Civil War engines of the old Florida Railroad.