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'Live Oak Avenue' commemorates educator

Hampton Dunn

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



LIVE OAK AVENUE' COMMEMORATES EDUCATOR

By HAMPTON DUNN

MONTICELLO -- "A lover of Nature" was the simple epitaph paying tribute to the late John Howard Girardeau, an early Florida educator, on a marker underneath the giant arms of the trees on "Live Oak Avenue" here.

The monument was erected by the Girardeau children and dedicated to the memory of the man who planted the live oaks back in 1889. The great moss-draped limbs clasp overhead to form a shady canopy and to give Monticello a famed beauty spot. Girardeau became County School Superintendent of Jefferson County in 1897 at a time when this community was a cultural and educational center of Florida.

The elegant live oak is an impressive trade mark for the Southland and is the State Tree for Georgia, whose southern border touches this county. The tree takes its name from its own leaves, which are always shiny, fresh-looking and alive, and is classified an evergreen.

Live oak timber is the toughest of woods and the heaviest of oaks, 60 pounds to the cubic foot. It's so hard it turns the edge of tools when dry.

Back in the olden days, before the days of steel bottoms, the live oak was this country's most prized ship timber. The wood from St. Simon's Island, Ga., not too far from this North Florida town, was used in the construction of the hull of the frigate, Constitution, the famed "Old Ironsides" of Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem.

