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Osceola boasts oldest courthouse

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



OSCEOLA BOASTS OLDEST COURT HOUSE

KISSIMMEE --- The three story brick structure that serves Osceola County as a governmental center is said to be the oldest court house still in use in Florida. And local folk will tell you it is one of the state's "most handsome" court houses.

Indeed, it is attractive, standing there under the massive oak trees, as sturdy as the tough brave Seminole Indian warrior for whom the county was named, Chief Osceola. The court house was built in 1889.

Osceola County was created from portions of Orange and Brevard in 1887. It extended as far south as Lake Okeechobee until 1937 when Okeechobee County was formed from parts of Osceola, Polk and Brevard Counties. Landwise, this is the sixth largest county in Florida.

The influence of the early occupancy of this area by the Indians is reflected in the names that have been handed down. The county seat name came from the Seminole Indians and has been variously translated as "Heaven," or "happy hunting ground" or "Eden" or "Paradise" or "Blessed Land." Well, you get the idea. When modern Indians are asked the origin, they simply reply "Me don't know; long time ago Indian named Kissimmee city, Indian Big Sleep." The community is situated on Lake Tohopekagliga.

The Indian who named the town may be in "Big Sleep," but this section of Florida is far from asleep. It's the hub of the Disney World development, has a prosperous cattle and citrus and fishing economy and is criss-crossed by modern highways. The cattle date back to the middle of the 16th century when DeSoto brought cows and hogs to Florida.

