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Hamilton Disston organized Kissimmee church

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



HAMILTON DISSTON ORGANIZED KISSIMMEE CHURCH

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KISSIMMEE --- Hamilton Disston, the saw and tool tycoon who bought four million acres of Florida at 25¢ per acre, began development of this area back in the 1870s. He and a group of English settlers organized historic St. John's Episcopal Church in 1875.

First services were held in the community's Opera House. Later, the Episcopalians met in the Presbyterian Church.

In 1889, St. John's got its own building --- the same one still being used today. It first was erected on beautiful Lake Tohopekaliga. Amid the turn of the century the structure was moved to a spot on Church Street. Finally, in 1960, the congregation decided to move from the downtown congestion, and transferred the building to its present site at 1710 N. Bermuda Ave.

The church looks now as it did in 1889 with the exception of the exchange of kerosene for electricity, and the new bell tower. The lovely antique furniture that decorated that original church still enhances the interior today.

Earliest record of the St. John's Church was the wedding of Mr. and Mrs. I. N. Mabbette during the founding year, 1875.

The name Kissimmee, from the Seminole Indians, might be translated "Heaven" yet the Seminoles had another word for this meaning "Happy Hunting Ground." The Seminole tribe lived here until about 1650, when a rival tribe, the Matokas, drove through the territory. The Seminoles were split, part going south and the other part migrated to the West. Osceola County, of which Kissimmee is county seat, is named in honor of the Seminole chief and warrior, Osceola.

