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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



THE BRIDE'S CHURCH' GRACES COCONUT GROVE

By HAMPTON DUNN

COCONUT GROVE --- They call the handsome old vine-covered structure at Main Highway and Devon Road here "The Bride's Church." Its charm and hospitality has attracted numerous socially prominent families to merge at the altar.

It is the Plymouth Congregational, originally called Union Congregational. Couples who have no church affiliation have been welcomed to wed here. Often there are ecumenical weddings when ministers of different faiths join in conducting the ceremony.

Except for circumstances at the time of its founding before the turn of the century, this might have been a Methodist institution. There was a sickly Methodist minister from New England, his name was the Rev. James Bolton, who came south for his health in 1897. He came all the way to this locality, just then opened to the railroad by Henry Flagler. Other Cononut Grove pioneers urged Bolton to start a church. He, being a Methodist, wrote the Mission Board seeking support. There already was a Methodist church in Miami, so the Board turned him down.

Whereupon, the Rev. Mr. Bolton turned to the Congregational headquarters and got the go-ahead. Thus, the Union Congregational Church came into being on March 2, 1901. There had been a little chapel serving this faith, it was erected on land donated by Commodore Ralph M. Monroe, but it just struggled along.

The Rev. Mr. Bolton was succeeded by the Rev. Solomon G. Merrick, the congregation's first authentic Congregationalist preacher. The present building, constructed in the 1920s is said to be the finest specimen of Spanish architecture in the South.

