

January 1960

Trinity is Florida's oldest Episcopal church

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Recommended Citation

Dunn, Hampton, "Trinity is Florida's oldest Episcopal church" (1960). *Hampton Dunn Phototouring Florida Collection*. 289.

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



TRINITY IS FLORIDA'S OLDEST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

By HAMPTON DUNN

ST. AUGUSTINE --- The distinctive church building with the weather-beaten look at its old entrance happens to be Trinity Episcopal, which claims to be the first non-Roman church organized in St. Augustine and the oldest Episcopal church in Florida.

The mottled stucco structure with a wooden-shingled spire is an unostentatious example of Gothic Revival architecture. It is reported the north porch and tower and the walls of the north transept and baptistry are the only remaining portions of the old building.

There had been Church of England gatherings in St. Augustine during the British occupation (1764-84), and St. Peters Church was started. But when the Spanish returned, the Catholics were in charge and the Episcopal movement "went into decay."

When the U.S. acquired Florida in 1821, the Episcopal church soon revived here. The first rector was the Rev. Andrew Fowler who found on arrival that St. Augustine was going through a time of pestilence. He and the Catholic clergy ministered to the victims of a malignant fever.

Trinity was chartered in 1825 and one of the founders was Judge Joseph L. Smith, father of Confederate hero Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith. It was difficult to get the financial support needed to finish the church edifice, which was not formally consecrated until 1834.

