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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



'SIDEWALK SUPERINTENDENTS' GOT EVANGELIZED

By HAMPTON DUNN

TAMPA --- The First Baptist Church of Tampa dates back to before the Civil War, and seven Negro slaves and one free Negro were on the original rolls.

First formal church in this fishing village was the Methodist, then came the Baptists and thirdly came the Catholics.

An effort had been made by the Baptists as early as 1853, but the congregation wasn't sufficient to keep it growing or going. But on July 23, 1859, the church was chartered with 16 white members in addition to the Negroes already mentioned. Services were held three times on Sunday, a separate session being held for the Negroes.

Early County Commissioners gave the fledgling church a lot at Twiggs and Tampa Streets which became the site of its first building. According to Dr. Adiel J. Moncrief, one-time pastor of the church and later church editor of The Tampa Tribune, this gift from government did not offend the "separation of church and state" scruples of these early Baptists. In fact, a member of the flock, who also happened to be Clerk of Court for the County used influence to get the land.

Building of the first structure caused quite a stir in the new town. Sidewalk superintendents, well there were no sidewalks, just sand streets at the time, gathered to watch progress before their very eyes. The enterprising pastor, a Baptist through and through, saw all those curious people and began a revival right there in the open. It resulted in a number of conversions.

The present church, at Plant and Kennedy, was built in 1924. The massive Romanesque church sanctuary cost more than half a million dollars.

