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Hampton Dunn

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



ST. MICHAEL'S HISTORY DATES BACK TO 1558

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PENSACOLA --- For sheer antiquity, St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church here probably tops all church congregations in Florida. Its history dates back to the year 1558, the year a expedition was commissioned by the Church and the governor-general of Mexico to go to Florida, the exploration being dedicated to God and Philip of Spain.

So it was that Tristan de Luna, the nephew of a Pope, busied about and got his journey underway in June of the following year, with a dedicatory mass being said in the historic Cathedral in Mexico City. The party arrived in Pensacola Bay in August and upon disembarking, quickly erected a crude chapel dedicated to St. Michael, the Archangle, and celebrated Holy Mass.

Both Pensacola and St. Michael's had their ups and downs in the centuries following, as the town switched from Spanish to French ownership, and later to British and finally to American. The second time the French lost the city, they put it to the torch, not sparing the Church. Other plagues and natural disasters wiped out history of the church between 1743 and 1810. A beautiful wooden church on Government St. was destroyed by fire in 1882 destroying records.

The present Church of St. Michael's on the corner of Palafox and Chase Streets in downtown Pensacola was built in 1855 by Father Baason, who later became the first Monsignor of the Dicosese. The gray stucco structure with Gothic doors and windows and a square belfry rising to a pyramidal spire is a masterpiece of architecture. The glass windows were imported from Munich, Bavaria.

It was during Father Baason's pastorate that the Right Rev. John Quinlan, Bishop of Mobile, applied to Mother Mary Austin, Superior of the Sisters of Mercy in New Orleans for Sisters to conduct schools and undertake other good works in Pensacola. On the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1877, the Sisters arrived to take charge of about 300 children who awaited their first ministrations.

A Parochial History of St. Michael's reflects the pride of its members in its antiquity: "The history of the cradle of Christianity in the New World."

