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They call it 'Moss Hill heritage'

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



THEY CALL IT 'MOSS HILL HERITAGE'

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MOSS HILL --- They sang "Church in the Wildwood" that day in 1963 when a historical marker was dedicated on grounds of the long-standing Moss Hill United Methodist Church.

The unpainted, weather-beaten frame structure, erected in 1857, still proudly serves the folks of this West Florida country known as Holmes Valley. The placement of the historical marker was part of a program to bring recognition and to encourage lasting appreciation of the role played by Moss Hill Church and the earlier Holmes Valley Mission "in spreading the Christian influence over frontier West Florida." That influence, according to the printed program at the dedication, "has become known as the 'Moss Hill Heritage.'"

They also call this picturesque community "the West Florida cradle of Christianity." The small wooden church is situated about three miles east of the village of Vernon, in Washington County, south of the county seat at Chipley.

The marker tells this story: "Early settlers, attracted by the fertile Coosada (later Holmes) Old Fields, established a log schoolhouse Methodist mission near here soon after Spain ceded Florida to the United States in 1820. The first Methodist ministerial assignment between the Apalachicola River and Pensacola was made to the Holmes Valley Mission. During the early history of Washington County, court terms were held here or in the home of a nearby settler. A church was erected here in 1857."

The first meeting place was a blockhouse a short distance northwest of the present church, It was listed on early maps as the Old Fort. Later, the Methodists shared a combination log church-schoolhouse with the Baptists and Presbyterians. When the Methodists got their own building, the one still in use, it was on property to which the deed was finally signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1861.

Lumber for the structure came from virgin pines on the site. Square nails and wooden pegs were used. The church has pine pews and there's a dividing line in the middle. The women used to sit on one side and the men on the other. There's still no electricity at the church.

