



Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



CHURCH IN SAME SPOT BUT IN FOUR COUNTIES

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ISTACHATTA --- Tucked away in a wooded area near this community is a tiny Methodist church so old it outlives all its records, and its birth certificate does not exist.

As pieced together by oldtimers interested in the history of the New Hope Methodist Church, situated on State Road 39, the first church was built in the 1830s --- perhaps even earlier. It might have been a private dwelling, and at first was a non-denominational meetin' house and school. Any itinerant circuit-riding preacher was welcome to hold forth.

The present little white frame structure is ancient. Way back many years ago there was a log cabin on the same spot serving as the sanctuary. Although its location hasn't been changed, the New Hope Methodist Church has been in four counties! The shuffling of county boundaries and names took the church from Hillsborough into Benton County, which was eliminated to become Hernando and Citrus counties, and from Hernando back into Citrus County, in which jurisdiction it continues.

A cemetery adjoins the church yard and legible tombstones in it trace back to the early 1880s. Annual cemetery cleanings and "dinner of the ground" bring back members and offspring of members from many miles away.

The church is not far from the Wahoo Swamp, once alive with Indians and the New Hope Church served in its early days as a refuge from the rampaging redskins.

