

1-1-1960

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Dunn, Hampton, "Conquistadores brought Catholicism to Tampa" (1960). *Digital Collection - Florida Studies Center Publications*. Paper 2751.

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



CONQUISTADORES BROUGHT CATHOLICISM TO TAMPA

By HAMPTON DUNN

TAMPA --- The Catholic movement in the Tampa Bay area is the oldest religion here and dates back to the visits of the Spanish Conquistadores in the early 1500s. At least five Franciscans were with Panfilio de Narvaez when he touched down in this section in 1528, and Hernando de Soto also had priests in his party when he landed on the Gulf Coast (presumably near Bradenton) and moved northward in the vicinity of present day Tampa in 1539.

This bit of history was noted by Adiel J. Moncrief, church editor of The Tampa Tribune, when he wrote a story marking the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Sacred Heart Church in 1960. Originally called St. Louis church, the parishioners met in a small frame building on the present site of the magnificent Sacred Heart Church on Florida Avenue in downtown Tampa. The early mission established here ceased in 1572 and the Catholic movement wasn't renewed until 250 years later.

County Commissioners in 1853 set aside land for use by the Catholics. Mass had been said in different meeting places before that. One spot where services were held was in the home of Mayor J. John Jackson.

The county land gift was swapped for the present site and the beautiful structure was erected. The church started a school for boys, known as Sacred Heart College, in 1899. It now is known as Jesuit High School.

