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Hampton Dunn
STONEWALL JACKSON GAVE $5 TO TAMPA CHURCH

By HAMPTON DUNN

TAMPA --- In the mid-1800s, the community of Tampa boasted 79 dwellings and a population of 441. Florida had become a State in 1845, Tampa didn't become a city until 1855.

About this time, the promising town adjoining Fort Brooke felt the need for a religious institution. The Methodists led the way, organizing on July 26, 1846, with a meeting of six persons. Founder was the Rev. John C. Ley of the Georgia-Florida Methodist Conference.

The new group erected an edifice of salvaged lumber on the bay front. This was washed away by the hurricane of 1848. A gift of $500 from a John H. Whidden for the building of "a Methodist church in the village of Tampa" started a successful drive. Among the contributors: Confederate General Stonewall Jackson, $5.

A small frame building went up. It served well as a meeting place, was enlarged in 1877, but went up in blazes in 1894. Whereupon the congregation constructed another building at Florida and Tyler in downtown Tampa. (Photo) This recently was removed and replaced by a new sanctuary.

The hard luck which stalked this congregation took from them the pastor in 1889, the Rev. C. E. Pelot, a victim of the yellow fever scourge which hit Tampa that year.

The new building was planned to cost $10,000, but when the bills were all paid it had cost $16,350.

One of the "firsts" of the First Methodist Church was to broadcast the complete service on radio when WDAE carried the service in 1923. First Methodist was responsible for forming many other churches in the area. Two of its pastors went on to become Methodist Bishops. They are the late Bishop John W. Branscomb and Bishop Edward Pendergrass, now bishop of Mississippi.