Beautiful enough to make an atheist pray

Hampton Dunn
"BEAUTIFUL ENOUGH TO MAKE AN ATHEIST PRAY"

ST. AUGUSTINE --- Florida developer Henry M. Flagler was the son of a poor New York rural Presbyterian minister who farmed "on the side" to support his family. Throughout his rags-to-riches life, Henry continued his interest in churches and financially helped in his kingdom of Florida.

The magnificent Flagler Memorial Presbyterian Church at Valencia and Sevilla Streets here was built by Flagler as a memorial to his only daughter, Jennie Louise Benedict. It cost $200,000 and is Venetian Renaissance, said to be the only church in this country with that style architecture.

During dedication services on March 16, 1890, the pastor of the church called it "a house of prayer beautiful enough to move a savage's wonder or make an atheist pray."

The dedication attracted a galaxy of big names of the day, including the wife of the President of the United States, Mrs. Benjamin Harrison, and Vice President and Mrs. Levi F. Morton.

Mrs. Benedict had given birth to a daughter in 1889, but the baby survived only a few hours. The heart-sick father, Frederick H. Benedict, borrowed his father's yacht, the Oneida, to rush the Flagler daughter to Florida to recuperate. She died aboard the yacht enroute, as Flagler awaited her arrival at Charleston, S. C.

Flagler contributed to other denominations, including the Methodist and Catholic churches here. Entombed in a mausoleum at Flagler Memorial are the bodies of Flagler, his first wife, their daughter and the infant.