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THE CHURCH HARRIET BEECHER STOWE BUILT

By HAMPTON DUNN

MANDARIN --- The howling winds of Hurricane Dora in September, 1963 wiped out historic Episcopal Church of Our Saviour in this charming, moss-draped community. This is the church that famed Civil War writer Harriet Beecher Stowe helped to found and build.

Mrs. Stowe and her husband, the Rev. Calvin Stowe, a Presbyterian minister, moved here in 1867. The author of the controversial "Uncle Tom's Cabin" planned to do philanthropy among the Negroes. They started religious work in the community.

In 1881, an Episcopal clergyman, the Rev. Charles M. Sturgess, came here and started a mission for his denomination. Mrs. Stowe was a recent convert to the Episcopal Church. By Easter the following year, the building fund for a church structure totaled $500. Mrs. Stowe created the Mandarin Amateur Dramatic Association to put on plays for the benefit of the building fund. In 1883 the Church was raised on a high bluff overlooking the St. Johns River at a cost of $2500. It was a copy of a mountain chapel in upstate New York. This was the last Winter the Stowes stayed in Florida. The Rev. Mr. Stowe died in 1886.

The noted writer asked that the end window be reserved for a stained glass memorial for her husband. It was not until 1916, long after Mrs. Stowe's death in 1896, that a Tiffany window was installed. It depicted a great live oak, "symbol of the Stowes' love of Mandarin."

The vicious hurricane ripped through Mandarin and smashed the building--including the Stowe memorial window. A new church with a chapel duplicating the old one was dedicated in 1966.