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J. C. PENNEY HONORED REVERED PARENTS IN FLORIDA

By HAMPTON DUNN

PENNEY FARMS --- One of the early "retirement villages" in Florida was the one here at this rural community near Green Cove Springs which the late chain store magnate James Cash Penney built in honor of his revered parents.

In the J. C. Penney Memorial Church of the Seven Gables, pivotal point of this unique village, is a plaque which reads: "As a memorial to his Father and Mother, Rev. James Cash Penney and Mary Frances Penney, Servants of God who went about doing good, inspirers of youth ---teachers of the living truth, this community is dedicated by James Cash Penney, A. D. 1927."

The philanthropic establishment, on State Road 16, was endowed by Penney as a place of refuge and retirement for superannuated Protestant ministers and their wives. Someone has written that "The venerable parsons sink their denominational differences and live in peace and comfort, each in his own independent apartment or cottage, and thoroughly enjoy each other’s society."

The group of buildings contain 96 apartments and the handsome sanctuary. A plaque in the church explains:

"It may be interesting to know the reasons for selecting this particular style of architecture and developing the community in the manner in which it has been done. In the 13th century in France, particularly in the section better known as Normandy, church control and influence predominated in all developments. Many small communities were built up around the church in which all activities of the community took place and around which the leadership of the community was centered. The houses and dwellings of the inhabitants of this community were built near the churches which often were built by the laymen and clergy themselves with their own hands."

Allen B. Mills and his associate, Arthur E. Davis, Jr., were architects of the Church of the Seven Gables.

Penney built a merchantile empire, using the Golden Rule as his yardstick. He died in 1971 at the age of 95.