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Wacissa more promising than Tallahassee to Episcopaleans

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TALLAHASSEE --- In 1827, when Florida was new as a Territory of the U.S., the Episcopal Church sent the Rev. Ralph Williston here to establish a mission. He looked the area over and found that the plantation settlement of Wacissa, 18 miles east of the capital city, was an even more promising field than this town.

The Rev. Mr. Williston divided his time between the two communities. A few years later, his successor formally organized and incorporated St. John’s Church here; this was in 1829. The young church struggled along during the Seminole War years, and the Rev. J. Loring Woart became pastor in 1836. He also was to become one of the organizers of the infant Diocese of Florida.

These were perilous times. It was reported that "in the dead of night citizens were often aroused and guards were constantly kept around town"during the Indian conflict. Nevertheless, St. John’s erected a new building and opened for divine service on May 7, 1838. The church was of wood "in the Grecian order, with a portico with four pillars."

The present red brick structure that houses St. John’s at the corner of N. Monroe and Call Streets, was built in 1881, replacing the original frame structure. It is designed in the manner of an old English Gothic church. The granite slabs forming the window sills and steps were taken from Andrew Jackson’s arsenal at Chattahoochee.

Francis Eppes, a Territorial official and grandson of Thomas Jefferson, was an early vestryman. So was Territorial Gov. Richard Keith Call and Gov. Thomas Brown.

A tall marble shaft on the grounds at the church entrance was erected in memory of the Rev. Mr. Woart and his wife, who perished in the wreck of the S.S. Pulaski in June, 1838, shortly after the first church building was erected.