

HISTORY OF THE  
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

*Oviedo, Florida*



FIRST 100 YEARS

*1869-1969*



Oviedo, Fla.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Oviedo First Baptist Church will celebrate its first one hundreth year starting Sunday, September 28, 1969. Mrs. Mary Walker is Chairman of the Celebration. On Wednesday night Oct. 1, a "Reminiscence" Fair will be held, displaying many treasured mementoes from the past. Homemade ice cream and cake will also be served.

On Sunday, October 5, Homecoming Day will be held with former pastor Jack T. Bryant bringing the morning message: "Launching A Second Century of Witness for Christ".

Sunday night the service will be held under a BRUSH ARBOR as the beginning started. Dan P. Thomas, Associational Superintendent of Missions, will preach.

We wish to acknowledge thanks to the following people who supplied information, pictures and without whose's help this history could not have been written.

Mrs. W. P. Carter  
Mr. W. J. Lawton  
Mr. Henry Walcott  
Mr. Wm. H. Martin

Mrs. T. W. Lawton  
Mr. C. S. Lee, Jr.  
Mrs. Nettie Aulin

Church History Committee

Mrs. E. F. Wheeler, Jr.

Mr. C. W. Holder

A HISTORY OF THE  
FIRST 100 YEARS

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

OVIRDO, FLORIDA  
1869-1969

Before the white man came to Florida from immemorial times it was inhabited by various tribes of Indians----- Muskogans, Tomokans, Caloosas, Creeks, Seminoles and others, who supported themselves chiefly by hunting and fishing. They roamed the coasts and the interior, nearly naked; they fought with one another fiercely, with spears, bows and arrows, tomahawks and clubs; they cultivated a few vegetables, corn, squash, beans and tobacco; they engaged in athletic sports and contest; they worshipped the Great Spirit and held festivals for the sun and moon. The Chiefs dispensed justice after their crude and cruel fashion, and the redskins celebrated the rites and ceremonies of their primitive faith, stretching their hands in the morning toward the rising sun and in the evening toward the setting sun.

Then came the inquisitive voyagers, warriors and priests from overseas, searching for new lands and treasure. First came the Spanish explorers, then the French Colonists, massacred and expelled by the Spaniards, who ruled Florida for nearly two centuries duration; then the English for

some twenty years; the second Spanish supremacy, from 1780 to 1821; the United States from 1821 and when on March 3, 1845 it was admitted to the Union and in 1861 when it seceded from the Union and finally readmitted as a state in 1868.

During the various European occupations the history of Florida was more tragedy than a song. Here explorers, brave knights, soldiers of fortune, lured by the siren song of wealth and hope of glory suffered and died and the world knew them no more. Here were armies sacrificed to satiate the vengeance of European monarchs, massacred by savage redskins or other enemies, with every refinement of cruelty that an ingenious mind could conceive or an experienced hand execute.

Army after army buried itself in these swamps and forests, they pursued the fateful errand of death and failure; no city of gold was their reward, no treasure-mine offered remuneration, only misery and death and immunities of a forgotten grave.

MOSQUITO COUNTY

The Spanish had called Florida Mosquito Territory and on December 29, 1824 we quote a transcript made from the territorial records. "An Act to establish counties and define the boundaries of the territory. Be it further



enacted that there be and hereby constituted a county by the name of Mosquito and the said county be bounded on the north by the county of St. Johns on the east by the Atlantic Ocean and on the west by the Indian boundary line."

In 1830 the population of Mosquito county was 733. By this time, the red men were again making their presence felt in the settlements. In 1843 the county seat was moved to Enterprise on Lake Monroe from New Smyrna. Because the people objected to the name Mosquito the name was changed on January 30, 1845 to Orange County.

The county seat of Orange County, which had previously been at Enterprise, was removed to Orlando in 1856. Three places wanted the county seat, The Lodge, (Apopka) Ft. Gatlin, (Orlando) and Maitland, these being the only point thereabouts which had arrived at the dignity of a name. The competition was lively, Judge J. G. Speer by some quick thinking went to Sumter County and persuaded a number of soldiers to come to Orange county on the day of election by promising a good picnic dinner. It seems that any citizen in the County on election day could vote. Orlando won even though some questioned the ethics of the Judge.

From the original Mosquito county six counties were carved out; Orange, Volusia, Brevard, Osceola, Lake, and Seminole.

Seminole was formed from part of Orange county in 1913.

#### FORTS AND TOWNS

In 1846 ten forts were situated in Orange County. Ft. Butler and Ft. Kingsbury on Lake George, Ft. Mellon on the south bank of Lake Monroe, Ft. Lane on the west side of Lake Harney, Ft. Maitland, Ft. Gatlin southeast of Orlando, Ft. Taylor, Ft. McNeal, Ft. Ann on the Halifax River and Ft. Christmas which got its name because of an Indian attack on Christmas day in 1835.

The location of these forts which were for the most part mere stockades, made of logs thrust perpendicularly into the ground, would indicate that attacks by Indians were along the St. Johns river being the thoroughfare for their canoes.

On December, 1836 Camp Monroe was established on the south bank of the beautiful lake which bears that name. In 1837 the Indian Chief King Phillip and his son, Coacoochee, made an attack upon the post with four hundred Seminoles. The battle lasted for three hours and Capt. Charles Mellon (Mellonville later Sanford) was killed and 15 others wounded. The Indians loss was 25.

When the troops were withdrawn from the forts each became the nucleus of a neighborhood. In the next years that followed, few persons traveled away from and few came to the area. Some orange groves were planted and the people produced from the soil mainly what they consumed for food.



Road to Jessup.

#### EARLY LAKE JESSUP SETTLEMENT

This part of the state was settled in the late 50's and early 60's because it was close to the St. John River and had an abundance of good hammock land.

Before the Civil War Col. Walter Gwynn operated a sugar cane plantation at Lake Charm where the old Dr. Foster and West's groves now stand. He worked it with slave labor.

During and soon after the Civil War several settlers moved into this area. This area was known as the Lake Jessup Settlement. Shortly after the war Dr. J. F. Mitchell and Mr. A. Solaria had a mercantile store and post office at Lake Jessup. (the wharf pilings still stand) It was known as Salaria's Wharf and the Post Office was called Lake Jessup.

Dr. Mitchell came here with his slaves, thinking he would be able to keep them here. He owned a large tract of land where the present high school, cemetery and Methodist Church now stands.

A settlement not far from the lake called Tuscovilla which consisted of eight or ten houses developed, some quite large and good for those early days.

Mail came from Jacksonville once a week by the St. Volusia, piloted by Capt. Lund, and later from Sanford twice a week by a Mr. Lord. At times when the mail bag was opened it contained only one letter and that for the postmaster.





Road to Clifton

away as Ft. Drum, two hundred miles.

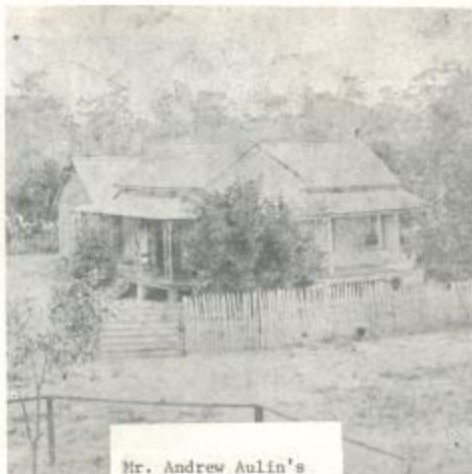
In August of 1871 an unprecedented storm of wind and rain occurred, for forty-eight hours the tempest raged without intermission; followed by a week of calm weather, then another storm for forty-eight hours. The rain came in a flood and the wind blew with hurricane force. It was reported that a flour barrel standing on end was filled and overflowed, that the Wekiwa river was a mile wide and the grounds in the flatwoods were saturated to such depth that horses and cattle were bogged down and drowned on the prairies.

listed are the names of people here prior to the year 1875 in the Lake Jessup settlement.

J. O. Jelks  
Dr. Jelks  
Julia Golden (school teacher)  
William Cleavor  
C.A. Love  
A.C. Hart  
J. C. Matlzelow  
A. P. Farnell  
John S. Womble  
J. O. Fries  
Joe Leinhart  
W.E. Alexander  
J. M. Jones  
Capt. M. E. Brock  
C. P. Rolquist  
Isiah Monchin

J. H. King  
Ira Rouse  
Tom and Alex Lawton  
Joe Fox  
Col. O. M. Brewster  
E. Swanson  
J. H. Lee  
W. W. Townson  
W. P. Rogers  
Dr. Henry Foster  
W. S. Sommerville  
Rev. G. Powell  
E. Z. Hunter  
Tom Wheeler  
Rev. R. W. Lawton  
Dillie Buster, an old Indian  
excluded from his tribe spent  
some time here.

The history of the county as a political body prior to 1869 cannot be written because of the official records covering its organization to the year 1868 was destroyed in a fire. An immeasurable misfortune from the historical point of view, a misfortune all the greater because these records covered the



Mr. Andrew Aulin's  
home



All of the large orange growers had their own packing houses in the groves. Before the railroads came oranges were shipped by boat to Jacksonville. Around 1889 Oviedo held the record for two years of being the biggest shipping point for oranges in the state.

In 1886 the Nelson Brothers went into the orange packing and brokerage business using as their trademark "Pride of Oviedo" which featured a beautiful eagle in the center.

In 1887 because of the high price of shipping oranges Dr. Henry Foster and others organized a railroad company. Oranges went by rail to Sanford and steamer from there to Jacksonville.

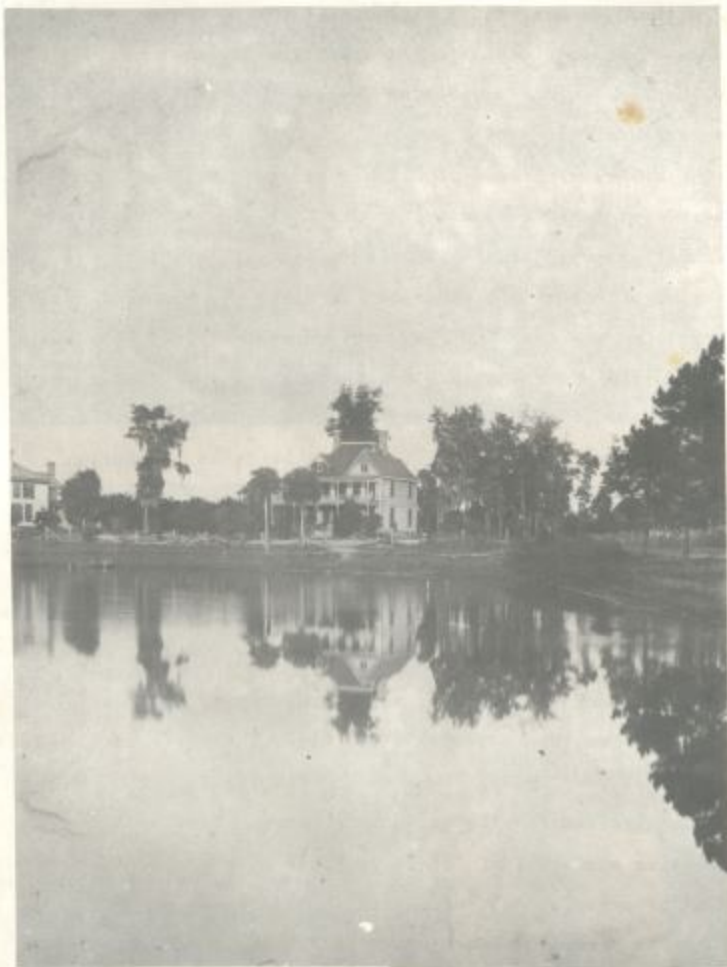
Prior to the freeze of 1894-95 Oviedo had a bank, two hotels, a good brass band, and a good baseball team.

In December of 1894 Oviedo had a freeze, dropping the temperature down to 17 degrees. This was followed with thirty-four days of perfect spring weather between the freezes. A full spring growth had come on the orange trees with full blooms. The night of February 4, 1895 the temperature dropped to 17 degrees and remained there for many hours. This freeze was the one that did the killing. The cracking of frozen limbs could be heard for miles. It was a blow to the state as well as to the grove owners. Most had put their life savings into the groves and in one night all of their hopes and dreams were gone. Many left the area and state, some walked out of their homes leaving dishes on the table never to return.

Times that followed that spring, summer and fall were



Res. of Mr. T.H.Lee.



Mr. Whitney's Res.



The first service was held under a brush arbor near the old W. E. Luther home on Lake Jessup Avenue.

Rev. W. G. Powell was the minister in charge of the first meeting and helped organize it. He served several years as Pastor, just how long, records fail to state. Rev. Powell travelled in a one-horse wagon to Tampa, Clearwater and other distant places carrying the Gospel where most needed.

The first Deacon was J. T. Wheeler, grandfather of B. F. Wheeler, Jr. The first clerk was Needham Jelks followed by J. M. Jones who served for many years.

The first building used as a church was a wooden structure standing on the property now owned by Miss Lois Ruddell. The first church owned building was the old Beasley house, now torn down, just back of the present auditorium and on the property where the new educational building will be located. It was used later as the first pastorium. Records fail to give the date of its erection, but it was used as a church until 1887, when a larger building was erected on the site of the present building.

The lot for the first church was donated by Rev. W. G. Powell. Also Church property was donated by a Will Alexander of Savana, Georgia. The first recorded minutes of land purchased by the church is Feb. 15, 1913 and reads, "the

trustees purchased the parsonage property of J. E. Okerlund for the sum of \$900.00."

The wooden church erected in 1887 served until 1926. It cost \$2,700.00 and the first recorded gift to the church was Oct. 4, 1888 when the Ladies Aid Society gave Pulpit chairs.

The Church had a belfrey and a large bell. The first recorded record of employing someone to ring the bell was in 1896 and he was paid \$1.00 per month to be the Sexton. Mr. Milton Gore, present member, as a boy served as bell ringer at \$1.00 per month. The first recorded church organist was a Mrs. Isaacs who was appointed on Mar. 9, 1889.

The recorded minutes date back to 1888 and many interesting facts recorded. Such as on April 13, 1889 the Deacons discussed insuring the Church and on May 7, 1894 a series of meetings were held which were called PROTRACTED MEETINGS and seven were converted. In 1891 the church decorum was changed so that a pastor was called for an indefinite period rather than on a yearly basis although later pastors were called for just one year. At first several names of pastors were placed before the congregation and the one receiving the most votes was the pastor for a year. In 1907 the Deacons discussed whether the church had the right to deed any of the church land away, and decided that provisions in the deed forbid any use other than for church purposes.

In 1915 the church adopted for the first time the Budget plan for financing the church, and in 1915 also the Magazine Club of Oviedo asked permission to beautify the east portion of the church lot and to make it a public park. No action was taken by the Deacons. This is interesting because this is one of the recommendations made and approved by the Deacons in the new building program, that is to make the east part of the church property into a church garden and park.

In 1921 in the old wooden church a Delco Light Plant was installed for the church at a cost of \$850.00 and furnished electric lights until in 1926 when the new brick building was completed they tied into the City's current.

In 1923 a group of the church members went to Golden Rod to help organize the Golden Rod Baptist Church.

The history of the Church was first written sometimes in the 1890's and a copy was read into the church minutes also a copy was to be sent to Stetson University. There is no known copy of this in existence now, the first copy we find is the one the Deacons asked Mr. T. W. Lawton to write on March 1929. He completed the work on June 30, 1930 and most of the church history in this is taken from his original copy loaned by his wife.

An interesting fact is that on Oct. 11, 1925 for the first time the Deacons organized a Ladies class and the class met across the street in the Argo's store.

Jan. 26, 1926 is the first recorded minutes of a singer being hired to help with a Revival. Mr. R. M. Hickman helped for two weeks and was paid \$150.00.

#### EARLY CUSTOMS AND FIGURES

Early in its history the church had strict decorum by which every member was expected to live. The minutes as early as 1888 refer to complaints brought before the church for failure to attend conferences, drunkenness, profanity, breaking the Sabbath, and unbecoming conduct between certain men and women.

Records show that members had fellowship withdrawn for each of these violations of decorum. Names and dates are given and names of brethren are given who were sent to deal with erring members. Some asked the church's forgiveness and in each recorded instance the church forgave them and they returned to the church.

The brick Church building now in use, costing something over thirty thousand dollars, was erected on the site of the former building during the pastorate of Rev. J. Max Cook in 1926. The Sunday School superintendent, Mr. E. F. Wheeler and chairman of the building committee, took the committee to visit churches recently built at Groveland and Clermont to get ideas. Upon completion it was one of the most modern and up to date churches around, seating over two hundred and fifty and housing Standard Sunday School rooms, a kitchen, pastor's study, and basement which converted into an assembly room for social gatherings.



During the hundred years of its life twenty-two pastors have served the Oviedo Baptist Church, there may have been others in the period from 1869 to 1888, for which period all records have been lost. The names of thirty-five deacons are recorded in the minutes, and eight Church Clerks. The Church Treasurers recorded have been only two, Mr. R. L. Wheeler and Mr. W. H. Martin.

Mr. T. W. Lawton played the piano in the church until around 1938 when Mr. W. H. Martin as a high school student began and played until 1948 when he began playing the Organ, except for the years he was in the service.

The oldest available record of a church letter to an association is dated 1888 and reads as follows, "Pastor, R. W. Lawton, Deacon Robert Lawton, Clerk J. M. Jones and other members elected messengers. Church membership forty-two; increased by baptism four, by letter eight. Decreased by letter two. Present membership fifty-two. Church property, Edifice one, sittings two hundred, value \$2,700.00. Contributions: home church expenses \$50.05, Foreign Missions \$5.00, printing minutes \$1.50. Sunday School: Officers and teachers eight, pupils fifty-two, Number baptised three, money raised \$25.86. Supt. W. A. Jelks."

The first register of members is dated 1889, none recorded for the first twenty years, and on the list of 1889 there were sixty names. Of these sixty only the following have descendants still on the church roll, or live in the community: A. P. Farnell, Andrew Aulin, R. L. Wheeler, J. M. Jones and R. W. Lawton.

In 1957 the church again felt the need for more space, so it erected a new educational building at a cost of \$27,500.00 just to the east of the sanctuary. This building contains another commodious assembly room and a large kitchen as well as four classrooms.

In 1968 the need for additional room became evident and a building committee was formed with Mr. R. L. Ward as Chairman. At present plans for an eleven thousand foot air conditioned annex is planned which will have three nurseries, and additional Sunday School rooms for pupils through high school age. An Ultimate plan is being developed which will project building for the twenty years. Plans also to turn the east part of the church property into a garden and park.

In 1947 the Hammond electric organ was presented to the church by Dr. J. W. Martin as a memorial to his wife, Pearl G. Martin. Dr. Martin moved here in 1925 from Ocala, and was very active in the church for twenty five years. He served as Chairman of the Deacons for a number of years and served Oviedo, Christmas, Geneva and Chuluota as

physician for those twenty five years. His wife, Pearl, served for many years as president of the Woman's Missionary Union and superintendent of the Primary Department of the Sunday School. In the earlier years when the river between Chuluota and Oviedo was up, Dr. Martin would go to the river and be ferried across by boat and taken on to make his calls in that area.

In 1965 new seating was placed in the auditorium and at the same time a new pulpit with matching chairs were donated by the Lawton Children in memory of Mr. T. W. Lawton and W. J. Lawton. The brass engraved plaque which hangs in the sanctuary was also given to perpetuate the memory of Mr. B. F. Wheeler, Sr., who served long and faithfully as deacon and who was never absent from his place except when providentially hindered.

The grand piano in the sanctuary was a gift from B. F. Wheeler, Jr. and the W. H. Martin families.

The founders of our church were establishing here an institution dedicated to those high ideals and principles that come not of man but from the throne of God. Their work was to be upon immortal souls, and that which they wrought is to live and be an unfailing medium of divine light through the years. So let us bow with reverence before the names and memories of that little band of courageous Christians that established this church that has served us so well.

Mr. Andrew Lawton was born at Albany, Georgia, June 16, 1847. Although quite young he served in the Civil war; after the war he lived several years in southern Georgia. In 1870 he came to Florida, making his home at Oviedo, then called Lake Jessup. Two years later he was married in Tallahassee to Miss Mary Gwynn. At the age of 26 he entered the Christian ministry in the Missionary Baptist Church in which he had labored many years. His last pastorate was at Chuluota, which he held at his death. There his last sermon was preached on the third Sunday of Oct. 1909. The sermon was a memorial service of Mr. J. P. Jacobs, a life long friend. Besides the Chuluota Church he had been pastor of several places, among them Geneva, Fort Christmas, Osteen, Longwood and two different times at Oviedo.

In Ft. Christmas in 1871 the first Missionary Baptist Church was organized and held in Grandpa Tucker's home until a log church could be built, it was also used as a school. Its crude seats were hewn boards, nailed to the wall at one end and supported by a stick driven through a crack in the floor and into the ground underneath. Rev. R. W. Lawton was in charge of the church and walked from Oviedo to Ft. Christmas once a month to hold services until the church members combined to raise sixty dollars to purchase a pony for him to ride.



## PIONEERING FAMILIES

Mrs. Nettie Jacobs Aulin, daughter of Joshua P. Jacobs and Mary Jacobs was born in Chuluota, Florida. She was married in 1909 to Theodore Aulin, son of Andrew Aulin.

The couple lived in Oviedo and on July 9, 1916 she moved her letter from the Chuluota Baptist Church to the Oviedo Baptist Church.

They had one son, Theodore Aulin, Jr., who was a member until his death April 29, 1966. His children, Diane Aulin Keller and Ted Aulin joined the church at an early age and are still members.



The present pastor A. Flourney Jernigan began preaching at the age of 17, and has been serving almost continuously since he was 19, the beginning of his second year in college.

He is a graduate of Stetson University (B.A., 1947) and of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (B.D., 1954).

Brother Jernigan has served several churches in Florida, Eastside Baptist Church, Lakeland, First Baptist Church, Orange Park, and the Ortega Baptist Church, Jacksonville.

He was pastor of the Ortega Baptist Church almost eleven years, before beginning his work in Oviedo, April, 1965.

The Church continues to grow Spiritually and increase in membership under his direction.



MR. AND MRS. R. W. LAWTON



MR. W. J. LAWTON

Mr. Winborn Joseph Lawton born March 24, 1881 to Mrs and Rev. R. W. Lawton is the oldest living member of the Church in years of fellowship.

He was baptised in November 1894 and served as trustee for many years. His father was minister here at the time he joined the church. He also has served as Secretary and Tressure of Sunday School for many years.

He attended Mercer University in Macon Georgia for three years, was a member of the class of 1900.

He married Miss Lillian Della Lee, daughter of pioneers, Mr. and Mrs. J/ H. Lee, Sr. , of Lake Charm.

He was in the Mercantile business for about fifty years, Insurance Agent about forty years and Citrus grove owner all of his adult life. He has been a Mason since 1916 and Shriner since 1925.

His children are Mrs. H. J. (Elizabeth Laney, Kathryn Lawton, John K. Lawton and W. J. Lawton Jr.

During the 100 years of the church, and the recorded history from 1888 the following have served as deacons.

J. T. Wheeler	P. H. Brown	Milton Gore
A. P. Farnell	B. F. Wheeler, Jr.	B. F. Ward, Jr.
Andrew Aulin, Sr.	T. H. Daniell, Sr.	Howard S. Gott
Robert Lawton	L. A. Hardy	D.D. Gammage
T. W. Lawton	G. W. Alford	John M. Camp
B. F. Wheeler, Sr.	J. I. Beasley	C. W. Holder
E. A. Farnell	A. A. Myers	C. K. Buckelew
Dr. J. W. Martin	A. B. Tedford	Arthur Scott
B. F. Ward, Sr.	A. J. Metcalf	A. A. Daniel
R. F. Cooper	W. A. Ward, Jr.	Donald L. Orman
F. A. Peirson	Basil Mays	R. L. Ward
W. T. Walker	C. D. Weaver	

THE FOLLOWING HAVE BEEN CHURCH CLERK:

Needham Jelks	R. L. Wheeler	R. L. Ward
J. M. Jones	J. I. Beasley	Mrs. John M. Camp (only woman)
H. B. McCall	A. R. Metcalf, Jr.	

The Rev. W. G. Powell was the first pastor of the First Baptist Church of Oviedo. We have no record of how long he served or of the subsequent nineteen years. Other pastors are as follows:

1888-89	R. W. Lawton
1890	A. C. Turner
1891-92	J. A. Richardson
1893	S. C. Dorsey
1894	R. W. Lawton
1896	S. W. Sheffield
1897	No pastor, no minutes
1898	No Pastor Richardson supply
1899	R. W. Lawton called, but resigned infew months
1900-01	No pastor
1902-3	T.J. Bell
1904	F. C. Edwards
1905-06	J. C. Black

1907-09	J. B. Rogers
1910-12	E. Lee Smith
1913-18	Wm. Stones
1919-25	J. N. Thompson
1926-28	J. Max Cook
1929-30	C. J. Broome (resigned in June)
1930-35	R. W. Dickert
1936-41	J. S. Day
1941-49	H. H. Link
1949-53	F. C. Morgan
1953-57	L. L. Day
1957-65	J. T. Bryant
1965	Flournoy Jernigan



BUILT IN THE EARLY 1870's, THIS WAS THE FIRST CHURCH BUILDING OWNED BY THE OVIEDO BAPTIST CHURCH. IN 1877 IT BECAME THE PARSONAGE.





View of Oviedo looking West



Dr. Foster around 1900



Whitney Home on  
Lake Charm 1900



Store in Oviedo  
around 1900



