

We Love to Tell the Stories
125 Years of Making God's Love Real

Where The Story Begins

Quoted from the 1984 history, compiled by Dr. Mary Louise Lake, Ms. W. B. Dickenson, Jr.,
and Mrs. Hugo (Lou) Schmidt

Leslie June Weller Connor was an original member. Since none of these memories were contradictory, we combined them all in a composite old-members' narrative. For, in our opinion, no account written from hearsay can have the value of one written by an eyewitness.

In Hyde Park in the middle Nineties, there were many little children up and down the sandy unpaved streets. In the old section, bounded by West Tenth Avenue (now the Boulevard), and Grand Central, which ran into a pond beyond the railroad, and down the streetcar line route through the woods toward Ballast Point, Methodist families with horses and buggies got their children down to the old First Church when they could. Some went by street-car, and those near enough walked across the bridge and through town. But there were some in those days who thought it was wicked to ride on the cars on Sunday, and for all the parents it was a problem, especially for the very small children. It was nothing for the old bridge to stick fast when the draw was opened and remain open for an hour or more. Then in 1898 when the Spanish-American War dumped upwards of 50,000 soldiers into the little town of 25,000 inhabitants, the problem became more acute, and many children were unable to go to Sunday School at all.

So, one Sunday afternoon there was a meeting of three fathers and three mothers in the home of the youngest of these couples. Mr. and Mrs. James Shaw, the oldest, who had come from England in the 1880's, brought with them their two talented daughters - Agnes, a musician, and Lucy, an artist. The second family represented were Mr. and Mrs. Heighington, who had come to Florida from Canada, and they brought with them their half-grown daughter, Ethel. The ones who had invited these neighbors in were Mr. John A. Weller, city auditor, and his wife, living at that time on the corner of Horatio and what is now Magnolia Avenue. The Weller family had come down from Michigan, and there were three small children, Leslie June, Fred and Marguerite.

There were twelve, all together, that Sunday afternoon, and they decided to start a Sunday School for the neighborhood children. Mrs. Weller was a singer of note, and Miss Agnes Shaw could play anything from a broken-down reed organ to the largest instrument known.

There was a little two-room red schoolhouse on Platt and Magnolia where Fire Station No. 3 stands today. [Editor: This building now houses the Old Hyde Park Art Center at 705 W. Swann Ave.] This was the first meeting place of the little Sunday School. It had an old organ and a small collection of old, torn song books. The word was passed around among neighbors, and there were thirty present the first Sunday, March 12, 1899. Mr. Weller was superintendent, Mrs. Weller led the singing, Miss Lucy Shaw acted as secretary, and Miss Agnes Shaw played the organ which had two hissing notes that would not play at all. They sang "Rescue the Perishing," "Onward Christian Soldiers," "Jesus Loves Me," and "I Love to Tell the Story." Everybody

knew the words. Mrs. Shaw was appointed teacher of the Bible Class, the others divided the groups of children into classes, and the school started.

On the 26th of the same month, Rev. John Dodwell of Port Tampa City held preaching services morning and evening. Still there were no regular services for a while and in the evenings the Shaws and the Wellers used to walk down to attend the Epworth League services at First Church, and remain for the evening preaching service if the children did not have to go to school next day.