

minister, but conscience led to his yielding and he as a preparation began an intense study of the Scriptures. This led to a conversion to the Baptist faith, which he came to believe was more compatible with his interpretation of the Bible. Despite family opposition, he requested membership in the Hurrah Baptist Church, was received, and baptized by the pastor Rev. A. Wilson. His zeal as a Christian and his ability as a leader soon attracted the attention of the leading members of the Hurrah Church, and soon a unanimous call to the care of the church was tendered him pending his ordination to the ministry, which soon followed. Meanwhile, the little church was being rent by internal dissensions. The pastor A. Wilson resigned and Rev. J. M. Hayman undertook unsuccessfully to restore harmony. After four months he resigned. About this time John had been ordained and was ready to take hold. He soon had the entire membership completely under his control and peace was restored.

This was the beginning of Rev. Hendry's great popularity as a preacher. The people in every settlement were anxious to hear him preach, and when once heard the spirit and eloquence of his discourses completely captivated his hearers. He was a born orator gifted with a wonderful memory and deep penetration of thought and strong powers of analysis. As a pulpit orator, he was logical, earnest, eloquent, and convincing. His impassioned utterances at times fairly electrified his congregations. His marvelous fluency of speech won for him the title of "the eloquent John W. Hendry". He became the leader and promoter of religious thought in the community and even accompanied the Rev. L. J. Simmons on a preaching tour into Orange County, Florida.

In the meantime, however, the scourge of the Civil War had passed over the country and left the people in a very impoverished condition in every sense of the word morally, religiously, and financially, especially financially. It will be understood therefore why religious meetings were usually held in the open air, or at best under rudely constructed bush harbors. There had been a great spiritual awakening, and churches were springing up in every community, thus taxing the time of the few resident preachers.

Maple Branch, now known as New Zion Baptist Church, was the first Church organized south of the South Prong of the Alafia River. It was organized September 29, 1866 on the south fork of the Alafia River, but it is now located about seven miles west of Ona. Rev. Hendry was one of the charter members of this church, its pastor without interruption for twenty years, and a member until his death. While serving this church, Rev. Hendry continually traveled over the country from the South Prong to Fort Ogden, from Peace River to Sarasota Bay, and organized churches at Fort Ogden, Joshua Creek, Pine Level, New Hope, Fort Hartsuff, Midway, Pine Grove, Bee Ridge, and Benevolence, nearly all of them, some under a different name, continuing until this day. For example, Fort Hartsuff founded in 1876 is First Baptist Church of Wauchula.

While Rev. John W. Hendry was a staunch Baptist, he was not narrow minded and fully believed that soul winning was far more important than mere denomination. Accordingly, the coming of Rev. William Penn McEwen, a minister of the Methodist Church was welcomed. The consecration and unbounded enthusiasm of this saintly man of God did much to encourage John. Traveling together over the same roads, preaching from the same pulpits, sharing the same perils and hardships, there sprang up between them a mutual love and close friendship seldom, if ever, met between ministers of different denominations.

At this time, John was still living on the South Prong of the