264# First United Methodist Church (Script by Peggy Macdonald)

In 1853, the East Florida Seminary opened as a three-room, one-story school in Ocala. It closed during the Civil War. According to Samuel Proctor’s 1958 University of Florida doctoral dissertation, all of the members of the 1861 senior class at East Florida Seminary enlisted, and most of them, along with then-principal Robert P. Bryce, were killed.

After the war, East Florida Seminary reopened in Gainesville, due in large part to the efforts of state senator James Henry Roper. The school opened at the present site of the First United Methodist Church on Northeast First Street. Roper was appointed principal. The Seminary served primarily as an elementary and high school for Gainesville students due to the prohibitive cost of travel and room and board for out-of-town students.

However, in 1880 the Seminary added teacher training to its mission and the primary school was closed. Enrollment from out-of-county students increased dramatically. Soon, a new two-story addition was added with a dormitory, infirmary, mess hall and faculty offices. In 1881, the school was reorganized as a military school for its male students.

By the turn of the 20th century, Hildreth and Cox maintained, the curriculum was at the collegiate level. The first bachelor’s degrees were awarded in 1882. However, after the University of Florida opened in Gainesville in fall 1906, East Florida Seminary became superfluous and closed.

Epworth Hall was originally an academic building for East Florida Seminary. When the school closed, University of Florida classes were held there until the campus was completed in 1906. The building is now part of the First United Methodist Church campus. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.