

in Atlanta whose meetings are open — the first in the country.

I went to Ravenwood Church and Seminary of Wicca, Inc. It was an ordinary house on Moreland Ave., and the priestess who lives there was on a ladder painting the ceiling.

"Why don't you magic this finished?"

"If I could," she said, "I'd never be here!"

Lady Sintana is the priestess. She said her name came in directed writing. "It came 'Sin', a Babylonian god, and 'Inan' the goddess."

She explained, "Five or six years ago witchcraft offended many. We suffered a good deal of persecution. Once an elderly lady stormed in saying everyone here should be burned, including my four-year-old grandson. People heaved bricks through the windows and I was afraid. We started keeping open house so people could see for themselves. We called this a church in accordance with common usage, though temple would be more accurate. (The sect is incorporated as a tax-free religious institution.)

"But five years ago people were cult-crazy, and flocked here just for a different thrill."

Speakers address open meetings on Friday nights. When the painting's finished they plan to conform further and change to Sunday meetings.

They have no idols, but many symbols. A classic statue represents the goddess, and a chalice and candle the female and male principles. Their ceremonial circle is in the yard — a clearing with holly and natural arbor of vines. Large stones mark the circle, a miniature of ancient ones in Europe. A cauldron on tripod in the center is for the ritual fire.

"In the six years we've been here it's never rained in the circle at celebrations," Lady Sintana told me. "Sometimes it's come as close as Little Five Points, but if you put yourself in harmony with natural forces they will work with you."

Ravenwood is also a seminary. It takes four to six years study to become a priest or priestess and another nine to be an Elder.

"We've worked hard to gain a good reputation," Lady Sintana said. Now the persecution has stopped: only the serious-minded come. It's no longer fashionable or chic to be a witch, and I'M SO GLAD!"

(Ravenwood Church can be reached at 688-3854.) ■