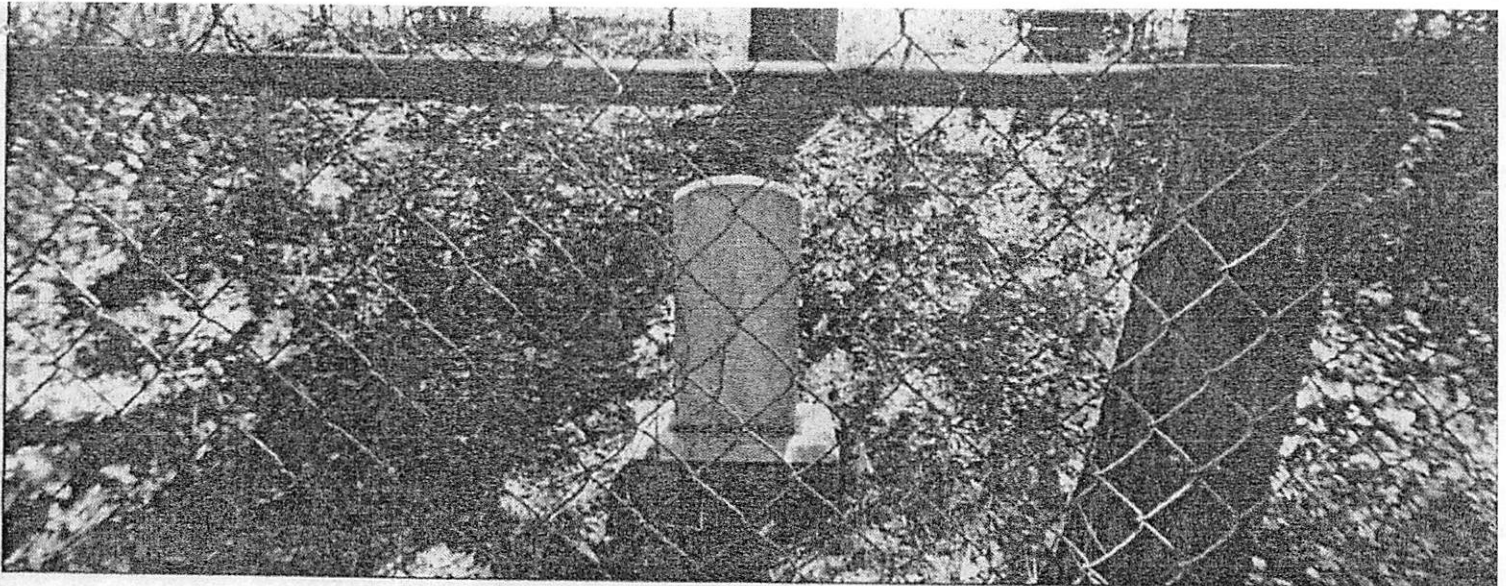


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Photos by LAYNE BAILEY/S

A tombstone marks the grave of Isaiah Moore in Concord Presbyterian Church's cemetery. Moore requested that he be buried as close as possible to his friend and former master, Maj. Thomas William Brice.

The church that stretched its fence

By DAN HUNTLEY
Staff Writer

WOODWARD, S.C. — Concord Presbyterian Church will celebrate its 200th anniversary April 20 with a picnic lunch on the lawn by its cemetery.

If you come down to visit the one-room sanctuary, prepare yourself for a trip back yonder — back to a time when church air conditioning consisted of a hand-held funeral home fan and an open window. The plain pine pews are not nailed down and are slightly askew. At Concord there's no paved parking lot, no fellowship hall, no choir loft, no steeple, no stained glass and no shutters over the tall-paned windows looking out over the grasshopper-green spring woods.

"It's the way churches used to be, and that's the way we like it," said George Montgomery Sweet, whose family first settled in this red-clay woodlands before the Revolution. "It's one of those little churches in the country that never really changed."

If you do come down to visit, you should also mosey up to a church member like Emily Brice Busbee after the service and get her to tell you the tale of her granddaddy Maj. Thomas William Brice who lost his eye in the Civil War, and how his slave Isaiah Moore saved his life. It's a story right out of a William Faulkner novel and transcends two centuries of race relations in this tiny crossroads of Woodward, about 12 miles south of Chester on U.S. 321.

"When the big war came, my grandfather joined up and so did his slave and friend, Uncle Isaiah Moore," Busbee said, stopping beneath the shade of a huge holly tree to pause while a train blew its

whistle. "I only knew Isaiah's daughter, Aunt Charity, but my family told me Isaiah was a good, honest man, who worked hard all his life. I know his daughter did. . . . I don't know which battle but it was Tennessee, or maybe up in Virginia somewhere, that my grandfather got wounded in the face and lost his eye."

Five Brice brothers went to war for the South; two came home.

The Brice family credits Moore with saving the major's life by bringing him back to South Carolina and nursing him to health over several years. The two men developed a strong friendship. Brice became a successful farmer and merchant. Moore worked with him until the major's death in 1908 at age 66.

On Moore's deathbed nine years later, he made one request: to be buried in the Concord Presbyterian Cemetery as nearby as possible to the major. Moore had attended the church for over a half-century, worshipping in the balcony.

Church elders considered the request, but at the turn of the century, politics in a small town like Woodward were conservative. It was an all-white cemetery — just like the all-black cemetery at Red Hill Baptist down the road — but the elders decided to do the next best thing. They buried Moore near Brice but just outside of the wrought-iron fenced cemetery.

"Some years after Isaiah's death, I remember when my daddy erected that white tombstone," Busbee said, pointing to the stone behind a red cedar tree. "The inscription says 'As Good As Ever Fluttered.' It's what Isaiah wanted."

Busbee's nephew James Brice was baptized and raised in the



Emily Brice Busbee talks about her grandfather, Confederate Maj. Thomas William Brice, at Concord cemetery.

church. He and his wife, Sarah, live in a restored two-story farmhouse about a half-mile away.

"I knew the story about Isaiah all my life," Brice said. "It was a link back through the past to the Civil War."

About seven years ago, Brice was one of the church members who decided that the wrought-iron fence at the cemetery needed to be extended to take in Moore's grave.

The congregation unanimously approved.

"I certainly remember the Jim Crow days in the South, and I believe the folks of the church were as understanding as they could be at the time," said Sweet, who was born in Woodward but grew up in Connecticut. He makes the 40-mile round trip to Concord

on Sundays from his home in Lewisville. "After the war, this part of the country was devastated for many years, extreme poverty and malnutrition. . . . I think the story of Isaiah and the major, and our church, is a good one. And one we can all learn from."

WANT TO GO?

The Concord 200th anniversary is open to the public. Church service is at 11 a.m. Bring a picnic for lunch on the grounds. A historical service will be held at 2 p.m. For more information, call James or Sarah Brice at (803) 581-3482, anytime.