



Historic Church Saved

Crooked Run Baptist Church, draped of her granite outer garments, but with a new lease on life, sits ready to be moved to a site closely on the church grounds. One of the oldest churches in the county (1826), the building had been relegated to the bulldozer and was saved only through the efforts of young James Green III, who took his campaign to the press and television. In a dramatic, last ditch appeal, Green asked citizens to contribute towards having the building moved. A loan of \$2,000, an outright gift of \$2,000, plus 1841 in small contributions were forthcoming, and now the old building will be used by the congregation as a library or dining hall. A new chapel will be erected on the old site. (Staff photo)



The Church in the Wildwood

*Come to the church by the Wildwood
Oh, come to the church in the vale
No spot is so dear to my childhood
As the little brown church in the vale*

*How sweet on a clear Sabbath morning
To listen to the clear ringing bells
Its tones, so sweetly are calling
Oh, come to the church in the vale*

*Come to the church by the Wildwood
Oh, come to the church in the vale
No spot is so dear to my childhood
As the little brown church in the vale*

*There she sleeps close by in the valley
Lies one that I love so well
She sleeps, sweetly sleeps 'neath the
willow
Disturb not her, rest in vale*

*Come to the church by the Wildwood
Oh, come to the church in the vale
No spot is so dear to my childhood
As the little brown church in the vale*

*There close by the side of that loved one
'Neath the tree where the wild flowers
bloom
When farewell hymns shall be chanted
I shall rest by her side in the tomb*

*Come to the church by the Wildwood
Oh, come to the church in the vale
No spot is so dear to my childhood
As the little brown church in the vale
As the little brown church in the vale*

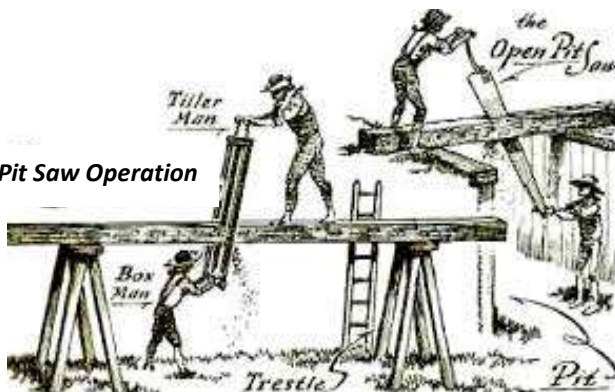


The Little Old Church in the Vale

The familiar song lyrics remind me of little Crooked Run church in the southwestern corner of Fairfield County which stands on a slope near the wooded stream that gave its name. The post-and-beam building was built in 1836 on the abandoned site of an earlier eighteenth century meeting house, probably not much more than a rude log structure hewn from the virgin oaks and roofed with rough slabs of riven shingles. Later farming communities developed nearby called Cedar Creek, Monticello, and Jenkinsville and by the 1830s the farmers in this locale decided to build this fine building with timbers and boards sawn at a nearby pit sawmill. Associated with the Twenty-Five Mile Creek Primitive Baptist at start, the church members would in 1853 split to establish the Primitive Baptist Church in another location. The present church retained the name of Crooked Run Baptist Church.

The geographic frontier surroundings in that early time were then described as being north of the Broad River near the confluences of Cedar Creek and Little River. The Palatinate (Swiss German) immigrants who first populated those woods named their site Bethesda Auf den Morven (meaning Bethesda at Morven, probably

named for a town previously lived in before coming to SC). These people had come in the 1730s and 1760s to SC to settle the rich lands around the Congaree River basin about 60 miles southeast of here in Orangeburg District. Further waves immigrants spread further inland to form a broad tract of colonial settlements called the Dutch Fork (Deutsche Volk) territory which stretched up



of

the Broad River valley into the fertile lands of present-day Lexington, Fairfield, and Newberry counties. The German language and traditions proudly persisted for several generations, but by the 1820s, the area had been infiltrated with settler extractions of English, Scots-Irish, and other early origins. German names became Anglicized (Rebsiman became Turnipseed, became Lever, Oemig became Amick, Buzhardt became Buzzard or Bozard) and into the mix came the Yarboroughs, Arledges, Lyleses, Bells. and the meeting house property was taken over by the founding families of CR, the present church built in 1836. These early families "populate" the cemetery next to the church (note here Arledge, Lyles, Taylor, Turmnipseed, Yarborough, Bell, McGraw, Souter).the church has changed very little physically since the mid 1800s.

It is located in a remote rural setting surrounded by old farmlands, pinewoods, and a few small ranch style homes and old mobile homes, grouped in 2s or 3s every few miles apart. The county population estimate for 2012 is 20, 363, a 2.5 % decrease since 2010. The county is 686 square miles, with an average of about 35 people per square mile, 21.4 % who lived below the poverty level. Racial makeup is about 60% black, 39% white, and a small number of Hispanic and oriental influx in recent years. The Crooked Run community is 13 miles southwest of the courthouse town of Winnsboro, which has a population of 3, 450. It is about 22 miles from the downtown area of Columbia, the state capital. Fairfield County has not prospered economically since the heyday of cotton before the Civil War when the county had one of the richest plantation economies in the upper portion of the state. Fairfield County was raided and burned by General Sherman's Union troops after the burning raid on Columbia, the state capital in February of 1865. The following hundred and fifty years have been characterized with little significant economic progress since that time.

In the mid 20th century a hydroelectric plant nearby the Crooked Run community was converted to nuclear power. In the 1970s, when a modern nuclear plant was built, a large cooling lake was created within 10 miles of the church. A portion of the lake was set aside for recreational development, but due to the economy of the area and the slowdown in property sales of the past few years, very little beneficial nearby development has come in to the rural area.

(You can distill the history of the congregation and the actual building from the texts and websites I already sent or that are on the rootsandrecall.com site.) Note the fact that a German meeting house, Auf den Morven, existed on the site from the 1780s. By the 1830s

An examination of the family names attached to today's congregation rolls reveals a small (20 - 25) group of families new to the area since about mid 20th C. Most of these have no ancestors connected to the early history of the church. There appears to be little connection to the heritage of the area as it is the present congregation who want a more modern facility and care little about preserving the dinosaurs of the past. What is more, the upkeep and insurance costs on the building (which presently is used for storage) are a burden to the resources of the church.

In 1944 the little frame building was sided over with granite veneer blocks and it served as the sanctuary until the 1970s, when the members decided to demolish the old church and replace it with a new granite (present) structure. James Green and his father, members of the church at the time, mounted a campaign to save the church. The little building had to be moved from its original site for the new building to be constructed. When the granite exterior walls were removed, the original 1836 materials, including the lapboard siding, remained in remarkable condition. A nearby landowner provisionally donated a small adjacent square of land to the church and a concrete block foundation was built on

which to move the church. At first the congregation used the old building for special events, but eventually it was closed up and used for storage. The Greens maintained the insurance and upkeep on the building for many years until Mr. Green, Sr. passed away.

Mr. Green alerted local museum director Pelham Lyles of the second impending demolition late last spring. The church deacons had contacted an individual who would pay salvage rights for the wood. Lyles and Green lobbied the deacons to request a "stay of execution" until they could come up with an alternative plan to save the church. After some negotiating, the minister reasoned with the group in July that after surviving 177 years, it would not hurt to allow a little longer for it to stand while we sought solutions.

In August, a contractor examined the building. There were some serious roof leak problems which have caused structural issues in the supporting exterior walls. Mr. Green and a friend replaced the leaking tin with new segments last week.

4. Resources:

- Letter from Fairfield County Museum Director Pelham Lyles to Crooked Run Board of Deacons, May 10, 2013.
- Unpublished manuscript of Dr. Buford Chappell's "North of the Broad River" in the collection of the Fairfield County Museum.
- Deed with restrictive provisions on file with property owner Gale Lever, showing that the property ownership will revert to her if the building is removed. Mrs. Lever had been a member of the church until the first attempt to demolish the church in the 1970s. She is allied with Green's and Lyles's efforts to preserve the church.
- letter undated from Mr. Green to the local News and Herald Newspaper describing the history of the church as researched on microfilmed church minutes located at the Caroliniana Library on the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC.
- undated clipping of photo and caption on the "first saving" in 1976 from the News and Herald, Winnsboro, SC.
- article on "Fairfield Uniquely Religious" from The State newspaper, Columbia, SC from Apr. 5, 1970.