

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*



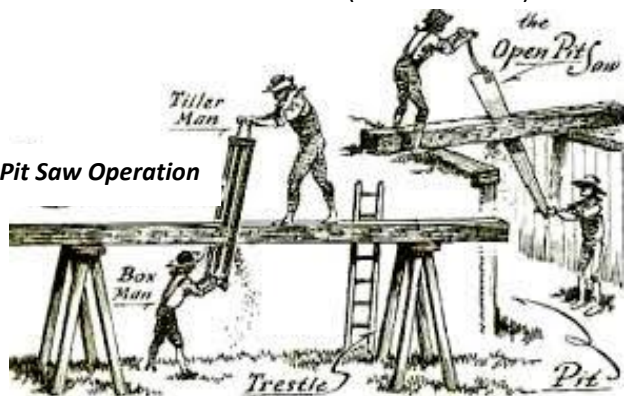
The Little Old Church in the Vale

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 (Morven being an old Norse or Viking word meaning a gap in a ridge of hills). 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 of immigrants spread further inland to form a broad tract of colonial settlements called the Dutch Fork (Deutsche Volk) territory

Early Pit Saw Operation



which stretched up 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 further infiltrated with settler extractions of English, Scots-Irish, and Welsh. German names became Anglicized (Rebseman became directly translated to Turnipseed; Oemig became Amick; Entzinger became Infinger; Kohn became Coon; Buzhardt became Buzzard or Bozard) and into the mix



came the Yarboroughs, Arledges, Lyleses, Andrewses, Bells. The meeting house property was taken over by the founding families of Crooked Run, the building being built in 1836. These early families “populate” the cemetery next to the church (note here Arledge, Lyles, Taylor, Turnipseed, Yarborough, Bell, McGraw, Souter). The church changed very little physically since the mid 1800s until a side entrance wing was added in 1926 and the whole structure was covered over with granite veneer blocks in 1944.

This configuration served as the sanctuary until the 1970s, when the members decided to demolish the old church and replace it with a new granite structure (placed on the present site). 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 clapboard siding, remained in remarkable condition. A nearby landowner provisionally donated a small adjacent square of land to the church very close to the back door of the new 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.



Historic Church Saved

Crooked Run Baptist Church, denuded of her granite outer garments, but with a new lease on life, sits ready to be moved to a site closeby on the church grounds. One of the oldest churches in the county (1836), 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 \$3,000, an outright gift of \$2,000, plus \$841 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)

In the Spring of 2013, Mr. Green alerted local museum director Pelham Lyles of the second impending demolition by a resolute vote of the board of deacons. The church officials had contacted an individual who would pay salvage rights for the wood to tear down the building, although it was known that ownership of the annexed property would revert back to its original donor once the church was removed. 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 group reasoned in July that after surviving 177 years, it would not hurt to allow a little longer for it to stand while solutions were being sought.



To the left, the old building is seen in its original location beside the cemetery.



On the right, the old church has been moved to the rear of the property and the modern stone church now sits by the cemetery.

To understand the situation that has brought the situation to this juncture, it is important to examine some of the attendant causes.

Crooked Run 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 twos or threes every few miles apart. The Fairfield 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. There are no country stores, gas stations, or other commercial establishments for several miles around this remote area. 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.

Essentially rural 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. The textile industry afforded some jobs for local residents until the bottom fell out of America's textile manufacturing industry in the last 25 years. Small farming became economically unfeasible over the past decades and most small landowners converted their family farms to accommodate game hunters coming in from the bigger metropolitan centers of the Carolinas. Although many old farms supported the fast growth of pines for pulp and paper production, that industry also has seen a move to distant countries

where labor costs and other factors were favorable. Fairfield County was raided and burned by General Sherman's Union troops after the burning of the state capital of Columbia in February of 1865. The following hundred and fifty years have been characterized with little spurts and then deaths of economic progress since that time.

In the mid 20th century a hydroelectric plant nearby the Crooked Run community was converted to one of America's first nuclear power plants. 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.

Another factor entering into the present church members' desires to demolish the old church probably has to do with the population makeup. The older farming families have moved away or assimilated into the larger urban areas. An examination of the family names attached to today's congregation rolls (about 20 – 25 families) reveals a small group of families new to the area since about mid 20th C. Many 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 the present congregation wants a more modern facility that is efficient and maintainable. There is little interest in 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 August, a contractor examined the building. There were some serious roof leak problems which have caused structural issues in the supporting exterior walls. Recently Mr. Green and a friend climbed on the tin roof and replaced the leaking tin with new segments. The incessant rains of this summer having ceased, it remains to be revealed if the repairs have temporarily resolved the leakage problem.

The project to determine how we can save this beautiful example of our architectural and cultural heritage is in its infancy. As yet, any fundraisers and conscience-raising efforts await a gathering of forces and facts. Mr. James Green and Ms. Pelham Lyles live in the immediate vicinity and are physically present to monitor the situation. Mrs. Carolyn Payne lives 85 miles north of Fairfield County, but has a family weekend home in the area and is involved in this "think tank" stage of trying to resolve the problem. Recently, Tara Gann-Burton, a graduate student in Preservation living in California, also with family ties to some nearby property has joined the three.

For now, it appears there are four scenarios to consider:

The building could be restored in situ at the back door of the modern church. Drawbacks in finding a use or potential occupant to take over the building would be in its contingency to the church (8 to 10 feet from the back wall) and lack of surrounding land to allow for a yard, parking and setting for the restored building.

If a nearby landowner would donate a small parcel (3 to 5 acres) of land within a short distance of the Crooked Run site, the building could be moved intact, just as it was in 1976, making the move considerably less expensive and damaging to the structure.

Moving the entire building for any distance other than the above will require dismantling the roof and dividing the sanctuary into two sawn-apart segments to be moved down the highway. The dimensions of 35.2 X 48.3 ft. require this division because of power lines, roadside structures, and other adjacent

Thoughts on a Country Graveyard

I visited the churchyard one Sunday afternoon recently. As cemeteries are so intriguingly full of information about our early settlers, I examined the names and "stories" on the tombstones. Sometimes, I guess it seems that I have a tendency to have private conversations with these symbols of the spirits of our predecessors, out of my devotion to learning about the families who came before us. Some of my own ancestors settled in that very same area of the county and one was scalped by Indians.

The overwhelming thought flowed in my mind that afternoon that some of these early graves mark the resting places for the people who lovingly built the old church. Generations of their offspring remained in the community worshipping at the place that represents the sweat of their brows. Our forefathers wrested their livelihoods out of the wilderness which was then Fairfield County and such structures as this old church represent their last whisperings of the struggles and ordeals they had to contend with in the olden times.

-Pelham Lyles

Winnsboro, SC

property concerns. This is often resorted to in moving larger structures, but greatly increases the cost of moving and putting it back together, as one can well imagine.

Totally dismantling the building and reusing the materials to reconstruct a replicated building, also expensive.

Deciding what the building will be used for is farther down the line in our thought process. The project partners are adamant that the historical integrity of the building must be kept as much as possible. If a willing non-profit group, or a community group that needs a meeting hall or facility would appear on the scene, it is hoped that other avenues of thought can come to the mix.

This document perhaps will bring more interested individuals to the table in our quest to save a beautiful little church. This writer cannot stop thinking that as the museum director for the county and because of concern for the demise of sites representing our early heritage; we must find a supporting group who can help in the quest to save Crooked Run.

