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Aden United Methodist Church
aka
Asbury United Methodist Church

Church Rebirth

When the congregation at Nokesville's Asbury UMC gathers for Easter sunrise services, they'll be celebrating the past

» JILL PALERMO
for Prince William Today

Like the season in which it occurs, Easter, the pinnacle holiday of the Christian calendar, is also universally recognized as a time of renewal, rebirth and rejuvenation.

For congregants of Asbury United Methodist Church in Nokesville, Easter is an opportunity to celebrate the recent renovation of the humble, weatherboard building that housed Asbury's original congregation more than 100 years ago.

The sunrise Easter morning service, scheduled for 7 a.m. this Sunday, will be held in the tiny building Asbury UMC members simply call "the old church," directly across the street from the main church building on Fleetwood Drive.

Nestled as it is between an active dairy farm, where grazing cows still dot green pastures, and

an adjacent church cemetery, the resting place of at least three Civil War veterans, Asbury's old church retains the look and feel of a 19th century country church.

The building has no electricity (which makes the precise scheduling of the sunrise service particularly important). And if it's chilly (which is expected this year), warm will radiate from a stovepipe heater near the front of the church.

The heater replaced an old potbelly stove; and the organ, although an antique, is not the original.

But other than that, the old church hasn't changed much since Newton Sayers, a Civil War veteran, farmer and a master carpenter, and his friend Frank Colvin built what was then called the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church South in 1893.

The inside of the building looks much the

same, right down to the 14 pews Sayers and his five daughters are said to have built with local black walnut.

And that's exactly what current church members Tom Gardner and John Paganoni intended when they and fellow members embarked on renovation last year.

"My feeling is we'd like to bring it back to the way it was built," Gardner says. "It's a really neat piece of history."

Both Gardner and Paganoni said their fascination with the old chapel on Fleetwood Drive was one of the things that initially drew their families to Asbury UMC.

"It really is a moving experience," Paganoni said of worshipping in the old church. "It's an emotional experience, to think people who fought in the [Civil] War actually built this church. To me, it's a treasure." ▶

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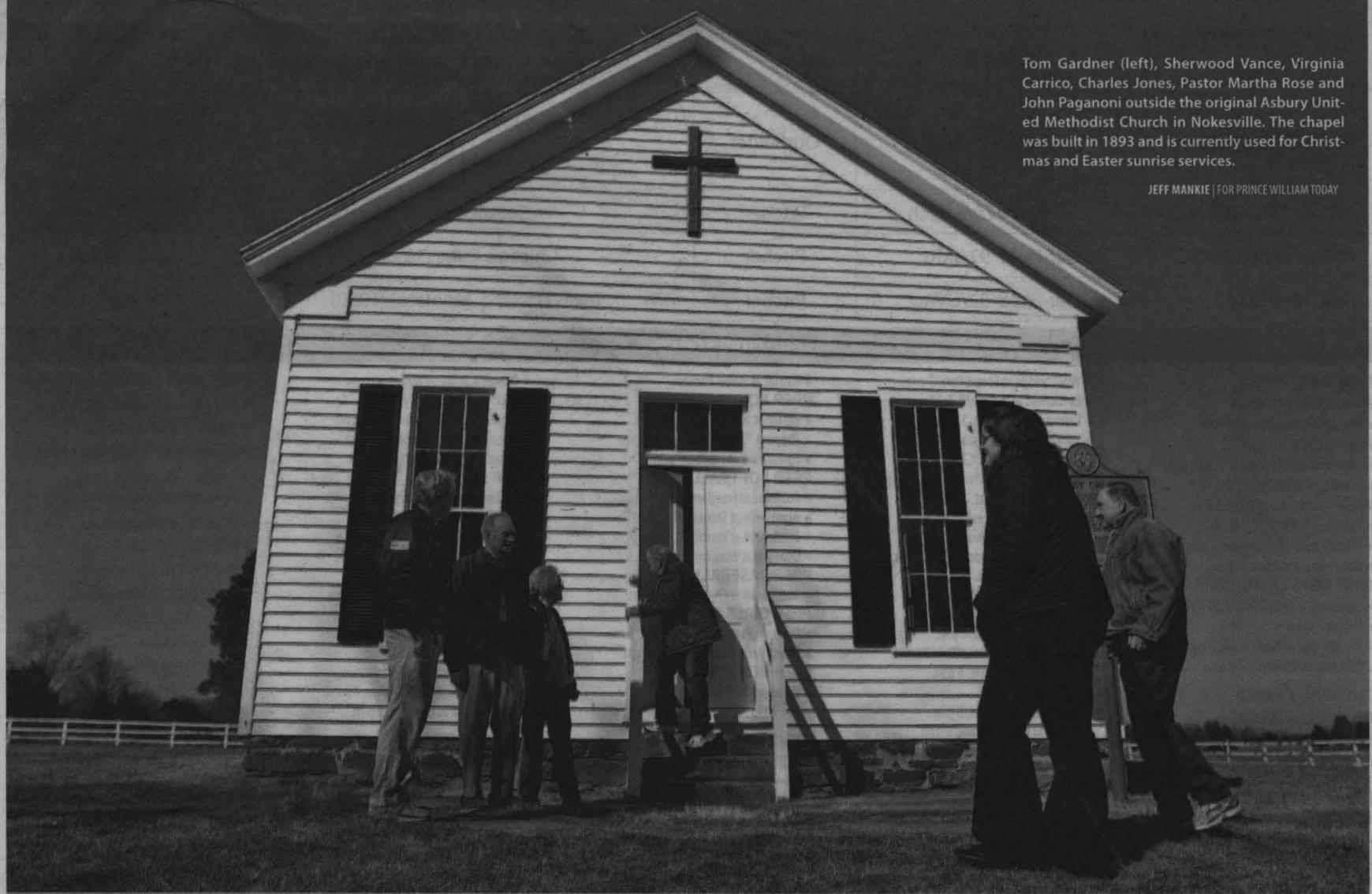
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March 29-April 4, 2013 • www.insidenova.com



Tom Gardner (left), Sherwood Vance, Virginia Carrico, Charles Jones, Pastor Martha Rose and John Paganoni outside the original Asbury United Methodist Church in Nokesville. The chapel was built in 1893 and is currently used for Christmas and Easter sunrise services.

JEFF MANKIE | FOR PRINCE WILLIAM TODAY