

Work under way to refurbish old Bethel Church

By GREGORY TRIPLETT
for the Potomac News

Visitors to the modern Bethel United Methodist Church have the unique opportunity of seeing the original Bethel Church built in 1850 standing across the parking lot.

The two church buildings are near the intersection of Smoketown and Davis Ford roads, an area long known as Bethel, which means "House of God," according to an historical marker nearby.

Land for the original buildings was donated by church leaders Burr and Emsey Glasscock. Community and church members donated work and funds to construct the church, the marker reads.

Places

Bethel Church also served as a community center and meeting hall for area residents, according to a book "Prince William: A Past to Preserve." The community, church members and non-members have traditionally pitched in and volunteered funds and labor for Bethel Church when necessary.

In summer of 1977, the Bethel congregation began using the newer building; and the original church building was moved 200 feet, according to the book.

The old church building was threatened with demolition by the highway department, according to a book "Prince William County - A Pictorial History." Having just paid for the new church facility, the congregation could not fund the old building's move, so a group of neighbors contributed \$5,000 to move it.

John Miller, president of Bethel Historical Society and a church member, said much work has been done to improve the old church's structure and its grounds since then.

"We've been doing a lot of work on the old church," Miller said. "It's a small group of volunteer help."

A wooden rail fence encloses the yard of the old building. From the parking lot, a brick path leads to the front door steps.

Beside the fence near the walk's entrance are two stone benches and a birdbath. Another birdbath is situated nearer the church building. Many plants, shrubs, and young trees have been planted around the grounds and alongside the old church.

"The grounds are an ongoing project," Miller said. "One of those trees was planted as a memorial to



By Steve Davis-Potomac News

The original Bethel Church, built in 1850 on land donated by the Glasscock family, is being refurbished.

Jerry Murphy, a prominent member of the Bethel community, who died about two years ago."

A small picnic area has been constructed down a short hill on one side of the church. A long brick barbecue with several grills on top was built by Boy Scouts as a project, according to Miller.

A lighted wooden pavilion housing two picnic tables was an Eagle Scout project by Kevin M. Wieters of Troop 1363 in October 1986, according to a plaque mounted onto one pavilion post.

Improvements have also been made on the old Bethel Church building itself in an effort to maintain and

preserve the structure.

The one-room frame church was repainted white with green-shuttered windows one-and-one-half years ago, according to Miller. Its gable roof was reshingled five years ago.

Currently, the volunteer workers are putting up new wooden banisters on the front steps.

"We're redoing the old windows," Miller said. "They're all original windows. We'll work inside once the windows are repaired, probably over the summer."

Church members had worked extensively on the inside of the building after the Civil War. Bethel

Church had been used by troops of both armies as a hospital and a horse stable, according to a roadside historical marker.

"We'd like to make the church like it originally was. The pews are original. They're pretty rough now. We'll sand, paint, and finish the woodwork," Miller said. "We hope by the end of the year to have ceremonial services inside the church."

Old Bethel Church also has a basement. Many historic pieces from the Bethel area are currently stored there.

"Eventually, we're planning on opening the church with a little museum in the basement," Miller said.