

Bethel represents old, new at Crossroads

By SARA MORIARTY

The official historical commission plaque has crisp black letters and a soft grey background. Thousands of cars whiz by the Smoketown and Davis Ford Road intersection. Most of them don't notice the square white frame building without a steeple, set well back from the road.

The new sign, installed Wednesday, was the dream of a handful of Bethel United Methodist Church members and others in the eastern Prince William community who loved the rural, stable unity that the old building represented.

James Woodrow "Woody" Taylor wrote the words on the sign. "Bethel has faithfully served as a meeting place for all people...it is still loved by all who worship there. Amen," the letters say, the only one of Prince William's 31 markers to end in prayer.

Taylor, who will be 69 "if I make next February 24," loves Bethel and though a nice new church now ac-

commodates the congregation, he remembers with pleasure the nearly 70 years he has been associated with the community center.

"As you go along through life, you will find something that holds a very dear spot in your heart — to me Old Bethel is that spot," he says. "I started going there in diapers and seldom missed a Sunday and when I went away from home there were very few weekends that passed that didn't find me at Bethel."

The frame church, saved from destruction in the late 1970s when a land exchange made it possible for it to be moved 200 yards from the site now in the middle of Smoketown Road extended, was built in 1850 on land donated by Burr and Emsey Glascock. The single room structure served as a hospital during the Civil War.

Community residents want to preserve the special quality of Bethel.

Janna Murphy Leepson, whose

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HISTORIC SITE FILE: *Bethel Methodist Church*
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POTOMAC NEWS, Woodbridge, Va., October 2, 1981, Page B-10



HISTORIC MEMORIES abound for Davis Ford resident Woody Taylor as he stands beside the new Prince William Historical Commission marker commemorating the site of Old Bethel Church at the intersection of Davis Ford and Smoketown roads. (Potomac News photograph by Clifford Owen)

CHURCH

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grandmother Daisy Russell ran a community landmark country store at Bethel, addressed the question of roots in a speech given in Dumfries several years ago.

"Since 1850, Bethel has served the needs of a small, once rural, community and has represented a last vestige of society's simple, country spirit," Mrs. Leepson said. "Within a matter of a few years, this area will be nothing but subdivisions and shopping centers. It is our hope that old Bethel Church will remain within this suburban area — a reminder of its proud rural heritage."

Community and church members have formed the Bethel Historical Society to restore the structure and promote interest in the community historic heritage. Society President Tom Nelson, who also represents Occoquan District on the Prince

into banks on either side of the entrance. The upstairs room will eventually be used for small community meetings.

Woody Taylor remembers the interior of the church. Taylor's family farmed acreage near the church and had timber land as well.

"My father had me plowing corn in a field by the church. No matter how hot it was you could go inside and it always felt like there was a little breeze," he says. As he sat in the cool interior, a parade of oldtimers would come to mind. There was the Glascock family's three spinster daughters, Miss Molly, Miss Susie and Miss Lou.

"They could sure sing," Taylor says. He also remembered a member of the congregation who would bring his "chaw" inside the building with him. The finish was stripped off the pew in front by the resulting juice.

Woody Taylor dressed up this week and went to look at the Old Bethel sign. He pronounced it "pretty fitting."

