

An old church is torn down . . .

Preachin' days are over here

By Mrs. Esther Pendergrass

One of the most historical old buildings in Chatham County is Old Providence Methodist Church, now being razed by permission of its owners, the Will Stedman family, because from time to time windows and boards have been removed from the old church at the lonely spot.

It was thought better by the Stedman family to have the building torn down by friends. J. H. Pollard is in charge of the operation.

Old Providence Methodist Church was in existence before the War Between the States.

The late Mrs. Julia Ann Stedman, mother of the late William W. Stedman, used to tell of the time she attended church there. She said that she was at church there on the Sunday in 1861 when five boys, Confederate soldiers, attended church with their families and friends before they left for the war the next day. The young Confederate soldiers were North Carolina volunteers and members of a group known as "The Haw River Boys."

Incidentally, one of the boys was Benjamin G. Womble who later became the first Postmaster of Moncure in 1881.

There is an old cemetery at the church. Such names as Cole, Stedman, Johnson, Gunter, Womble, and others are seen on the moss-covered old tombstones there.

In recent years some members of one of the old families have been buried in the old cemetery. Several years ago the late Mrs. Calvin Harward, who was the former Miss Alice Womble, was buried there. Her father was Joe Womble, a Confederate soldier who was buried there years and years ago.

Ten years ago the late Mrs. W. W. Stedman, the former Miss Nora Harmon of Chatham County and Moncure was buried there.

The most recent grave is that of her husband, William W. Stedman, age 89, who was buried there this year.

It is a sad fact that a church like old Providence, with its sentimental, pleasant, and lovable history should have to be torn down because of unappreciative persons.

It would have been wonderful if the old church could have been kept as a Shrine as the late Mrs. Stedman labored so hard to have done.

During her lifetime she had the church painted a number of times, the cemetery cleaned and beautified, and the lawn mowed, but after her death her aged

husband went to Pennsylvania to be near their daughters. There was none of the family left in Moncure to see about the upkeep of the church.

In Mrs. Stedman's lifetime, long after preaching services were discontinued at Old Providence, she used to go out there on Sunday afternoon and hold Sunday School and other religious services for the

people of the community. She furnished a piano for the purpose.

The place where the church stands is a lonely one, but the country-side is beautiful. Tall old trees such as oak, elm, pine and cedar are all about. A lonely cedar tree seems to stand guard now over the old building. Dogwood in the Spring is

all about and the country air is clean and sweet.

About two miles away is Gum Springs Baptist Church, a thriving church today, also with a colorful history. Gum Springs is just off the road between Moncure and Pittsboro.

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