

New Home Church & School

After celebrating the 100th anniversary of the New Home Church in 1996, the congregation decided the integrity of the building was good, but it needed a new foundation.

Soon after that, they hired a house mover to jack up the church building about three feet, and they crawled under it to clean out the old timber foundation. Then they laid a new concrete block foundation, masoned together, around the outer edge of the building with cross support blocks in the middle. (In the process, they found a box that would today be called a 'time capsule,' which showed that in 1896, they had eight donors who started the original church.)

However, once the new level foundation was laid, they found that doors no longer shut right and they couldn't open some of the windows, whose sills were rotted out. They began searching for historical preservation carpenters to repair the windows, some of which still have the original 1896 panes, but the quotes they received were around \$1,000 per window, much more than they could afford. Then they found Ben Bacon of Rogers, a master craftsman who had restored many local historical buildings. Because of his love for old buildings, he was willing to take on restoring all eight windows for under \$1,000 total. He did one or two windows at a time and did an exceptional job, Featherston said. They were very pleased with his work and asked him to continue with the whole building, once he finished the windows. The west wall of the church was leaning; there was rotten lumber on the exterior of the building which needed replacing and painting. Bacon had the wood milled to be identical to the old style, and was able to get the paint donated. He researched churches of that era and then redid the interior, keeping it as close as possible to the original. A cornerstone dated 1896 was added to the foundation.

A few years after he finished all that work, Bacon died unexpectedly at age 61 of a heart attack in May, 2013. His wife asked the congregation at New Home if he could be buried in their cemetery since he had so enjoyed restoring that church, and they readily agreed. His grave is the first one to be seen upon approaching the cemetery.

While there are 52 graves in the cemetery documented on www.findagrave.com, there are known to be several unmarked graves also. The earliest documented burial, that of Mary Cash Gregory, was in 1872, before the church was built. One of the graves is that of a little boy, James Floyd, who died five days before his fifth birthday in 1925 after being hit by a car on the nearby road that is now Highway 71.

Local author Billie Jines, when she was with the Morning News of Northwest Arkansas, wrote a number of articles about old schools in Benton County in her "Back Roads" column that they later published in a series of volumes entitled "Benton County Schools That Were." She wrote that New Home School, District #19, was one of the original tax-supported schools established in the 1800's by the Benton County Court. In her research, she found court records from 1869 ordering a tax to be levied on "the taxable property of District 19 for school purposes," and by 1883, the county was levying millage for District 19 "at the rate of 5 mills on all property in that district for general school purposes." Thus it appears that the school was built first, with the church being built across the road several years later.

The school was no longer used as a school after the Bentonville School District consolidated the nearby rural schools in the 1930s-1940s, but it continued to be used for groups like the 4-H and Extension Club meetings until it fell into disrepair and was eventually torn down.

The country road that went between the church and the school was formerly called Punkin Hollow Road. That stretch of road was not renamed Peach Orchard Road until just a few decades ago.

New Home Church went from being located out in the country a few miles north of Bentonville in 1896, to being inside Bentonville city limits on a paved city street with the new Bella Vista bypass being constructed right behind it in 2016. What will the next 120 years bring?

Picture 1: This sketch of New Home School which stood across the road from New Home Church was provided by the church pianist, Cheryl Gregory, artist unknown.

Picture 2: New Home School stood among these trees near where the new Bella Vista bypass is now being built. It was consolidated into the Bentonville School District in 1933 and torn down years ago.