

Blocksburg restores 1901 church

By Mary Siler Anderson, author of "Backwoods Chronicle, History of Southern Humboldt County, 1849-1920."

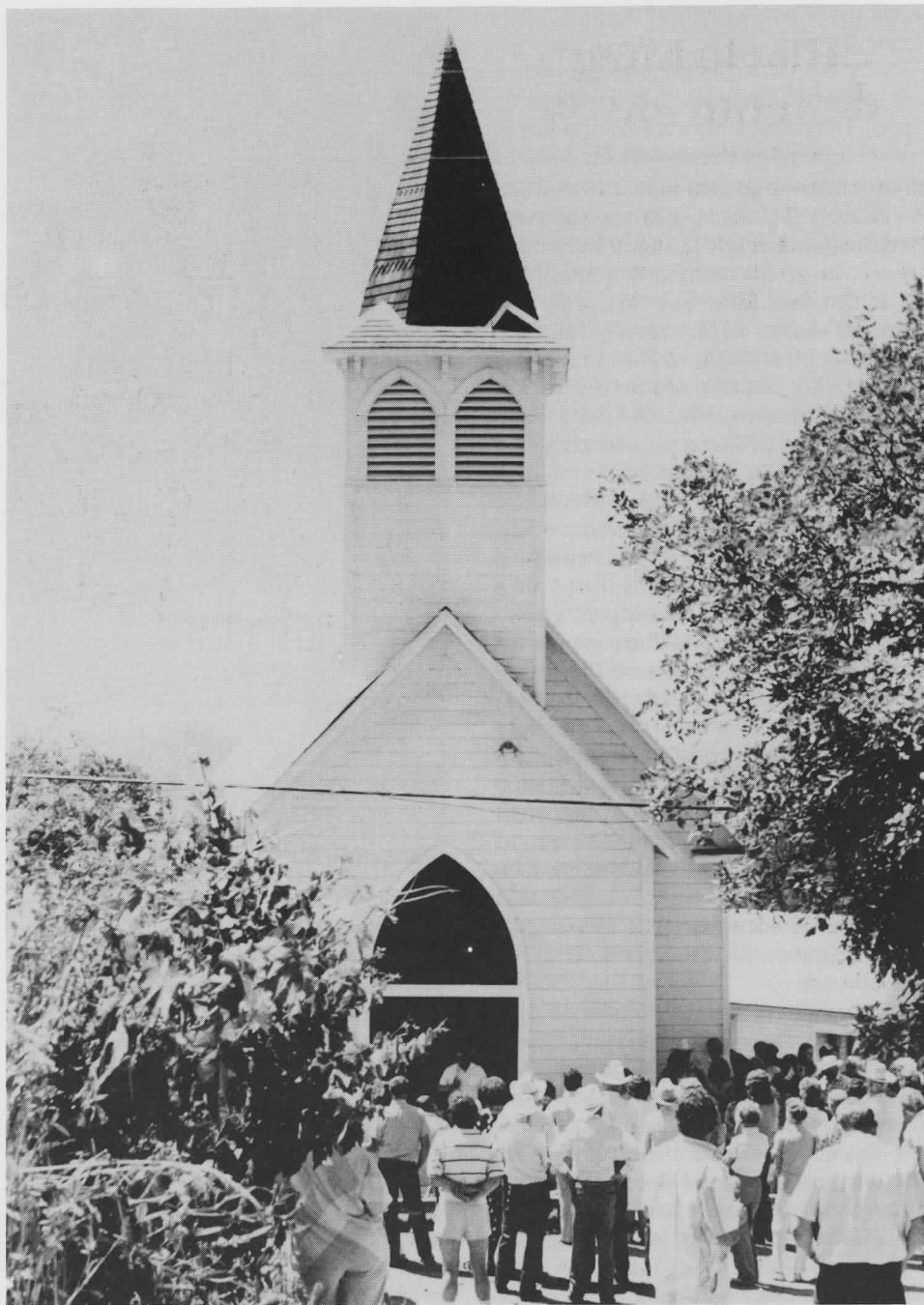
Of all the remote villages in Southern Humboldt County, Blocksburg is one of the prettiest and most picturesque. In the early days of the county, before the railroad and the Redwood Highway, Blocksburg was a thriving settlement very much in the thick of things. It was founded in 1872 by Benjamin Blockburger, who built a hotel there to take advantage of the traffic on the Overland Road. By 1880 it boasted 121 residents and several businesses all prospering in an economy based on the stagecoach trade and sheep ranching.

In 1880, the San Francisco Methodist Conference responded positively to a request from the citizens of Blocksburg for a resident minister to tend their spiritual needs. It wasn't until 1889, however, that a minister was found for the village. Very little personal information remains about this man, the Rev. William Jensen. He remained at Blocksburg for only two years but he must have been a person of uncommon energy and dedication because he was responsible for the building of the first church there. That first church was destroyed by fire on September 23, 1899, just before the new building was to be dedicated.

Undaunted, Rev. Jensen immediately set about building another church. Church records indicate that Jensen was assisted in the rebuilding by Henry Brace, John Walker, William Carson, S.A. Vance, The Bank of Eureka, the Salvation Army, the Peniel Mission and other Methodist churches in the area. The land was donated by the Bank of Humboldt County. This second effort was more successful and the church was dedicated on September 8, 1901, with the Rev. J.H. Wythe officiating. The

ballast, thereby lowering the freeboard to improve her ride. This suggestion proved to be sound, but it took time with the equipment that was available. Finally the call was given for the sea-going tug to come to Eureka.

A very powerful tug with an experienced crew arrived to move the ship to Terminal Island, Los Angeles Harbor.



The restored Blocksburg Community Church.

original trustees were John Walker, William T. Smith, Mrs. Lou Ballard, and Mrs. Belle Helmke.

For whatever reason, Rev. Jensen left his pastorate at Blocksburg the following year and was replaced by the Rev. A.N. Sweet. Sweet himself was replaced the following year, 1903, by the Rev. B.H.

Schneider. Under Schneider, a parsonage was built and completely furnished for \$300, according to the Methodist Conference records.

Despite this improvement, Schneider also left at the end of a year and the church was without a resident minister

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The transit was accomplished with no problem. There the massive boilers, her shaft and other large machinery were salvaged before the complete dismantling took place.

George Rynecki said, "That part was not my worry, I had to get her safely out in the ocean. What a relief that was to see her cross the bar so smoothly!"

Since that day, there have been at least two occasions elsewhere in the world when a ship's power plant has been used as emergency power for a seaside community. However, we are certain nothing can match the record of the Donbass III, while anchored at Humboldt Bay.

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Blocksburg church

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in the succeeding years until 1914 when the Rev. F.M. Scott took up the post. Scott organized a M.E. Church Society whose original members were Mrs. W.S. Curless, Mrs. Sol Cox, J.S. and Mrs. Madden, Mrs. Sarah Johnson, W.C. and Mrs. Craig, Agnes Craig and Laura Craig. Scott remained until 1916, at which time the church had 17 full members and property valued at \$1,800, including the parsonage.

Sometime after 1918, the Methodist Conference sold the church and parsonage to the Presbytery of the Redwoods but the population had declined to a point where it couldn't support a resident minister. Nor was there money for maintenance and repairs so the lovely old structure began to deteriorate. Services and Sunday schools were still held in the church through the following decades, whenever a visiting minister happened to be available. The Rev. Hollinger and the Rev. Shumaker held occasional services there during the 1950s, but by then the building had deteriorated so much that it was felt better to move the Sunday school to the schoolhouse.

The people of Blocksburg were saddened to see their church in such a state of decay. As early as the late 1950s, several people of different denominations approached the Presbytery with the idea of purchasing the building so it could be restored and used for a community church. Negotiations continued for a decade, however, and it was not until June of 1966 that the Town Hall Association was finally able to purchase the old church.

That was only the beginning for the townspeople. The church was in such a state that restoration needed to be made from the foundation up. The treasury had been exhausted to make the purchase so it took an incredible twenty years for the people of Blocksburg to complete the restoration. Year by year, improvements were made as money, labor and material became available. Repairs began with the foundation and sub-flooring, moved onto new siding and skirting, new sills, new windows. A new roof was installed to protect the interior, a retaining wall was built to divert winter water flows and the belfry was reingled and stabilized.

It wasn't until 1983 that work began in earnest to restore the interior. This



The antique organ has a place of honor in the church.

involved sheet rocking, laying a new floor and handworking the interior woodwork. The original pews were painstakingly cleaned and restrained, as was the old organ. By early 1986, the church was deemed ready enough for use by the community. The first marriage was held in the restored church on May 24, 1986, uniting Kathy Bowen of Fortuna and Tim Cook of Loleta. A second marriage was performed in the church on June 21. The bride and groom were Sheri Dronbusch and John Watkins, both from Salem, Oregon.

The official dedication, which marked the culmination of so much time, energy and devotion on the part of the residents of Blocksburg, was held on Sunday, June 22. Three hundred people, current and some former residents of Blocksburg, gathered together to joyfully celebrate the completion of their landmark effort. To add to the celebration, the traditional Blocksburg Ice Cream Social was moved ahead a few weeks to coincide with the dedication.

The people of Blocksburg are justifiably proud of what they have accomplished. Their historic church is once again a focal point in their communal concerns, a meaningful place for the baptisms, marriages and burials that are integral to the history of this small, closely-knit and very spirited community.

The story of a 'first real job'

The following account of his "first real job" was handwritten by Melvin Peterson and given to me by his wife, Leona, a resident of Eureka and a former elementary schoolteacher. Melvin began his story with a description of the various tasks he undertook as a youth, including a newsboy job. I have deleted this portion in order to go directly to his adventures in learning to be a "whistle punk" at a logging camp.

But first, for those who have not been as fortunate as I in having known Melvin Peterson as a friend since high school days, following is a brief history of his life to date. Melvin was born in Eureka, the son of Martin Peterson who worked as a longshoreman and later was the custodian of the Civic Auditorium for a number of years. Mel graduated from Eureka High in 1926 and attended Humboldt State for three years preparing for Stanford where he graduated in 1932.

He taught science and served as principal of the East Nicobus High School for a number of years. From there he moved on to San Francisco where he became the assistant superintendent, having eight high schools under his jurisdiction. This involved considerable travel to represent his schools at various conventions and other meetings. After his retirement, Mel moved back to Eureka, where he was active in the Calvary Lutheran Church. He is at present a patient in St. Luke's Convalescent Hospital in Fortuna.

Here is his story of his "first real job."—Submitted by Neil Price.

There came a time when a good work record paid dividends. A man said to me one day, "How would you like to become a whistle punk in a logging camp this summer?" The "Bar Mitzvah" and the many other rites which celebrate the approach of manhood, could not stir the ego of a boy more than the offer of employment which came to me.

The weeks moved slowly but vacation finally arrived. Mother gathered the clothes which included newly purchased overalls cut with a scissors at "high water level," hickory shirts and real man's work shoes with short calks, a gift from dad. Repayment of this investment was not expected but restitution in good part was made since it was in the