

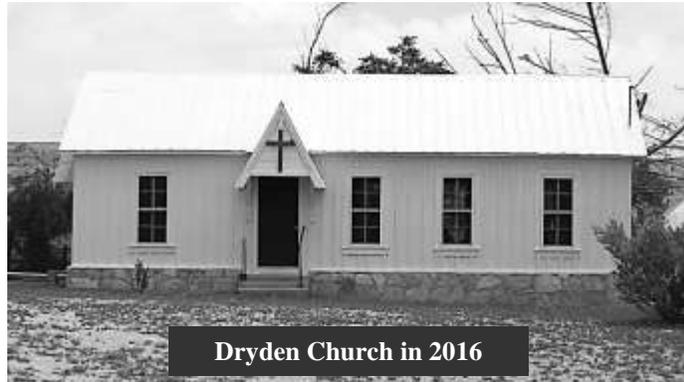
Museum News: The Little White Church in the Vale

By C. W. (Bill) Smith, curator emeritus

Terrell County Memorial museum

“Come to the church by the wildwood
Oh, come to the church in the dale
No spot is so dear to my childhood
As the little brown church in the vale.”

Nothing touches a sentimental chord in the heart like remembering the church where you attended Sunday school as a child. Most people have fond memories of their childhood, and for many, the church was at the center of their lives. Such was a tiny little white building in Dryden, Texas. It not only served for church and Sunday school, but for marriages and funerals as well. The whole story of some folks' lives was played out within its walls, from birth to death. The happy times, the sad times, the joyous times, the tragic times...the little white church witnessed it all. It is an historic place.



Dryden Church in 2016

The Dryden Methodist Church was constructed in 1907 and began life as a grammar school. It was authorized by the Terrell County Commissioners' Court and money was allocated for its construction.

From the beginning it also served as a place for weddings, dances, parties and public meetings. In 1930 a new school was built and the old building became the Community House, where it continued to be used for social gatherings and public meetings. There were enough Methodist folks in Dryden and on the surrounding ranches that they began to gather there for church. The



Sunrise Service in 1992.

congregation joined the Texas-New Mexico Methodist Conference in 1931 and gained full-fledged status as a church. Many happy years were enjoyed within its four walls.

In 1938, however, the building was falling apart. A town meeting was called to discuss that deterioration and the fact that it was no longer being used for public meetings. The citizens present decided to turn it over completely to the Methodists and the building was deeded to the Methodist Conference by owner J. M. Bassett.

The Dryden Methodist Church continued to be the social center of Dryden. It was used for church services and the occasional public meeting, party or dance.

Eventually the population of Dryden dwindled to a few souls and even the Methodist congregation became so small that most folks came to Sanderson to church. They were no longer able to have a minister come for services. The building deteriorated once again and was in deplorable condition. At this time, in the late 1980s, the Terrell County Historical Commission decided to try and save the building, but they felt it should be moved to Sanderson for a better chance to preserve it. They approached the Terrell County Commissioners and applied for permission to move the building onto county property and restore it. In a spirit of civic pride and concern for the preservation of our history, the County Commissioners gave their permission. The building was moved to Sanderson about 1989 and placed behind the Terrell County Memorial Museum. At that time it was painted, underpinned with native limestone and made presentable. From that point forward it became the home to Easter Sunrise services and public prayer meetings throughout the years.

As the years passed, the harsh West Texas sun did its work and the building once again began to show its age. The windows, especially, were in bad condition, with missing panes of glass and broken window frames and screens. The roof was in bad shape and water had damaged a part of the interior. There was no interest by the county to maintain the building or do renovations.

Rather than stand by and watch the building fall to the ground, the Friends of the Terrell County Memorial Museum stepped in and provided the funding for the first phase of renovation. A contractor was found to repair the roof and coat it with a sealant and paint. With the leaks stopped, the deterioration of the interior was checked and the building was dry once again.

When more funds became available, the second phase was begun. Another contractor was found (with the unlikely name of "Catfish") who had trained in a cabinetmaker's shop and claimed he had the skills to repair the windows, even to making new parts if necessary. The TCHC and the Friends of the Museum felt that new windows would be out of place and that restoration of the old windows was necessary in order to assure that an official historic marker could be obtained from the Texas Historic Commission for our little piece of history. After the first window was restored, the Friends breathed a sigh of relief...the window was as close to original as humanly possible. In a lengthy project, the building repairs were finished and the exterior received coats of protective paint.

At completion of this phase in 2016 the building was finished in time to be used for the traditional Easter Morning Sunrise Service in April and for the annual 4th of July celebration. It was once again in good condition and available for public meetings and as a part of the regular museum tour. Displays of religious memorabilia from Terrell County churches were moved into the Dryden Church and it now serves to interpret the efforts to promote the faith of our citizens.

Future plans for the Dryden Church are to replace the worn carpeting, repair damaged ceiling tiles and spruce up the interior. The Friends of the Terrell County Museum will spearhead the efforts to restore the church to better-than-new condition, borne not out of duty, but by love for our heritage. The Friends realized that once something is gone, it can never be brought back. They feel that our heritage is important and it must not be forgotten.