

Old Methodist Church lies in storage at Pajaro Dunes

By LANE WALLACE

In a day when historical preservationists are trying to keep local landmarks from being torn down, there's a piece of old Watsonville some of them would like to see go up.

It's the wooden church built in 1874 which served Methodists until 1952, the Lutherans for several more years, and was then a warehouse for Ford's until 1967. (The building stood at Beach and Rodriguez Streets.)

When the time came for a new building (now an auto parts store) on the site, the late Mabel Curtis led a drive to move the building to the county fairgrounds. The drive fell short. "Money (for historical preservation) was difficult to raise then," recalled Harriet Proctor, a long-time church member.

Although Mrs. Curtis' drive failed, the church didn't meet the fate of the wrecking ball. Ryland Kelley of Hare, Brewer, and Kelley figured the building might make a nice addition to his Pajaro Dunes development.

Kelley purchased the church building and had it dismantled and moved to Pajaro Dunes land. (Part of the building was destroyed, but the focal point — the steeple, has been preserved.)

Kelley had planned to build a firehouse and small commercial project on Shell Road, using the steeple. By the time Kelley was ready to proceed with the idea (about five years ago), the county wasn't.

Some member of the county Board of Supervisors wanted the new firehouse in the Rio Boco area of Pajaro Dunes, others wanted it on Shell Road.

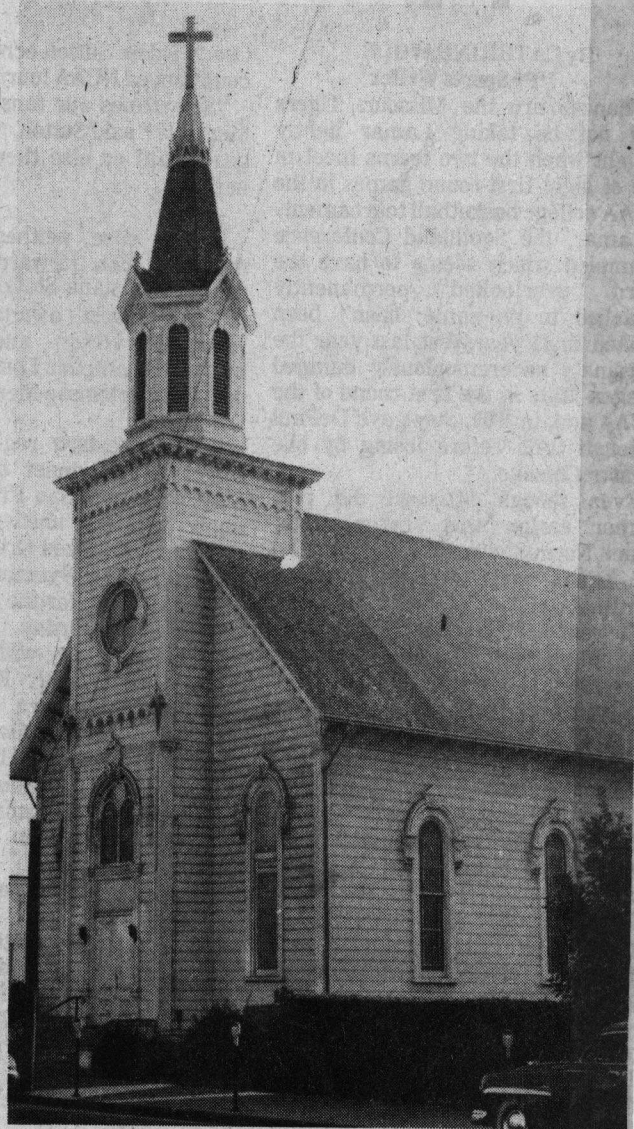
The issue became a political football. Kelley finally scrapped the idea of the commercial project, not wanting it to delay the firehouse. (The firehouse application is now winding its way through the bureaucracy.)

While the Shell Road idea is dead, Kelley still hopes to reconstruct the old steeple. However, he hasn't been able to find an appropriate site and circumstances. Kelley said he has no plans to destroy the wood, now kept in a dry safe spot at Pajaro Dunes.

Betty Lewis of the Pajaro Valley Historical Association said she'd like to see the church put up again, although there is no current effort by the society to do so.

Mrs. Lewis said Kelley told her he would consider donating the church to the Historical Society if an appropriate site for it can be found.

Although it's been 29 years since the Methodists moved out of the church, some of the old members



The church in a 1952 photo.

have fond memories of the building.

"There were a lot of tears shed" when the congregation moved out of the old building to its current building on Stanford Street, said Harriet Proctor.

Ruth Richardson Johnson, now a member of the Freedom Methodist Church, remembers when the pews were painted. "They were canary yellow," she said with a laugh.

Several of the pews (no longer yellow) are at the Stanford Street building.