



Placerville M.E. Church and Cemetery

Federated Church has been an important local institution for the last 173 years. It began life as a Methodist Episcopal Church, right here in Placerville in 1851. A guy named Frank Goyan donated the land and went to San Francisco to purchase building materials not available locally.

Beams and studs were hand cut from local timber, but the siding came around the Horn from the east coast. This was just three years after the gold discovery, and the lumber industry had yet to catch up with demand. The Blair family, who eventually encamped into several homes at the base of Cedar Ravine, would fill that need in the ensuing years. But until then, many common building materials were shipped from the east coast at great expense.

Like the church, the cemetery dates to the early 1850s, which ranks both with the oldest in the county. We know much more about the history of the church than its cemetery.

The M.E. Church served the community well in its first decade. Foothill towns suffered devastating fires in the 1850s. Placerville burned down twice in 1856 alone. Through it all, the M.E. Church sat up here, above those conflagrations, and served the town well during them.

The church was located just north of its current location and was probably half-again its current size at the time, but Placerville had nonetheless outgrown it by 1861. A large brick edifice on Cedar Ravine and Main St. was erected to replace it. The Presbyterians would erect their own large brick church right down the street, across from the Courthouse, a few years later.

The old M.E. Church was sold to the owner of an adjacent lot, roughly where C&H Auto Parts is today. The new owner moved the church down the hill onto an existing one-story structure, re-sided the whole thing, creating a two-story living quarters for the next 65+ years. Wrap-around porches were added at some point.

In the late 1920s the church was once again expanding. Members purchased the two-story building and remodeled it into classrooms, offices, a pastor's study and a youth center, then gifted it to the church.

Fast forward to 1944. Both Presbyterian and Methodist congregations are shrinking during the throes of WWII. They decide to merge, forming the Federated Church we know today.

The current Federated Church building went up in 1953. A few years later the two buildings on Main Street and Cedar Ravine were sold to fund construction of Federated's community room.

By this time, the origin of the second story of the smaller building was forgotten.

In 1958 Sam Evans was contracted to demolish both buildings. While taking the smaller building apart he makes a startling discovery – there's a separate building inside the one he's tearing down! He thankfully stops the demolition and notifies church officials, who eventually identify the inside of the top half as the original 1851 church.

Several other important people step forward to save the old church. Church member and president of the Historical Society John Hassler spearheads the effort. Other key contributors:

- The Chamber of Commerce
- Ken Bonham, former superintendent of Folsom Cordova school District.
- Native Sons and Emblem Club.
- Vivian Carpenter – fundraisers.
- Frank Gerbode raised funds and found the original bell, from ship Staffordshire.
- Al Briggs helped with the engineering reconstruction of the current structure.

They take the old church apart, painstakingly encode the pieces, haul them up the hill and reconstruct the chapel you see today.

In subsequent years the building suffered from insect and water damage. Clara Nielson led an 8-year renovation project which retained the historic look and feel of the original structure.

The building continues to serve the church and the community as a small chapel, meeting place and wedding venue. It's an ideal and affordable place for a memorial service. The church staff is very helpful.

The old church is again threatened by time and insects, and the incessant woodpeckers. Fundraisers are being held to offset the cost of renovations that will insure the historic church is here for future generations.

The cemetery's history is muddier. Portions of two other old cemeteries were moved here over the years. The Pioneer Cemetery was beneath the current parking lot, and also on the north side of the church cemetery. Most, but not all, of the graves beneath the parking lot were moved. The little-known Log Cabin Ravine Cemetery, located along Bedford Ave, was probably also moved here. Researchers suspect that remains were not always relocated, and that some headstones were randomly placed in the cemetery.

The headstones in this cemetery have seen a lot of abuse and very little restoration. What has been done was not done to modern standards. Federated staffer Mary Morisset has started an informal group that meets out here every month to clean up the cemetery and its headstones. Save the Graves hopes to work with Mary to get some of these broken headstones repaired properly.

M.E. Church and Cemetery was part of the 2024/2025 –Lesser Known Placerville Cemeteries– tour led by Mike Roberts, Save the Graves.



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many the Methodist Episcopal Church, was repurposed, and the original location. The church was built in 1880. A few years ago the church was torn down, leaving behind a pile of rubble and a few remaining stones.

The Old M.E. Church



M.E. Cemetery Map



Broken Headstone in M.E. Cemetery

Category

1. Cemetery History

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