

# St. Louis Globe-Democrat

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## A Church in the County, Wrapped in 105-Year-Old Tradition

When Harry Cooper, chairman of the Geyer Road Improvement Association, called a meeting recently in the old Des Peres Presbyterian Church, St. Louis County, to propose straightening and widening of Geyer road near the church, he stirred up a hornets' nest. Cooper suggested rerouting the road between the church entrance and church cemetery to eliminate a double curve which the road now makes around the rear part of the building. Members of the 105-year-old congregation averred this would place the road within 3 feet of their front door, bristled indignantly, vehemently refused to allow "any such desecration of this little old quaint rock church."

Cooper assured them his group did not contemplate any action on

the matter without approval of the church, and the incident is apparently closed. The hardy pioneers who labored to organize and build the church and who now lay buried in the churchyard must have been proud of their children's good fight to preserve the old landmark in its original setting.

The place of worship is not in the village of Des Peres, but is 2½ miles northeast of the locality from which it takes its name. It is a small vine-covered, ridge-roofed structure on the east side of Geyer road midway between Clayton and Manchester roads. Disdaining the smell of gasoline and the bustle of paved Geyer road, it turns its back upon it and faces east toward the cemetery. Set on a hilltop in beautiful rolling country, it overlooks the spacious estates of Huntleigh Village.

The church is rich in tradition and remarkable for the stay-in-one-place-iveness of its members. Most of them are grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the founders. Generation upon generation of the same families are interred in the burial ground.

It was in blustery March of 1832 that a small number of country squires and their wives gathered in the home of Stephan Maddox to discuss organization. Most of those present were Southerners from Virginia, with a sprinkling of French and Germans. They had come overland from the East and South by buckboard and wagon. They had settled near Des Peres, and were tilling the soil and prospering. They had become acclimated to their new home, and felt the need of a place in which to worship.

Former Virginians, Mr. and Mrs. William Belt Harwood proposed meeting at their log cabin home until a church could be erected. The church was built in 1833 on ground given by the Maddox family. Land was also given by the David Smalls and the David Harts-horns. So a cemetery was laid out

with a section for slaves, for most of these people were slave owners. Later the William Harwoods presented two acres of ground across Geyer road and a wooden two-story parsonage was raised. This parsonage is still standing. At present it is occupied by a tenant, as it has been abandoned as a parsonage for many years.

The surnames of the founders, early elders and deacons are profusely sprinkled through the latest county directory. Among these charter members, besides those already mentioned, were: T. D. Yates, George Reed, Henry Baron, William McKnight, King McCutchins, George Y. King, Jonas Geyer, Frederick des Combs, O. B. Harwood, Edward Fitzgerald, Charles Snyder, Cornelius Demorst, Thomas M. Bacon, Chas. H. Loverscheck, Thomas H. Ennis and David L. Des Combs. Most of them now rest in the church yard while their children's children attend the church they built and cherished. To the descendants the church is a shrine, the grounds hallowed.