

## Documentation and Reasons for the Destruction of the 1829 Ponds Church

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**From:**

"KEVIN HEFFERNAN" <k.heffernan1@verizon.net>

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**To:**

marchbank@verizon.net

**Cc:**

rgaserorca@rca.org

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Phil,

As you may have surmised, I'm not one who surrenders easily. However in this case, a few weeks ago I recently discovered information from 1950 regarding the demise of the 1829 Ponds Church building and it compels me to do so.

In 1950 there was a local newspaper called the Bulletin and in it there was a regular column on Oakland called the Oakland Observer. I have those files from 1950 to 1953. It's important to remember here that 1950 is only 15 years or less after the destruction of the 1829 Ponds Church building. Hence there was a rich living memory of the church building and its issues by local residents.

One article pointed out that while the church was indeed beautiful, it was nonetheless was poorly built. It seems that it was neither designed nor built by professionals as evidenced by the fact that very poor quality mortar was used in its stone work. In fact it was built by local residents who were farmers. So in 1889 when the nave was added and cahtederal windows replaced the previous rectangular ones, the first structural steps toward the building's doom were undertaken. Then in about 1900 when the 2 front doors were replaced by a single entrance and proper supports were not added to the roof superstructure, the building's doom was sealed. The church steeple began to tilt, the roof line sagged and, worse, the walls began to crack and spread due to the poor quality mortar.

Then, in about 1910 or 1915, a professional firm was brought in to assess the damage and

provide a cost estimate to fix the Church. The bottom line number was \$10,000 for a full restoration. While this seems like a very small price today, it was very substantial for a town whose total population was about 900 souls. While everyone wanted to save the building, no one was ready to write a check. The net was that a decision was reluctantly made to move the congregation one mile north to a new, wooden 'chapel' and abandon the 1829 church building. A side benefit and not a primary motivation was that the new chapel simply would be closer to the center of town as well.

The official report prepared by the Historical American Buildings Survey (about 1938) states that ***"The church was discarded because two tension members in each truss were lacking. The trusses spread and pushed the walls out of plumb and caused the cupola to tilt backwards. Instead of preserving the ancient ediface, the congregation erected the present shingled Ponds Church."*** In other words, the building was ready to collapse.

So, I concede and am at least at peace with regard to my quest to find the true and accurate answer to the demise of the 1829 Ponds Church building. Amen.

Separately but still on the topic of the 1829 Ponds Church building, I have discovered several hitherto unknown photos of the building that, I believe, were taken in 1934 or 1935 as part of a WPA project. Remember these pics were taken 8-10 years after the 'Ponds 'chapel' was built one mile north. Also remember that the 1829 church building was abandoned. They depict the building in a near collapse condition with the cupola torn apart to retrieve the weather vane, with the roof containing holes in it and, yes, with the bell tower in full tilt.

I've attached the pics here. Please forward them to the current Ponds Church historian and/or to any other interested person.

Regards,  
Kevin Heffernan

PS

An additional piece of documentary information also came to light as it related to the compass orientation of the 1829 Ponds Church. This info was developed while the building was still standing. Specifically, the building was on a true north - south axis. This means that it did not face the current Burger King. Rather, it faced diagonally across the intersection looking at the current TD North Bank building. Also remember that Post Road did not yet exist at that time.

Also attached are contemporary architectural drawings of the 1829 Ponds Church complete with its compass orientation.

Kevin