



Members of the Moravian Church attempted to create a settlement in Georgia around 1735-1740 to avoid persecution on-going in their homelands of Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland. The effort was ultimately unsuccessful and most decedents finally migrated to the Moravian community in Pennsylvania. Their lasting legacy, however, was the rough-wooden structure built sometime in the mid-1850s that was to become the Warsaw Methodist Church.

Located on a small hill (across from the present-day St. Ives), the church and its cemetery served the little “Warsaw community” for the better part of a century until its dwindling membership caused it to become part of Johns Creek Methodist Church.

For years it stood vacant and suffered a string of vandalisms. But it was not until the church property was sold to developers, that long-time and former members of the Warsaw community were jolted into action to save the historic structure. “Having grown up in this area, I have lots of fond memories of the old Warsaw Church and its historical significance to this once-rural community,” said Representative Mark Burkhalter.

The Warsaw Church was included in Fulton County’s “inventory of historical buildings;” but with the developer’s rezoning, the building was scheduled for demolition. That was before the “cemetery issue” had been settled. The planning commission required that an archeologist determine whether graves of former slaves and Cherokee Indians were actually located outside the cemetery fence “marked only with rocks as headstones” as local history maintained. Reverend Posey, a respected African-American minister from Atlanta, prominently joined the inquiry. Some 248 families formed the Warsaw Cemetery and Church Association that was established to perpetually maintain the gravesites and “save the church at all costs.” For two years they worked with the developer on rescuing the building while he dealt with various aspects of the complicated regulatory process.

About that time it was suggested that Autrey Mill Nature

Preserve and Heritage Center, a 46-acre woodland property off Old Alabama Road, might find a spot on its grounds for the old church. Officials at Autrey Mill believed that Warsaw Church would be a splendid addition to the “village crossroads” they were trying to assemble next to their nature center. Today, their heritage town includes an old country store, a sizeable barn, a classic farmhouse, and several small outbuildings.

Autrey Mill Board members Judy Webb, Janis Hill, and Margaret Kruger were instrumental in securing the final home for the church. In March, 2004 the old building made its way slowly down Highway 141 on the back of a low-boy trailer, crawled past the neighborhoods along Old Alabama Road, and crept up the hill along the gravel drive to Autrey Mill. “It was no small task,” said house-mover Jack Rausch.

Janis Hill was not at the move, but her daughter, Jodie Ritch, phoned her every ten minutes with updates. When Janis finally saw Warsaw Church at Autrey Mill for the first time, still on the trailer but safely tucked under the tall trees, “I just broke down and squalled; it meant that much to me.” Especially, because as a child of eight, she promised her grandfather she would always look after the graves and the church for him. Her grandfather, “Poppa Bob” Long, had originally donated the land for the cemetery, and had been a deacon in the church under the Reverend Don Herndon.

The church has another interesting piece of history “built” into it. In 1956, when repair work was sorely needed, church members used the discarded wooden floor from the Duluth High School gym to replace their own.

In a cookbook sold to raise money for the cemetery upkeep, Warsaw Church is described as “a silent but eloquent tribute to memories of the early days of the Warsaw Community.”

Autrey Mill’s plans call for weddings in the church, receptions at the Summerour farm house, opening Green’s Store as a gift shop, and conducting events in the big “program” barn.