

## **New face for old church**

**By Moira K. Wiley**  
**Staff Writer**

The city of Perkins is closing the doors on the oldest public building in Payne County -- temporarily.

The Old Church Center, formerly the Methodist-Episcopal Church, was built in 1892 at the corner of East First and Thomas streets. City officials recently voted to shut the doors so the building can be refurbished.

Several repairs have been made on the building, including the roof, foundation and siding through a grant from the Oklahoma Historical Society. In 1997, it received a new coat of paint through funding by the town and a gift from Patricia Leonard. Plus, the bell tower was restored through a gift from Gertrude Ishmael. All these repairs were done to help preserve the building until funds were available to completely restore it.

William David Sasser (1875-1953) and Robert Sherrod helped build the church along with Sherrod's son, Emra, and a man named Haden. Sasser, who was only about 17 at the time and later married Sherrod's daughter, hauled the lumber for the building from Perry and construction began in winter 1891.

The property was given to the town of Perkins by Sherrod's great-great-grandson and Sasser's great-grandson, David, in 1987 for the development of a Community Center for the furtherance of art and history. The Old Church Center now serves as a cultural center and meeting place for the community.

The former educational building that stands next to the old church now serves as the Dave Sasser Memorial Museum.

"I've always been interested in the building," said David Sasser, "because, my great-great-grandfather and great-grandfather helped build it. I thought it would be neat to have a museum tied to the community, so in 1986 I acquired the building from Merrill Lynch.

"When I gave the building to the city, it was with the idea that it would be used for civic functions and a cultural center for plays, wedding receptions and other events.

"Basically, it was to serve as a community center, but for probably seven or eight years, it just sat there and nothing was done with it. About four years ago, there was some interest in restoring it and we started getting things done.

"I'm encouraged that something will be done with it, but I am disappointed that it's going to be closed.

"I hope the building stays on the city's priority list."

Perkins City Manager Jack Rosson suggested the building be closed for repairs because the city was spending a lot of money on utilities. However, he's hoping the building won't be shut too long.

"A lot of structural work needs to be done," said Rosson, "more than cosmetic. It's a beautiful

building, but the city's utility cost for the building has been extremely high. The improvements will help decrease these expenses and at the same time restore the building.

"Although it's been painted and new things have been done on the inside, it still needs a lot of structural work done," he said.

"The main concern I have is that we have some beams underneath in the floor that seem to have had some kind of termite or rotting damage."

"We'll be looking for grants to do the repairs, but we're hoping to get the Historical Preservation people involved in the restoration. We'll be going to them first, because they have contractors that normally do historical buildings and they can advise us on the best approach as to the rehabilitation of the building."

"We also have a group in town who oversees the building. They are going to assist us in searching for grants and writing grant proposals, so we can get it back on line as soon as possible."

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