



Sanctuary for an

Just 20 to 30 minutes east of the Andrews campus you'll find a run-down, dilapidated wooden church in the little settlement of Pokagon in Cass County. For years the church has been used for storing hay bales—wild sumac growing from its weakened foundations, cows rubbing their noses against the church's rough wooden corners and sides.

But now a group of people is dedicated to the building's preservation and renovation. The Pokagon Methodist Episcopal Church was built in 1862, and in 1913, it was where the Reverend George Bennard first sang the hymn he penned—"The Old Rugged Cross"—at a revival meeting.

The story goes that Bennard, a writer of several hymns, wrote the opening lines—"On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross" after he was heckled by young hooligans during a revival in Albion, Mich. However, the rest of the hymn was composed in Pokagon. And it was at the Pokagon church that Bennard introduced the beloved hymn.

The church fell into disuse after 1915 when the Pokagon Methodist Episcopal congregation moved across the street to the Baptist church. After nearly a century of neglect, the church has found support—sanctuary—in The Old Rugged Cross



NARTHEX OF NEGLECT: The Old Rugged Cross Church entry once welcomed worshippers.

Andrews alumnus Melchizedek Ponniah (MA '78, PhD '86), chair of The Old Rugged Cross Foundation board, explains that "with financial support and prayer support, the church will take on a rich spiritual legacy for years to come."

Old Rugged Church

by Douglas Jones

photographs by Madeline Johnston

Foundation, a group dedicated to preserving the legacy of the beloved hymn.

Upon its restoration, The Old Rugged Cross Church will include a museum and space for weddings, funerals and other special services.

Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to The Old Rugged Cross Foundation, P. O. Box 41, Niles, MI 49120. The church is located at 60041 Vermont Street in Pokagon, Mich., just off M-51 north of Niles.