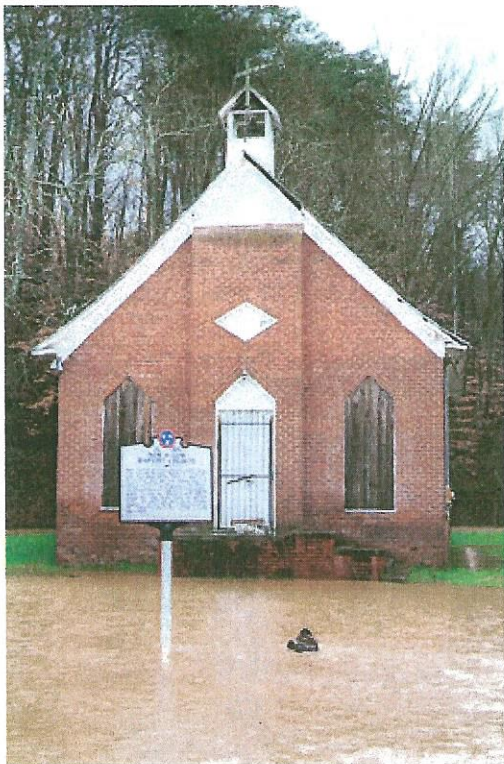


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Renovations to historic Baptist church approved

by JEFF FARRELL
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SEVIERVILLE —The county’s oldest church is past the latest hurdle in ongoing plans to restore the structure.

New Salem Baptist Church was constructed in 1886 by noted builder Isaac Dockery. The church is believed to be the county’s oldest surviving building and is the county’s only historically black church.

It’s also on a flood plain, and floodwaters this year came to the entrance. It’s on the **National Register of Historic Places**, and has been listed on the East Tennessee Preservation Association’s list of endangered historical structures and attractions.

The church, which seats 75, suffers from mold and other issues inside, although the floor is in good condition.

The Dockery Family Association has been working on restoration efforts for some time, and recently got approval from the **Sevierville Board of Flood Plain Review** — made up of members of the planning commission — to do renovations despite being on the flood plain.

“I think I have all the documentation we need, and I can recommend approval,” **Codes Enforcement Officer Butch Stott** said before the board gave the plan the affirmative vote.

Members of the Dockery Family Association were expected to attend the meeting, but didn’t make it. Still, Stott said they had worked with his office and had exhausted other possible methods for restoring the building.

Because it’s on the flood plain, they were required to look into relocating the structure before doing any major renovations, but Stott said their research showed that just wasn’t feasibly. They also looked into altering the waterway, but engineers said that also was not feasible.

The board’s approval is just the latest step. The association still must raise money for the work, and Stott said he didn’t expect to see work start there this year.

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