

Briceville building, cemetery put on National Register of Historic Places

• By [Bob Fowler](#)



PHOTO BY BOB FOWLER // [BUY THIS PHOTO](#)

With the entire student body of Briceville Elementary School listening inside the historic Briceville Church, entertainer Tony Thomas, left, weaves a tall tale during dedication ceremonies Friday.

BRICEVILLE - A tiny church on a knoll overlooking this former coal-mining community was recognized Friday for its unique role in history.

Briceville Church, built in 1888 by Welsh miners during the community's heyday as a hub of coal-mining operations, has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The church cemetery was also acknowledged with that designation. The bodies of 21 men and boys killed in two horrific coal mine explosions rest there.



PHOTO BY BOB FOWLER
[BUY THIS PHOTO »](#)

Briceville Elementary School students, above, leave Briceville Church after ceremonies to add the church and its cemetery to the National Register of Historic Places.

The farewell message of 20-year-old Eugene Ault, who slowly smothered in the Cross Mountain Mine explosion of 1911, is engraved on his headstone.

Tucked into a remote valley in the Cumberland Mountains, Briceville Church is one of Anderson County's oldest buildings.

All of the students from nearby Briceville School made the trek up the church's steep, narrow driveway to participate in Friday's ceremonies.

"I feel fortunate that every day, I view this place," said Richard Foschino, who lives nearby. "It never gets old."

The church has two steeples, and there are two entrances to its sanctuary - one for men, the other for women.

During the turbulent Coal Creek War, the house of worship became a jailhouse.

Miners captured by state militia during that 1891-92 conflict over the use of prisoners in the coal mines were confined there.

Formal church services ended in 1991 after the congregation dwindled. The building fell into disrepair. Its basement flooded. Its sanctuary was invaded by thousands of ladybugs.

"It was too valuable a resource to let it deteriorate," said Barry Thacker, president of the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation.

That nonprofit, now a decade old, is dedicated to improving the quality of life in the remote area.

A state grant and donations helped with initial restoration, and volunteers painted and helped fix up the building a few years ago, Thacker said.

While the interior has been restored and is now in good shape, work remains to be done on the exterior, Thacker said.

There are no immediate plans for continued use of the church, he said, but what's known as the "mother church of Briceville" has been preserved, he said.

Bob Fowler, News Sentinel Anderson County editor, may be reached at 865-481-3625.



© 2010, Knoxville News Sentinel Co.

[Want to use this article? Click here for options!](#)

© 2010 Knoxville News Sentinel. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

[More](#)

• [Comments](#) » 1

barryt#236812 writes:

Special thanks to Rep. Les Wittingham and John and Sandra Carpenter for participating in the dedication program. Special recognition goes to Briceville student Skylar Mozingo for presenting the winning Eisteddfod Literary Competition essay and to runners-up Noah Lamb and Sydney Campbell.