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Tim Kemper surveys some of the damaged interior, below the stained glass from 1896, at the Unitarian Universalist church in Woodstock. Kemper is the second generation in his family working to restore the church, built before the Civil War in the village in Champaign County.

Town aims to save its historic church

Volunteers raising money to remedy years of neglect in ornate pre-Civil War structure

By Dylan Scott
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

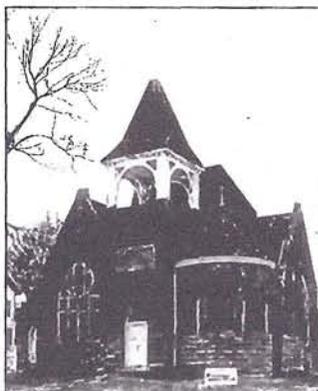
WOODSTOCK, Ohio — Tim Kemper's eyes well up and his voice gets a little softer when he talks about continuing his father's mission to save this town's old church.

The Unitarian Universalist church, a landmark in this small community steeped in Civil War history, is in ragged disrepair. Debris loosed by a leaky roof litters the floor, and wall

plaster is crumbling. But Kemper and the Woodstock community are determined to change that. "Somebody has to do it," Kemper said as light from the distinct stained-glass windows — full of Civil War imagery — hits his face. "I'm not in it for the glory."

He's not alone. Woodstock, about 40 miles northwest of Columbus in Champaign County, has 316 residents. As Kemper puts it, the church is "something we can hang our hats on." It's been a part of the community since 1844 and continues to host a small Christian congregation with less than 30 members, called Gospel Mission, which

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Despite obvious problems with the roof and interior, an engineer pronounced the Unitarian Universalist church structurally sound.

CHURCH

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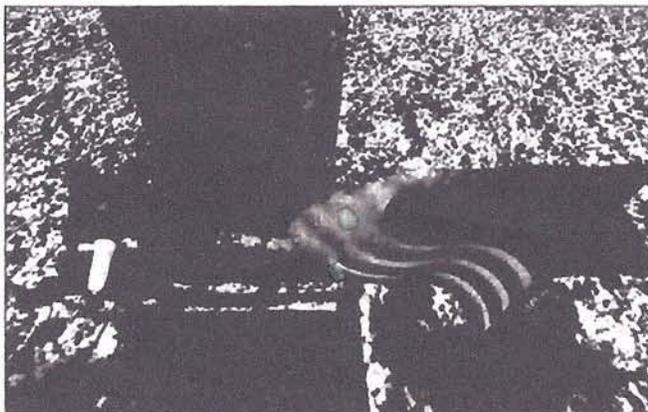
rents the smaller sanctuary in the back.

The church is a memorial to the small town's rich Civil War history.

The windows arrived in 1896 from Massachusetts. The top pane bears a seal with Union Gen. John A. Logan's image and the words *Fraternity, Charity, Loyalty*. The larger bottom section depicts two soldiers headed on the march to war.

Yesterday, the local Lions Club hosted Wayne E. Motts, noted Civil War historian and executive director of the Adams County Historical Society in Gettysburg, Pa., to get the word out about its efforts.

Motts visited the grave of a Medal of Honor winner and an 1898 memorial to the Cushman family, which had several Civil War veterans, at the Woodstock Cemetery. He toured the church and then, along with local historian Barry Dunn, told community members about their town's contribution to the war effort. Woodstock sent about 150 men to war for the Union and lost at least 29. Its Medal of



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The grave of Woodstock's Capt. Oliver P. Colwell, one of about 150 men from the town to serve in the Civil War, marks his place in history as a winner of the Medal of Honor.

Honor winner, Capt. Oliver P. Colwell, was one of only 1,500 to receive that distinction, Motts said.

Many of the Lions Club members say the church holds a special place in their hearts as well.

Kemper and the Lions Club of Woodstock are taking steps

to restore the main sanctuary. It's an effort that began in the 1970s and was spearheaded by Kemper's father, Monte. The club assumed the title of the church to prevent its demolition and transferred ownership to a board of directors, composed of Lions Club members. The next generation is now

taking up the effort.

Kemper remembers Christmas plays at the altar and was baptized there. Charlie Cushman, whose ancestors served in the Civil War, has been a part of the effort since the 1980s when he did some "Band-Aid" work on the roof. "I hope we can save her,"



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Cushman said.

Roger Fields, who runs an engineering firm in Columbus, inspected the building this fall and said the church is structurally sound. The roof is the top priority, Kemper said, and estimates about the entire project could exceed \$250,000.

But the Lions Club is determined to make it happen.

The effort will include monthly dinners, starting in January, and selling calendars and baked goods. Kemper also seems optimistic that Motts, who is from Groveport, could organize donors interested in the project.

Motts, for his part, appears enthusiastic.

"The sad thing is treasures like these are disappearing," he said. "We need to step up and take the bull by the horns."

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