

"Don't Spit in the Meeting House"

Carroll County Times Article for 16 December 2001

by Jay A. Graybeal

In recent years tobacco users have been ostracized and even forbidden to indulge their habit in many public and work places. Those who think that this is a relatively recent trend may be surprised to learn that chewing tobacco users were being criticized a century and a half ago. The following anonymous, mid-nineteenth century poem entitled, "Don't Spit in the Meeting House," was a plea to end tobacco use in churches:

"The Israelitist camps were clean  
Such were their institutions  
And why should not a meeting house  
Be guarded from pollutions  
Religion is a cleanly thing  
And decency befits it  
Spitting is a nauseous thing  
And every one admits it

Yet this vile practice here prevails  
It pains me to relate it  
And rational reflecting men  
We hope will reprobate it  
The rules of moral decency  
Our mothers inculcated  
Are here profaned and trampled on  
Too bad to be related

Pray lend a kind propitious ear  
And do not be offended  
When we propose a remedy  
To have this evil mended  
Let those who will indulge at home  
There use it unmolested  
If those around them can submit  
To be so much infested

But when they come to worship God  
Behave as is befitting  
Oh! Then refuse for conscience sake  
This is no place for spitting

But for inveterate cases when  
They cannot be obedient  
And for accommodations sake  
We have a grand expedient  
Let each procure a calabash

This from his neck suspended  
Would answer well and cleanliness  
Would be thereby befriended”

It is unclear if the plea worked, however, chewing tobacco use waned in the early twentieth century and spittoons disappeared from many public places. One notable exception was the tavern where, judging from photographs, marksmanship greatly suffered.



*A spittoon is partly visible to the right of the small pile of firewood under the second central pew in this c.1890 interior view of the Old “Pipe Creek” Methodist Protestant Church built in 1829 near Uniontown. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.*