"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

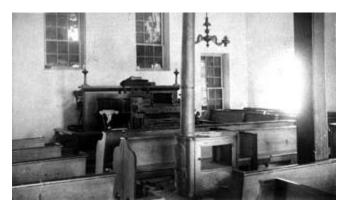
Yet this vile practice here prevails
It pains me to relate it
And rational reflecting men
We hope will reprobate it
The rules of moral decency
Our mothers inculcated
Are here profaned and trampled on
Too bad to be related

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.