

Outreach BC

McDOWELL NEWS
NATION, N. C.

Blue Ridge

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Solid As A Rock



His collection — James Freeman stands near the sign that's now home to the rocks he collected from nearly every state. The members of Outreach Baptist Church worked to build this sign from Freeman's collection. (Photo by John Coutlakakis)

Man Puts Stone Collection To Good Use At Nebo Church

By SCOTT HOLLIFIELD
Associate Editor

In 1938, James Freeman started a collection that would grow steadily over the next 50 years.

He picked up a rock.

"Everywhere I've been, I pick one up," said Freeman, 73, as he

chatted this week at his Sunny Acres Drive home in Nebo. He talked about his travels and a collection that includes almost a thousand pounds of rocks from 46 states and Canada.

"He never got any souvenirs, it was always a rock," said his wife

Nell.

The Freemans, who came to McDowell County from Virginia when James retired from his aircraft mechanic's job in 1972, are soon moving to Maryland to be closer to their daughter.

When Freeman first came to North Carolina, he brought along his rocks in the back of a pickup truck. This time, they won't be going with him.

Instead, most his collection will stay behind as part of the massive sign welcoming members and visitors to the Outreach Baptist Church off Highway 126 in Nebo. The Freemans are members of Outreach.

"I figured I was going to leave and I wanted to keep my rocks all together," he said. "This is sort of a memorial, a good place to leave them."

The church has nearly 80 members, Freeman said, and everyone was pleased with the idea. Church members donated money and time to build the sign, which is nearly eight feet tall and forms the shape of a "V."

Some of the rocks that make up the sign are from the chimney at the church, which is an historic rock building nearly a century old.

But most of the rocks — as much as 800 pounds — came from Freeman's travels, and he walked around the structure on a chilly Thursday afternoon and pointed to specific examples.

"That one came from New York," he said, rubbing a stone midway up the sign's base. "That red looking one is from New

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Florida coral — James Freeman shows one his prizes.
(Photo by John Coutlakakis)

Rocks Make Church Sign

(Continued from Page 1)

Jersey."

In Canada, Freeman had to scale a fence to get the one he wanted. At the border, the customs official didn't inquire about the rock.

"They asked about everything else, though," he said.

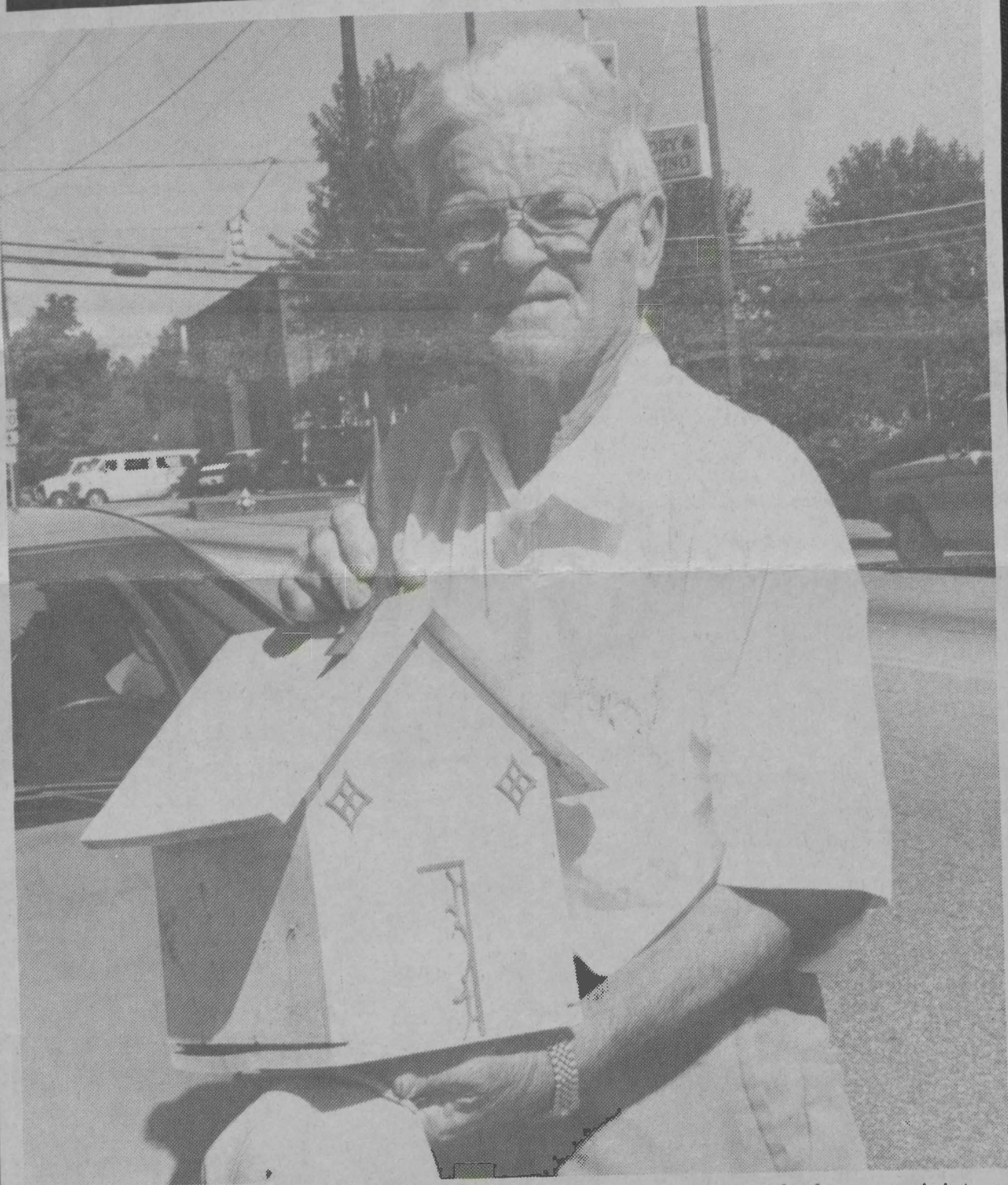
A smooth rock at the front of the sign was retrieved from White Sands, New Mexico, where the first atomic bomb was tested in 1945. Freeman said the blast gave the rock its smooth, glassy surface.

Freeman admitted he will miss his collection when he moves, but said there's no better place than his church to leave it.

He's shot quite a bit of video tape of his collection and its new home to take with him to Maryland.

"I've got almost as much film as I had rocks," he said.

It Once Was Lost



Church recovered — Daniel Abernathy of Outreach Baptist Church shows a miniature church that has been recovered after it was stolen. Story appears on page 2.

Lost Miniature Church Is Found

By ROGER WATSON
Staff Writer

The story of a missing miniature church ended with a semi-happy ending for the members of Outreach Baptist Church earlier this week.

The miniature church, which served as a bank for loose change, was stolen after the church off N.C. 226 near Lake James was broken into last week. The miniature church and the money inside were the only items taken.

That puzzled Rev. Timothy Carter.

"We had other stuff in there, but they didn't bother anything else," he

said.

Others in the church reacted with anger to the crime.

"It made me mad," Daniel Abernathy said of the theft. "It hurt everybody in the church."

Outreach Baptist offered a \$50 reward for the little white church's recovery. That led to its return early this week.

Abernathy said a man riding an all-terrain vehicle found the little church in a sandpile along U.S. 221 North. The miniature church was in relatively good shape considering its perilous adventures. The weekend's rains caused the wood to buckle a

little, but Abernathy said he believes he can fix it. It was no surprise to Abernathy that the money was not with the church.

It was Abernathy's brother Lewis who made the church six years ago. The wooden structure was originally used to gather money for the congregation's building fund.

Carter said contributions of loose change sometimes add up to \$40 a month.

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