

## Churches in the Shenandoah Valley

### New Market Seventh-Day Adventist Church 62 W Lee Hwy New Market, VA 22844



#### A Brief History

The forerunner of the New Market Seventh-day Adventist Church congregation was organized on January 13, 1877 in a Christian church in the Soliloquy community about five miles from New Market. The church building is not standing today, because it was torn down and the lumber used to construct a school building nearby which does still stand today and is used as a residence (this was the sixth Adventist church congregation organized in the former Confederate territory of the South). Foremost charter-member-families were the Zirkles, the Neffs, and the Woods. The congregation met in various inter-denominational community churches in the area until Shenandoah Valley Academy was built in 1908; then they met in their chapels until ninety-nine years later when a commodious church building was built on the campus in 1976.

The Adventist Church began in New Market as the result of Isaac Zirkle having sent Adventist tracts to his brother and his wife, John and Elizabeth Zirkle in New Market. Isaac had become a member of the Adventist church after he had attended Adventist evangelistic services near his home in Indianapolis, IN. John and Elizabeth asked Isaac to arrange for an evangelist to come to Virginia. On January 28, 1876, pastors E. B. Lane and J. O. Corliss were sent from Battle Creek, Michigan, the

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denomination's headquarters at that time. They conducted meetings in various schools, churches, warehouses, and homes. They finally obtained a tent which they pitched first in New Market then in nearby towns and counties. On January 13, 1877 after a year of persevering evangelism, they organized the first Adventist church in Virginia. Elizabeth Zirkle was the first person to be baptized as an Adventist in the state.

As the church membership grew, in 1883 they formed the Virginia Conference with A. C. Neff as president. That same year they held a Campmeeting at the Valley View Springs resort on the side of the Massanutten Mountain near New Market. G. I. Butler and I. D. Van Horn, leaders in the Adventist denomination from Battle Creek, MI spoke at this event. Over a thousand people attended on weekends. The next year, 1884, another Campmeeting was held on A. C. Neff's farm. A railroad ran by the farm and excursion trains brought interested persons from Winchester and points in between.

In 1905 as Charles Zirkle, son of John and Elizabeth Zirkle, lay dying of tuberculosis, he asked his parents to give him his inheritance, which was 42 acres of the family farm, to be used for an Adventist school. In 1908 Shenandoah Valley Academy, a boarding high school, became a reality. Since then thousands of students have gone forth from its doors to serve as workers in various capacities around the world.

Starting with one all-purpose frame building, the school has expanded into 300 acres and a campus made up of brick buildings. Included are: a girls' dormitory for 150 girls and a similar boys' dormitory, an administration building, a gymnasium and pool, a student center, a cafeteria, a 100 student elementary school, and brick utility and industrial buildings.

The church continued to meet in Academy chapels until one hundred years after evangelists Lane and Corliss arrived to preach the Adventist message. In 1976 a spacious brick church, seating 777 people was built, including a fellowship hall, Sabbath School rooms, and a pipe organ. The membership in the church has grown to 779, and the academy enrollment reached its height in the 1970's with nearly 400 students. Around forty students attend the academy from foreign countries each year to learn English, along with other academic studies. Through the years parents have come to New Market with their children who attend the academy. These parents continue to live in the community after their children graduate, and this has greatly increased the church membership.

Reminiscent of earlier years, the annual Campmeeting of the Potomac Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is held on the campus of Shenandoah Valley Academy (the Potomac Conference territory includes Virginia, the District of Columbia, and two counties in Maryland). Around 10,000 persons attend on weekends. Permanent cabins, RV hook-ups, dormitory rooms, and local motels accommodate the people coming for this five-day event. The campus buildings house the various activities throughout that time.

Written by Richard E. Harris

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*Elizabeth Zirkle*