

## Asbury Methodist Church History



Sometime in 1873 the African American residents of New Market Virginia were able to dedicate a new Methodist Church for them to worship in. Records indicate that this congregation had been founded sometime in the late 1860s, most likely by travelling African American ministers that visited the area to work with recently freed slaves and local black communities. They would have met in various public buildings reserved for African Americans, including the segregated school, before constructing their own church.

Asbury Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, as it became known, was the center of much of the town's local African American community for many years. The congregation's annual Christmas Program, held in the Rouss Opera House, was its premiere event and attracted large crowds from both the white and black population.

This program helped the church raise enough money to pay its minister for the upcoming year since the congregation was not large enough, or wealthy enough, to support itself.

Little else is known about this church. An April 15, 1954, article in the Shenandoah Valley newspaper gives one of the few descriptions of it and its

congregation. The story focused on a horse that regularly attended the church by sticking his head through the church window while in his next-door pasture. The paper mentioned “there are only 38 Negroes in New Market, counting men, women, and children” and most attended Asbury which was the only church for African Americans in town. The article also observed:

- Royal Steptoe, New Market’s barber, was the church’s trustee and Sunday School superintendent
- The Reverend W.E. Jefferson was the church’s minister. He also led services at the historically black Woodstock, Mt. Jackson, and New Market Methodist Churches.

Asbury Methodist Church would continue to hold services until 1965. By that time the congregation had become so small it was unable to remain in operation. Around March of that year it, and Calvary Methodist Church in Mt. Jackson, merged with Manor Memorial Methodist Church in New Market whose church newsletter boasted became an “all inclusive church.”

Asbury’s building was sold soon afterwards. It served as a residence and a storage structure. In the 1980s it was abandoned and it was demolished in 1992.

Taken From:

Shenandoah County Library, “Asbury Memorial Methodist Church,” *Shenandoah Stories*, accessed December 23, 2025, <https://shenandoahstories.org/items/show/297>.

**New Market Horse is Church Attendant by Bill Garrard April 29, 1954:** A horse goes to church here every Sunday, except in cold weather. The horse is well behaved, doesn’t make a noise, seems to enjoy the service and doesn’t sleep during the sermons. The church is Asbury Memorial Methodist Church in New Market. It is a white clapboard structure with a belfry, 75 years old, on Cadet Road. It seated 100 people.

The horse’s owner, William Roadcap, moved the horse in the winter so he could not attend church, but as soon as the weather was warm Felix returned to his window view of the church and the folks inside.

## **Calvary Methodist Church History**

Sometime after the Civil War Mt. Jackson's African American population banded together to form a Methodist Church. During the period local churches were segregated by race and the town's African Americans needed a church to meet their spiritual needs.

By 1870 this congregation had constructed a church building on Race Street. They performed baptisms in nearby Mill Creek and supported the local African American School (located on Orkney Drive).

Around 1885 the congregation seems to have relocated to a new site beside the African American School. However, in 1889 the church seems to have faced financial trouble and was involved in a chancery case over an unpaid mortgage. While it is uncertain how the case was resolved, the church remained open.

The name of this church seems to have evolved. In a 1930 Sanborn map, the church is identified as "Mt. Zion M.E. Church (Colored)." Later articles refer to it as Calvary Methodist Church.

After the Second World War the congregation dwindled as the African American population of Mt. Jackson declined. In 1965 the congregation made the decision to merge with Manor Memorial Methodist Church in New Market and to close their church after failed attempts to merge with the Mt. Jackson Methodist Church. The building would be demolished sometime in the 1970s or 1980s.

Taken From:

"Mt. Jackson "Colored" Church," *Shenandoah Stories*, accessed December 23, 2025, <https://shenandoahstories.org/items/show/302>.