

Longs Chapel History **Harrisonburg, Virginia**

In the heart of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley lies a single remnant of Zenda, a settlement formed after the Civil War by newly freed slaves. When Rockingham County reclaimed the property from a former plantation owner in a postwar legal action, they decided to sell it to the freedmen. Thus Zenda, also known as 'Little Africa,' was born.

On September 23, 1869, the United Brethren Church helped these newly freed slaves purchase an additional half-acre lot for thirty dollars to establish a church of their own. The United Brethren Church also hired a contractor, Jacob Long, to build the church. Many believe Mr. Long donated the funds for the church construction, with additional labor provided by the freedmen. Built between 1870 and 1871, the original structure still stands along with the cemetery where some of the community's founding residents lay at rest.

The church served not only as the spiritual center of the community, but as the educational center as well. Since the county did not provide for the education of black students, this facility was the first school for the community residents. It was also the first teaching assignment for trailblazing educator Lucy F. Simms, who was born a slave in Harrisonburg and used her new freedom to pursue an education at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (now Hampton University). A classmate of Booker T. Washington, she returned to the Shenandoah Valley, and after spending the next two years teaching weekdays at Longs Chapel, she spent the next 56 years teaching in Harrisonburg.

Longs Chapel stands today as a reminder of the transition of African slaves to American citizens. Its congregants made the journey from owned-property to property owners. Their struggle to establish their new-found freedom paved the way for the great successes that African-Americans have the opportunity to achieve today. Through the establishment of the Longs Chapel Preservation Society, we will restore and preserve the church so descendants of slaves and slave owners can visit and honor the legacy of faith and memorialized at Longs Chapel at Zenda.

Source: Longs Chapel Preservation Society, Harrisonburg, VA
<http://www.preservelongschapel.org/>