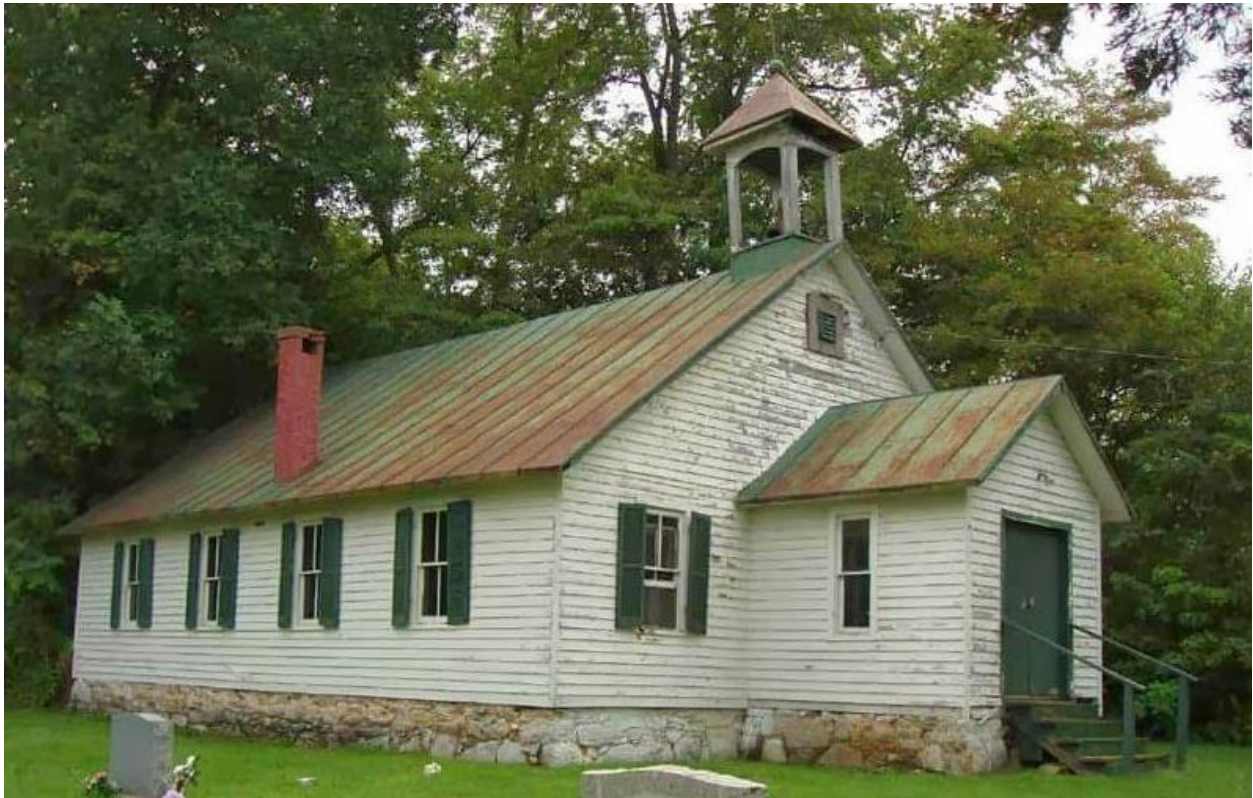


**Landmark Nomination Report**  
**Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission**

**Mount Zion Freewill Baptist Church/Johnstown Church**

20 Johnstown Road  
Kearneysville, WV 25430



**Physical Description**

Mount Zion Freewill Baptist Church, also known as Johnstown Church, is located about one-half mile north of Wiltshire Road on the west side of Johnstown Road where that road connects with Hite Road. The building is single story with gable roof and gable orientation. An open-sided pyramidal roof belfry rests above the façade. The building is sided with white-painted

clapboard. It has a three-bay façade and four-bay sides. See architectural description for more detail.<sup>1</sup>

### **Historic Description**

By the Reverend Jerry Myers Johnson

According to the Deed dated June 24, 1892, trustees Lewis Summons, James Johnson, and William Brown of the Mount Zion Free Will Baptist Church of Johnstown purchased a lot of ground from the Coyle family for one dollar.

James Johnson was the son of George Johnson and Betsy McCord Johnson, husband and wife and free African Americans who founded the first community of free Africans in what became West Virginia. George Johnson was born in 1822 on New Hopewell Farm that was owned by Thomas Hite and his son James Hite. The Hites owned the farm from 1774. In the slave census of Jefferson County for 1850, James Hite owned 40 slaves on Hopewell Farm. Hopewell is the codename used by the Society of Friends, or Quakers.

The Quakers held worship services in various meeting houses. In these meeting houses Friends kept records as recorded in *A History of Hopewell Friends, 1734 to 1934*. Hopewell Friends established meeting houses in Jefferson County as early as 1734. In 1865 a New England Free Will Baptist Home Mission established Storer College in Harpers Ferry. This they called their Schoolhouse Evangelism of 1865.

The deed for Mount Zion Free Will Baptist Church states the name “Johnsontown” derives from Quaker meeting houses on Johnstown on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Here records state that Quaker George Johnson purchased land in Johnstown on September 5, 1663, and October 20, 1664.

Johnson’s lot was the first “land of freedom,” and members of Johnstown today (2018) believe they are descendants of Anthony and Mary Johnson. The Johnsons, husband and wife, came from London, England as part of the Jamestown settlement in 1622. According to Quaker records of the Friends Meeting in Maryland, Anthony and Mary Johnson became Quakers and held House Meetings at Johnstown.

The Mount Zion Free Will Baptist Church of Johnstown, then, was built and completed in 1898 on the lot purchased in 1892 by church members of Johnstown whose Quaker history dates to 1661 from Johnstown on the Eastern Shore of Free African Communities of Maryland. The Quakers of 1734 and Free Will Baptist Church missionaries of the 1867 Schoolhouse Evangelical movement spurred interest in a free school system and educational reform. Their

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Taylor, West Virginia Property Inventory Form, Site Survey 2005-2006, survey no. 308 (WV designation JF-0725), 2006.

actions inspired the services of the Reverend Jerry Myers Johnson I who became first pastor of Mount Zion Free Will Baptist Church. With his brother James Johnson, one of the church trustees, Reverend Johnson completed his education in 1883 and graduated from Storer Normal School. He guided the church as part of the Brackett-Morrell Baptist Association that consisted of nineteen Christian Living Communities (CLC) in Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland.

He started the first Homecoming ritual in Johnstown when he obtained a license from the State of West Virginia to establish a church cemetery. The Reverend Johnson went to New Hopewell Farm and exhumed the caskets of his father, George Johnson, his mother, Betsy Johnson, and aunts, uncles, relatives, and friends. These remains the Johnsons and their church reinterred these remains in the Johnstown cemetery. Various families of the community – some connected to the Storer College Community Club – purchased other sites in the cemetery.

Families of Ropers, Browns, Taylors, Davenports, Smith, Fox, Berry, Stevensons, and many others were connected to the Schoolhouse Evangelical movement. The Reverend Jerry Myers Johnson II, son of the first pastor, continued his father's vision. Like his father, he graduated from Storer College where he attended from 1928 to 1931. Pastor Johnson II first became minister of St. John's Free Will Baptist Church in Shepherdstown. In 1933 Pastor Johnson moved his family to Newark, New Jersey where Quaker house meetings recorded sessions as early as 1729. The Reverend Johnson II founded the Shenandoah Camp Vacation Club that included Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Their headquarters was Mount Zion Free Will Baptist Church in the Johnstown community. The Club operated between 1946 and 1960.

By 1994 the Reverend Jerry Myers Johnson III, trustee of Mount Zion Free Will Baptist Church, had carried the Schoolhouse Evangelical mission for 35 years in the New Jersey Public Schools. The Reverend Johnson III introduced the Community Learning Center program to the New Jersey Educational Association to fulfill the educational reform movement originating from the Mount Zion Free Will Baptist Church rooted in the Quaker and Free Will Baptist Christian Living Church – CLC mission.

**Architectural information:**

Gable-front church 30' wide x 56' long  
Sited facing Johnstown Road  
Date stone "1898" set at northeast front corner  
Wood structure, lapped siding, painted white  
Uncoursed stone foundation

Standing seam metal roof on sanctuary, vestibule, and belfry  
Brick chimney extends midway through roof on the south wall

3-bay front east gable

4-bay sides, south and north facades  
No openings on west wall

2/2 sash windows with shutters on north and south walls  
2/2 sash windows with shutters on east wall flanking vestibule  
1/1 sash windows on north and south walls of vestibule

Main entrance: wooden double door  
Wooden stair with railing leading up to the main entrance

**Nomination Criteria:**

The JCHLC nominates this property under Criterion A for inclusion on the list of registered county landmarks. Criterion A states that a site may be nominated if, in the opinion of the JCHLC, it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The Johnstown Church has agreed to have the property listed as a Jefferson County Historic Landmark.

**Nomination Action:**

The JCHLC voted unanimously to add **Johnstown Church**, under Criteria A, to the rolls of registered Jefferson County Historic Landmarks on March 14, 2018.