

Landmark Nomination Report Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission

Bethesda United Methodist Church

22 Knott Rd.
Shepherdstown, WV 25443

Physical Description:

Bethesda United Methodist Church is located at Moler's Crossroads, at the corner of Knott and Bakerton Road, about 3.5 miles southeast of downtown Shepherdstown in a rural setting. The church is a front-gabled structure with a centered vestibule and steeple; it is covered in pebbledash stucco, painted a bright white. (See Architectural Information below.)

Historic Description:

The Bethesda United Methodist Church was built in 1874 when Lee Henry Moler granted 64 square perches of his Linden Spring estate to the friends and members of the Methodist Episcopal Church South (Jefferson County Deed Book C/382). The congregation had previously been participants in interdenominational meetings at the nearby Reinhart schoolhouse, which began in 1851 and included adherents of the Lutheran, Reform, and Episcopal Churches. There were eleven meeting places listed in the "Shepherdstown Circuit," two of which were for colored slaves, with the Reinhart schoolhouse listed as number seven with leader Michael Nichols. Tensions arose in the neighborhood when the Methodist members separated from the group to build their church, leading to the eventual breakup of the Reinhart school meetings as members joined their respective congregations in Shepherdstown and Uvilla (Unionville). The first pastor, Reverend A. A. P. Neal, christened the church "Bethesda Methodist Episcopal Church South" after the Pool of Bethesda where Christ healed a lame man. The church was dedicated on December 20, 1874 by Reverend G. T. Tyler. The Methodist Episcopal Church South merged with the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant Churches in 1939 to form the Methodist Church, which then merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968 to form the present United Methodist Church. Bethesda has been in the continual use of the Methodist Church since 1874.

When younger members of the church felt that improvements were needed, they decided to retain the original wood structure, which was expanded and updated in 1916. The church was raised several feet and a basement dug below, paid for with funds left in the will of George M. Knott. The original windows became the basement windows and stained glass was added above, as well as a vestibule, steeple, and apse. The exterior was covered in pebbledash stucco. The renovations cost \$4,000 and were paid in full at the time of the rededication. The church has looked much the same since, with the addition of restrooms on one side in 1969 and a handicap ramp and restroom on the other between 2007 and 2008.

The church has been continuously maintained through the care and generosity of its members and has been chosen by both the National Geographic and History Channels to be featured in

historic pieces as representative of a traditional rural church in its rural setting, with panoramic views of mountains and fields.

Architectural information:

Gable-front church 30' wide x 56' long
Sited parallel to crossroads, facing Bakerton Road
Date stone "1874" set at a front corner
Wood structure overlaid with pebbledash stucco, painted white
Concrete foundation with water table and parget, painted white

Grey asphalt shingle roof
Decorative slate roof on steeple with metal flashing and finial
Interior brick chimney to the rear on the southeast side with corbelled top
Decorative brackets on the cornice and returns
Cornice continues into belt course around the vestibule and steeple

3-bay front northeast gable
3-bay sides
2-bay rear southwest gable

Stained glass windows with round tops and geometric pattern with protective panels
Stained glass fanlight above the main entrance
Modern fixed frame round top vinyl windows with grids in basement
Round window in rear gable
Additional stained glass window centered high on the steeple

Main entrance: double door purchased in 2001
Two doors on northwest side – one from handicap ramp and one at ground level
Bricked stair leading up to the main door

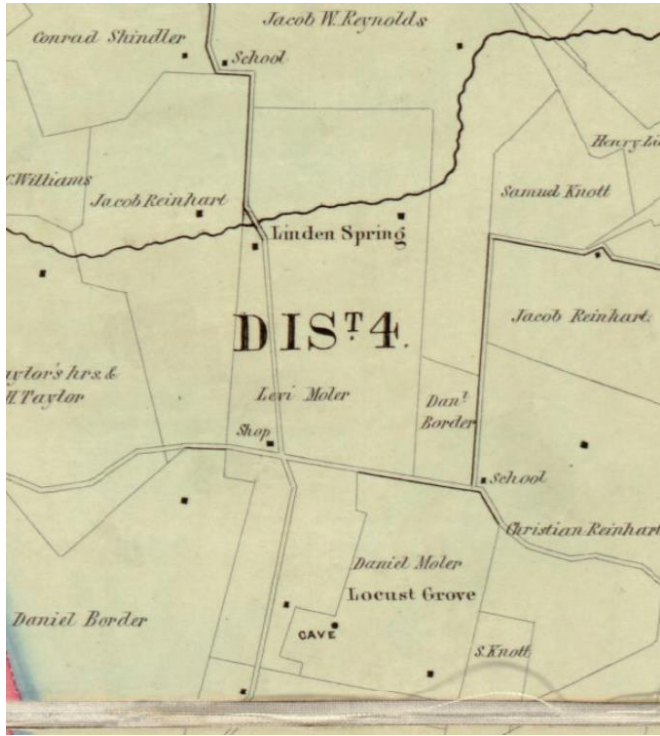
Addition on southeast side to accommodate 2 restrooms, exterior entrance, stuccoed to match the church
Handicap ramp on opposite side with white wood railing

Nomination Criteria:

The JCHLC nominates this property under Criteria A for inclusion on the list of registered county landmarks. Criteria 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.

Nomination Action:

The JCHLC voted unanimously to add **Bethesda United Methodist Church**, under Criteria A, to the rolls of registered Jefferson County Historic Landmarks on August 17, 2016



1852 map showing the Linden Spring estate and the school on Christian Reinhart's property



1883 map showing the Linden Spring estate with the Bethesda church present