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Religious Diversity on The Road to Damascus

By Patricia Abelard Andersen¹

New Hampshire Avenue, in various newspaper articles discussing the confluence of churches along its route, has variously been called "Religious Row." "Highway to Heaven" and "the Road to Damascus" – speaking of Paul's Christian journey, as well as the fact that New Hampshire Avenue slips into Rte. 108, the Damascus Road, at Etchison's Corner. It has long been noted as an interesting road to drive, because of the numerous, diverse religious buildings along the route.²

Religious diversity was not always the case in Maryland, so the oldest churches are those



of mainline denominations. Not surprisingly, among these is the Episcopal (Anglican) Church, which was the established church in Maryland in 1692, and the Parish that covered the whole of Western Maryland, Rock Creek Parish, was established that year. It is now in the District of Columbia, where the Glebe, the old Rock Creek Cemetery, borders on New Hampshire Avenue! From this church, other parishes were established in Montgomery County as the population increased.

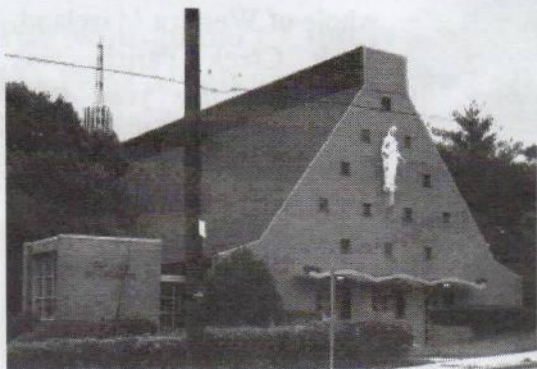
Pictured above is St.Luke's Episcopal Church, Brighton.

Other Episcopal Churches on New Hampshire Avenue include the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration, 13925 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring. Established in 1959, it was a mission of Rock Creek Parish, D.C. Early on it was welcoming to its African American community, and active in the Civil Rights movement. In 1968 it achieved parish status, and built its first community building. This parish, with over a 50% minority population, including West Indians, Africans and more recently Hispanics, practices a multi-cultural ministry.³

A much older Episcopal Parish is St. Luke's Episcopal Church, at the corner of New Hampshire and Brighton Dam Rd., in Brighton. Their first "chapel of ease," was built in 1761, where their present parish hall stands. The chapel was destroyed a few years later by a severe storm. Not until 1812 was a new church built, some miles from the site of the original chapel, on the Hawlings River. The present church building was built by and for the immediate community in 1870, and has long served the descendants of the original congregation. Originally it shared a rector with St. John's, Olney and St. Bartholomew's, Laytonsville. It was recognized by the diocese as a separate church in 1912. Like many older community churches, it has an attached graveyard – although it is not presently used for burials and contains only ten graves.⁴

Even though the Episcopal church was the established church, the people of Maryland were not of one religion. Other religious groups that had significant representation were the Roman Catholics, who worshiped most often in homes of members in Montgomery County, notably at the Carroll family's estate in Forest Glen, which eventually gave rise to St. John's. It was not until after the American Revolution that Catholic Churches were constructed as separate buildings. The Quakers, were also present in the 17th century, and they established one of the earliest meeting houses in Sandy Spring, prior to the American Revolution.⁵ There were also Presbyterians, whose leading families, the Bealls, the Offutts and the Magruders, often donated real estate for the establishment of churches.

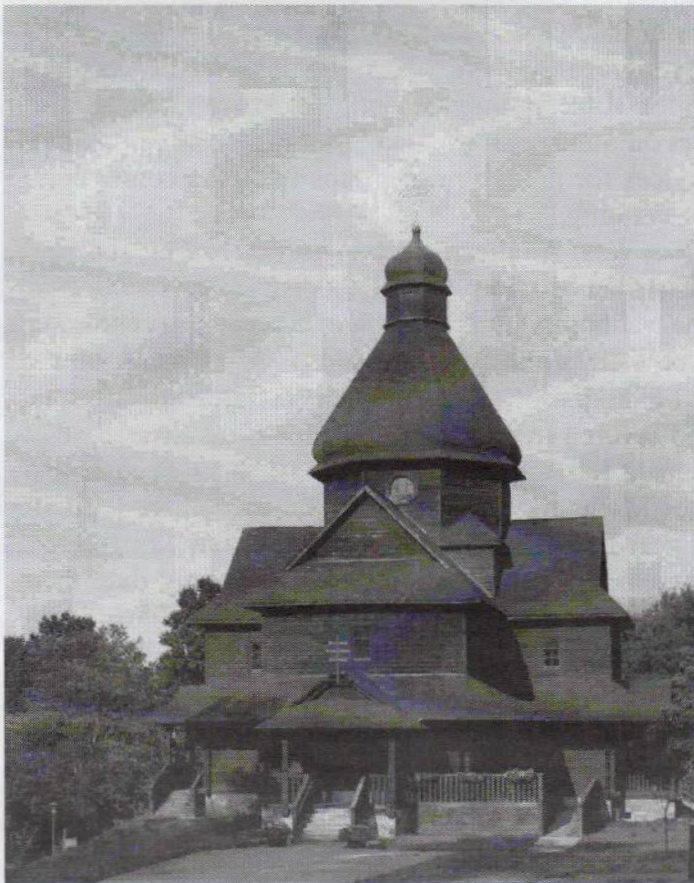
Catholic Churches on New Hampshire Avenue include Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in Takoma Park at the corner of Larch Ave.; St. John the Baptist, 12319 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, and at the other end of the road, the appropriately named St. Paul's Roman Catholic Parish in Damascus, which has recently completed a large second church building to accommodate its growth.



Our Lady of Sorrows, above.
St. Paul's, Damascus, right.



One of the most unusual of the Catholic parishes serves an ethnic population: Our Lady of Vietnam Roman Catholic Church, at 11814 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring. It features a blend of Vietnamese architectural details in the church built in 1993, including a red roof in a pagoda style, a bronze bell, and a Roman cross. This community formed in the area after 1975 when Catholics, who made up less than 10% of the population in Vietnam, an overwhelmingly Buddhist Country, fled communism. Over 300 refugees wound up in the greater Washington area and formed a Congregation, eventually growing to the point of being able to build a church.⁶



Also Catholic, but Byzantine rite, reflecting the heritage of another group of 20th century immigrants is the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church, 16631 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring. This church is built entirely of dark hemlock logs held together with wood pegs. Characteristic of the "hutsul" style of the Carpathian mountain region, it has an octagonal center dome that rises about 80 feet. They are not to be confused with an Orthodox Ukrainian Congregation, both of which built on New Hampshire Avenue in the 1980s.

The Orthodox are represented by St. Andrew Cathedral, Ukrainian Orthodox Church, at 15100 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring. Its golden spires and onion shaped domes, present an interesting contrast to the dark woods of Holy Trinity. Both of these Ukrainian Churches sponsor Easter Bazaars featuring Ukrainian traditional foods – a week apart, as they celebrate their respective Easters in ways meaningful to their cultures of immigrant origin.



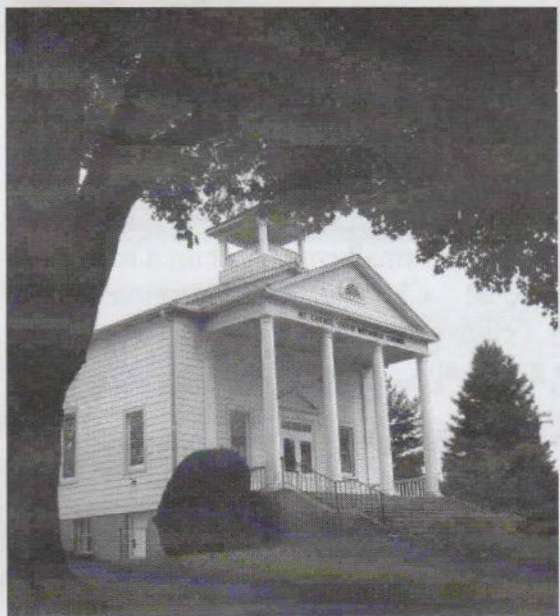
Another early religious force in America was the Presbyterian Church. The Beall family, the Offutt family and other Scots-Americans gave land for the early development of these congregations. They founded parishes in Upper Marlboro, Georgetown, Bethesda and Potomac. Unfortunately, they did not found an early parish on what became the New Hampshire Avenue corridor. The earliest Presbyterian church there, appears to be Colesville Presbyterian Church, 12800 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring. Their building bears a founding date of 1960. This church is also host to the “Ewe Church of America,” a multi-national congregation which worships in Ewe, English and French. The members of the Ewe congregation come primarily from the African countries of Cameroon, Ghana, Togo and Benin, and meet on Sunday afternoons. With space at a premium, many main line congregations, now host services for multi-ethnic groups from the community, so several congregations may meet in any one building.

At the time of the American Revolution, most Anglican clergy returned to England, and taking their place were members of a home-grown religion: the Methodists, who found their foothold in America in Maryland in 1766. The Methodist Episcopal Church became an attractive alternative to many Episcopalians because of their similar backgrounds. After many of the Anglican priests returned to England, the Methodists had ready-made congregations. The Methodists at that time ran large revivals, and favored freeing slaves. From 1789 through 1879 (and probably longer), they were the predominant religion in the county, and many chapels and churches were established by them. While the Methodist Church had been split on the issue of slavery since 1844, it wasn't until 1866, the year following the close of the Civil War, that the division officially took place. Several of the earliest congregations, therefore, only date their formation to the split in 1866.⁷

During the 1860s, the Baltimore conference firmed up their control of most of their property with a series of deeds recorded in Montgomery County Land Records. One of these was for the church in Colesville:

“William Reed and others [Edward Reed, James M. Holland, Melotha Trail, Ignatius Waters Jr., Florada Howard and Lyttleton Maclin, trustees] recorded 15 April 1862 from Lydia B. Holland, Elizabeth J. Holland, Stephen L. Holland, James M. Holland, Amos T. Holland, Anna L. Holland, Martha A. Holland and Virginia L. Holland, Virginia L. Holland, deed for a lot on public road from Mechanicsville to Colesville, for one acre for use of the ministers of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁸

The 1879 Atlas of Montgomery County shows several churches already planted near the thoroughfare by one of the old names of the road, the Ashton Colesville Turnpike. Mt. Pisgah Methodist Episcopal Church, an “old Church”, and Andrews M.E. Church were present. The Colesville United Methodist Church, which traces it’s origin to the M.E. Church, South, in 1866, and dedicated Andrew Chapel in 1869, has since moved to a Randolph Road address, but their first parsonage (1904) and a small building at the corner of New Hampshire and Randolph in 1898, for use by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), was under their ownership. When their newest church building was erected in 1958, a name more appropriate to the area was chosen, in favor of the old St. Andrew’s.⁹



Continuing up New Hampshire Avenue, to the intersection with Rte 197, Georgia Ave., we have the small town of Sunshine, with Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church. Their church family began at the Mt. Carmel Methodist Episcopal Church in Triadelphia, not far from the present location. Begun in 1809, the town of Triadelphia eventually became a bustling community of 300 to 400 souls, boasting among other things, a busy cotton mill, grist mill, stone quarry, saw mill, bank, homes, stables and the Methodist Episcopal Church. Sadly, the little town is now lost under the waters of Triadelphia Lake, at Brighton Dam. But in the fall of 1858, the Mt. Carmel Methodist Protestant Church was built just north of Sunshine on property where Mount Carmel Cemetery is now located (Mount Carmel Cemetery Road). In 1928, the church was relocated to its present site at the corner of New Hampshire and

Georgia Avenues.¹⁰ Continuing up this road to Damascus (now route 108), the road ends, fittingly at Damascus M.E. Church. A church history claims an 1822 date of organization for this early Methodist congregation.¹¹

Later Methodist Churches in the county include Good Shepherd United Methodist, at 9701 New Hampshire Ave, Silver Spring, whose building was consecrated in 1963 under Rev. Herbert L.D. Doggett who was their founding pastor in 1956¹². In the City of Takoma Park is one of the older churches, Grace Methodist, at 7001 New Hampshire Avenue. Pictured here is

their new building, in front of their old church, and a picture of their old building which is now home to First India United Methodist Church, also at 7001 New Hampshire Ave., serving the Indian population in Montgomery County. The old Grace Methodist Church building is connected to their new building by a brick walkway.



Another well maintained older church facility is Mount Lebanon Church and Cemetery, in Laytonsville where Jarl Drive intersects with New Hampshire Avenue. This church was built in 1902 to house a Methodist Congregation, but when the local founding families, the trustees of the church, refused to deed

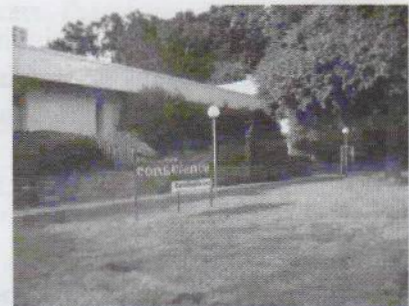


the property over to the Methodist Conference, the conference stopped supplying the church with ministers.¹³ Today the families who hold ownership rent the small country church to a non-denominational Christian congregation: Mt. Lebanon Fellowship, pictured at left from the church's graveyard.

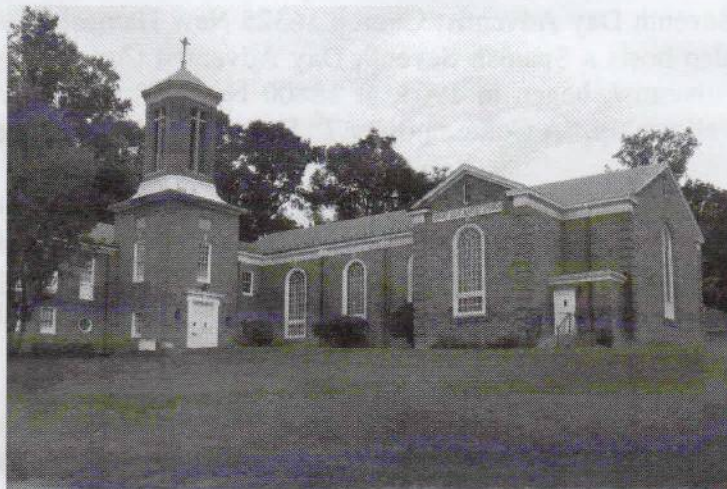
Lutheran Church, founded in 1954, which also rents space to Segorah Congregation, a Korean language church, as well as to Thornton Friends Middle School during the week.

After World War II the population in Montgomery County boomed and many new churches, ethnic groups and others found church homes on New Hampshire Avenue in the 1950s and 1960s. Among them are St. Stephen's

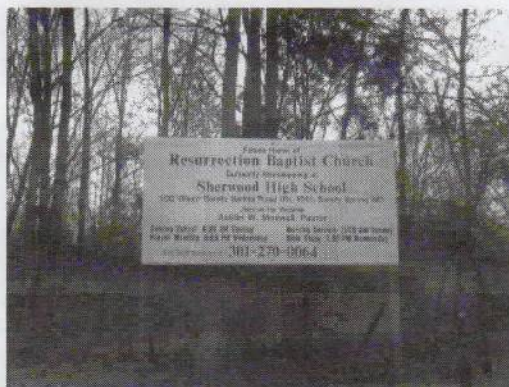
The Jewish population in Montgomery County also increased, and the first synagogues came to the county in the 1950s; among them Shaare Tefillah Synagogue, a conservative congregation. Shaare Tefillah is just off New Hampshire Avenue on Lockwood Drive. Pictured at right.



Baptist Churches are also represented: from Takoma Park, Bright Light Baptist Church at 7300 New Hampshire Ave; and Ashton Baptist Church 17826 New Hampshire Ave, in Ashton to the almost new Tri County Baptist Church, in Damascus. The Tri-County Church was built in 2001 with seating capacity of 300 and expansion capability for 625 members.¹⁴



Bright Light Baptist at right.



Churches are continuing to build and develop on New Hampshire Avenue, there is a sign at the corner of Ednor Avenue and New Hampshire, for the future home of Resurrection Baptist Church, currently worshipping at Sherwood High School. At least one other church that wanted to move to New Hampshire Avenue, Derwood Bible Church, eyed a site where Griffith Road comes into Rte 108, in the Laytonsville area, but was refused building permits over a conflict with development of what is now agricultural reserve lands, because of the persistence of a local advocacy group.

New Hampshire Avenue comes out of the District of Columbia, into Maryland, on the east side of Takoma Park – now the boundary with Prince George's County, after Takoma Park, in Prince George's County was joined to its other half in Montgomery County. Takoma Park is noted as the headquarters of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in North America. The Seventh Day Adventist church is an American denomination, which grew out of the Millerite movement of the 1840s. Their church was founded in 1863 and grew rapidly, developing publishing houses aimed at utilizing the print medium to spread the Gospel. They are most noted for worshipping on the 7th day, Saturday, which they believe is the biblical Sabbath.



Grace Fellowship, Damascus - pictured above.

There are several Seventh Day Adventist Churches on New Hampshire Avenue: Spencerville Seventh Day Adventist Church 16325 New Hampshire Avenue Silver Spring, Maryland, which also hosts a Spanish Seventh Day Adventist Congregation; Emmanuel-Brinklow Seventh Day Adventist, began in 1963, at 18800 New Hampshire Ave, Ashton, MD and Damascus Grace Fellowship, "A Contemporary 7th Day Adventist Congregation"

Besides the Seventh Day Adventist Church, America also spawned many Christian Churches, the Disciples of Christ founded in the early 1800s is represented by Heritage Christian Church, 15250 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, and representing our international community, the Chinese Christian Church of Maryland: 12604 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, MD.

Other Christian Churches, perhaps with lesser ties to national bodies, include the large and growing Immanuel's Church, founded in 1982, and built at present site in 1989 at about 20,000 sq.ft., then expanded in 1996 to over 120,000 sq.ft. at 16819 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring. Next to Immanuel's is a small Prayer Stop, that many a curious



driver drops in at to check out, where literature on prayers, social issues and Immanuel is available to the curious.

Immanuel's Church right..



Immediately to the north of Immanuel's is Kingdom Hall Jehovah's Witnesses, 16825 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring.

Pictured at left.

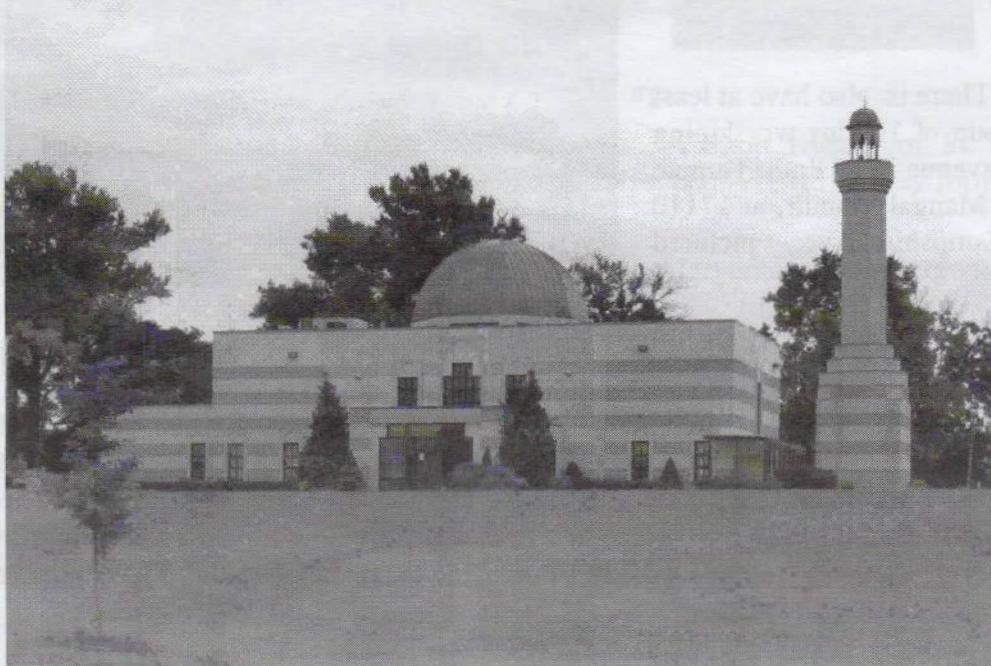
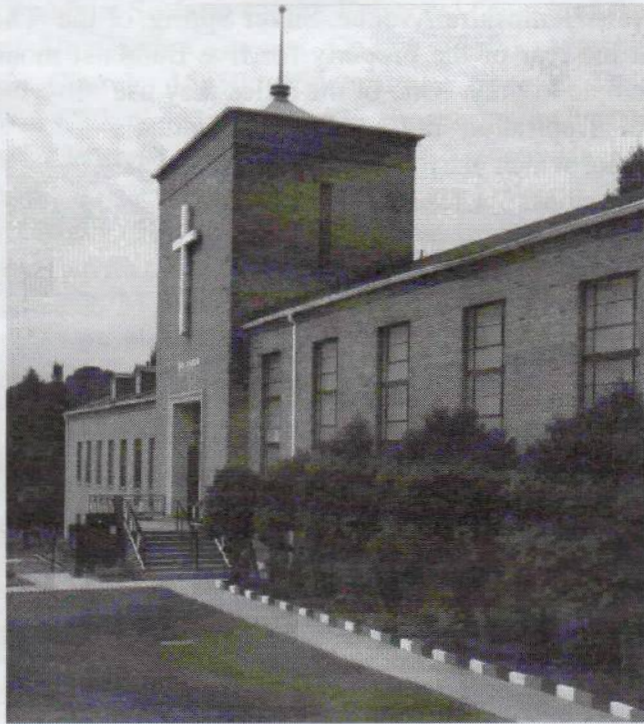


Takoma Park is home to the oldest Lutheran Church in Montgomery County, Zion Lutheran, founded in 1869, now at 7410 New Hampshire Avenue, Takoma Park. Their building also hosts the Spanish-speaking Seventh Day Adventist Congregation in Takoma Park, who use the church building for services at 10 a.m. Saturday mornings.

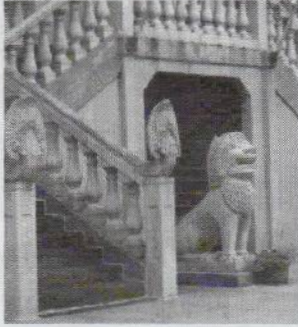
Zion Lutheran Church at right.

In addition to traditional Christian faiths, and fundamentalist churches, there is also the first Unitarian-Universalist Church in America. Silver Spring Unitarian-Universalist Church, 10309 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, was founded in 1952, as the last Universalist extension effort in the U.S. and was the first church to include both Unitarian and Universalist in its name.

The third major religion, claiming Abraham as their father, is the Muslim Faith, and they are represented by an impressive Muslim Community Center, next door to St. Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral. The faithful gather here for prayers as well as for social services, medical exams and other needs provided to members of their community.



Further south on New Hampshire Avenue is the Cambodian Buddhist Society, 13800 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, of the Theravada Tradition. They have their residence at the rear of the property for five Buddhist monks, garbed in orange robes who go into their temple to pray. One of the relics they use for inspiration in worship is Buddha's bone, which they will display on special occasions.¹⁴ Closeup – door below



Closeup – Roof Corner



There is also have at least one group of Hindus worshiping on the avenue in a Hindu Temple to Shri Mangal Mandir, at 17110 New Hampshire Ave., pictured left.



Driving up New Hampshire Avenue, from Takoma Park, the churches mentioned above, in order as they appear, on New Hampshire Avenue, are: Grace Methodist Church, 7001; First India United Methodist Church, 7001; Our Lady of Sorrows Roman Catholic; Bright Light Baptist Church 7300; Zion Lutheran Church & Spanish Seventh Day Adventist Church 7410 – all Takoma Park; then: Good Shepherd United Methodist Church 9701; Silver Spring Unitarian-Universalist Church, 10309; St. Stephen's Lutheran Church & Segorah Christian Church, 11612; Our Lady of Vietnam Roman Catholic Church 11814; Shaare Tefillah Synagogue (at Lockwood

Ave.); St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church 12319; Colesville Presbyterian Church & Ewe Church of America at 12800; Cambodian Buddhist Society, 13800; Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration 13925; St. Andrew Cathedral Ukrainian Orthodox Church 15100; Muslim Community Center 15200; Heritage Christian Church, 15250; Spencerville Seventh Day Adventist Church 16325; Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church, 16631; Immanuel's Church (and Prayer Stop) 16819; Kingdom Hall Jehovah's Witness Church, 16825; Shri Mangal Mandir Temple 17110; First Baptist Church of Ashton, 17826; Emmanuel Brinklow Seventh Day Adventist Church, 18800; St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Brighton; Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church, Sunshine; Mt. Lebanon Fellowship, Laytonsville; and in Damascus: Tri County Baptist Church, Grace Fellowship Church and the Damascus Methodist Episcopal Church. There are probably another 20 congregations with addresses on New Hampshire Avenue, that time and space did not permit us to research for this article.

Notes

1. Patricia Andersen is the librarian at the Montgomery County Historical Society. Ellie Hagner assisted with research for this article by identifying churches on New Hampshire Ave and their web sites. Jane Sween and Rob Jenson read the first draft and offered helpful suggestions. All of the photographs used in this article were taken by the author with a digital camera and modified to black & white using Photoshop Elements. It is the intention of the library to collect more information and photographs of these congregations for our vertical file research collection, and notes, comments about our articles, and/or congregation histories are always welcome in the library.
2. "From Buddhists to Baptists, faiths abound for the multitudes," *Montgomery Journal*, December 27, 1991; Susan Levine, "A Place for Those Who Pray, Along Montgomery's 'Highway to Heaven,' Diverse Acts of Faith," *the Washington Post*, August 3, 1997; Matt Hamblen, "Religious row, Ave. Holds variety of the world's religions," *Journal*, August 18, 1987; Various newspaper article in the vertical files, at the Montgomery County Historical Society Library, hereafter MCHS.
3. Web site for Church of the Transfiguration: www.transfig.org
4. Willson, Deborah Iddings and Elizabeth Iddings Cook, "A Short History of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Brighton, MD," n.p., ca. 1970; Eileen McGuckian, ACHS Survey form, Sept. 1978, in vertical files at MCHS library.
5. See Patricia A. Andersen, "Quaker Witness in Sandy Spring, Maryland," *The Montgomery County Story*, Vol. 48, No. 1, February 2005.
6. Phuong Ly, "Our Lady of Vietnam, A Miracle" *The Washington Post*, October 19, 2000, news clipping file, MCHS.
7. Joan Eames, "Church dates back to before founding of community," *Gazette*, June 5, 1985, and also J. Pinoake Browning, "Colesville Methodist Church Sets Active Centennial Celebration," *Sentinel*, October 13, 1966.
8. Patricia A. Andersen, *Land Record Miscellany Abstracted from Montgomery County Courthouse Land Records Relating to Slavery, Other Forms of Servitude, Bastardy, Marriage*

Contracts, Unusual Agreements, Bankruptcy and Institutions, non-published manuscript, last updated July 2006. Abstract taken from deed recorded in liber JGH8, folios 591-592.

9. "Bishop to Lead Rites at Colesville Church," Washington Star, Oct. 15, 1966, includes picture of Andrew Chapel in 1938; J. Pinoake Browning, "Colesville Methodist Church Sets Active Centennial Celebration," Sentinel, Oct. 13, 1966, 13, other clippings in vertical files, MCHS.

10. "100th Anniversary Mount Carmel Methodist Church, Sunshine, Maryland, 1858-1958," booklet in vertical files, MCHS. "Old Sentinel Story Aids Church History," from the Sentinel, August 7, 1958. "Rev. Shropshire named to lead Mt. Carmel-Sunshine Church," Sept. 3, 1980, the Courier. Clippings file, MCHS.

11. Janie W. Payne, "History of Damascus United Methodist Church, 1822-1972", n.p, n.d., booklet in vertical files, MCHS

12. "Good Shepherd United Methodist Church," Anniversary bulletin in vertical files, MCHS.

13. WPA Church Records Survey for Montgomery County 1936-1937, Mt. Lebanon U.M. Church. Materials copied at the Maryland State Archives, and made into manuscript book at MCHS Library.

14. Susan Singer-Bart, "New Tri-County Baptist Church makes Damascus Home," Gazette, August 22, 2001. From the clippings file, MCHS.

15. The Cambodian Buddhist Society website: www.cambodian-buddhist.org

The Montgomery County Story is sponsored by the Chevy Chase Land Company of Montgomery County, established in 1890.

Isabel Church, Guest Editor

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