

Virginia chapel built by newly freed slaves

Continued from page 5B
 walls, water damage stains the ceiling and deep divots dot the cemetery.
 But even with its imperfections, Longs Chapel is receiving top honors when it comes to historical significance. Last month it was added to the Virginia Landmarks Register, and it could be added to the National Register of Historic Landmarks soon.
 "The (state registry) board felt that it was important to celebrate the African American heritage there" by putting Longs Chapel on the registry, said Marc Wagner, national registry manager. "It's the only surviving building from (Zenda)."
 Interest in preserving Longs Chapel began in 2003 when Jenkins and his wife, Robin, were vacationing in Rockingham County from South Carolina, and someone suggested they drive past the chapel. Covered with trees and briars, the chapel was

barely visible from the road and the cemetery was covered with brush, Jenkins recalls.
 Even though the chapel was less than impressive, Jenkins says, he couldn't help but think that something needed to be done to save it. That's when the Jenkinses made it their mission to find out who owned the chapel and take the necessary steps to preserve it.
 They started by researching the property at the Rockingham County Courthouse. There, Jenkins says, they discovered that Roger Emerson, who owns the property adjacent to the chapel, bought it in a tax sale.
 Dedicated to preserving black history, the Jenkinses contacted Emerson and asked if he would be willing to sell the chapel and the cemetery surrounding it. Emerson agreed on the condition that the Jenkinses move forward with plans to save it.

"I just hated to see it destroyed," Emerson said. "He said he wanted to restore everything, and I thought that was pretty good (because) it's got historical significance."
 The Jenkinses vowed to preserve the property. They bought the chapel and the lot for about \$3,200 in October 2004. A couple of months after making the purchase, Jenkins received a call from a businessman, who, he says, wished to remain anonymous.
 "He said, 'You tell me what you would like done,'" Jenkins recalls. Jenkins told the man that he needed to clear the property of trees and brush. The man, Jenkins said, offered to cut down all the trees that the Jenkinses didn't want. "He said, 'Put a ribbon around the trees you want to keep,'" Jenkins recalls. About a month later, Jenkins said he visited the chapel and to his astonishment, the land was cleared. "I

could not believe it," Jenkins said. "I was set."
 Since then, Jenkins and his family have moved from South Carolina to Rockingham County, with big goals for the chapel. And they are goals, Jenkins says, that will be easier to accomplish now that the chapel is recognized by the state.
 First and foremost, Jenkins said, the Longs Chapel Preservation Society plans to hire a general contractor and find volunteers to help work on the chapel. Its roof, the columns that hold it up and the exterior walls are all in need of repair. The interior also needs work to make it fit for tours, Jenkins said.
 "We want to preserve it for the future, so (visitors) can come and learn from (the former slaves') tremendous effort to rise above where they started and live out the American dream," Jenkins said. "We want it to be a living site for black history."

Steele Creek AMEZ choirs host celebrations

Continued from page 5B
 registration at 8 a.m. Workshop sessions begin at 9:15 a.m.
October 22
 The Mighty Children's Choir of Steele Creek AMEZ Zion Church, 1500 Shopton Road, will have their 31st anniversary. The theme is "Let the Children Sing." The program will begin at 8 p.m.
October 29
 The Gospel Choir of Steele Creek AMEZ Zion Church, located at 1500 Shopton

Road, will have their annual fall concert. The theme this year is "I Need A Church". The concert will begin at 8 p.m. The minister of music is Brother Stanley McCullough.
November 17
 Pastor Valari Logan and Women of the Harvest present a Women's Fall Retreat, "Listening to God with our Total Mind, Body, and Soul." The event runs through Saturday and registration is \$85. The deadline to register is

Sept. 15. Send cash or money order to Kingdom Fellowship-Women of The Harvest, PO Box 444334, Charlotte, NC 28215.
 The retreat will be held at The White Oak Conference Center in Winnsboro, S.C. For more information, call (704) 531-2246.
December 2
 Matthews United

Methodist Church will host its annual Walk Through Bethlehem. The event models the Town of Bethlehem as it appeared when Christ was born and offers visitors an interactive experience. The church is located at 801 S. Trade St. in Matthews. The event runs from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m.

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