

**Brief History of
Asbury Methodist Church
Middleburg, Virginia**

Asbury Church, dating to 1829, is the oldest surviving church building in Middleburg and one of the oldest churches in the Northern Piedmont region of Virginia. According to a recent Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) historic survey of the town, the church is a contributing structure within Middleburg's National Register Historic District and is eligible for individual listing to the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Middleburg is a Certified Local Government.

The church was built in 1829 on land donated by Hugh Grant to provide a separate Methodist worship facility for those who no longer wished to worship with other denominations at the town's "free church", which no longer exists. The structure served as a Methodist Episcopal Church until the mid-1850's, when a new and larger church was constructed on Washington Street (Route 50).ⁱ The church was emptied and abandoned between 1857 and 1860, but did not remain empty. Local diary entries during the Civil War years indicate that the church was used at various times as a storehouse and government depot for corn and as a temporary war morgue and hospital facility for both sides in the war. A local history reports that, "After the Battle of Bull Run more than 1200 wounded and dying soldiers were hauled in wagon loads over the rough and rutted roads from Manassas to be placed on pallets in the Middleburg churches to await death or recovery."ⁱⁱ Another history includes the following 1864 excerpt from a diary kept by the wife of the town's physician: "So we set to work and improvised a Hospital in the old Methodist church, and made it comfortable with the scanty materials at our command, then we dispatched a wagon for provisions to the field with a request to have 50 wounded sent to us, and soon they arrived and the church was filled to overflowing with men who hadn't tasted food for days and were famished like wolves."ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1864 the white congregation that owned the church donated it to a black Methodist Episcopal congregation. The congregation made slab seats and fixed the windows, and the church became the first African-American church in Middleburg. By 1866 the congregation of freed slaves was thriving. The church was renovated in the 1880's, including the addition of an organ in 1880 and a bell dating to 1884. It remained a center of religious activity for the local black community for many years. The gallery was also used at various times as a public school for black children, a Sunday School, and dining facilities. The church was placed out of active use in 1994, when its congregation merged with the Willisville United Methodist Church. The church was abandoned for active worship and presently sits vacant, but remains under the care of the Willisville Trustees.^{iv}

ⁱ Lane, Charlene T., "Middleburg Methodist Churches: Two Beginnings, One Possible Future", paper for George Mason University, Fall 1993, p.4.

ⁱⁱ Osburn, Penelope M., "History of Middleburg", The Story of Middleburg, 1787-1958, The Middleburg National Bank, September 1958, p.19.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p.22

^{iv} Loyal D. McMillin, "The History of Middleburg United Methodist church: 1776-1996", Middleburg Printers, Middleburg, Va., pp. 1-9.