

ELIZABETH ZIRKLE BIOGRAPHY.

Written by Richard E. Harris, OCTOBER, 2008.

Elizabeth Rife Zirkle was born in Timberville, VA April 22, 1836. Her future husband, John Philip Zirkle, lived on a farm three-fourths of a mile west of New Market. One day John burned his hand severely while cooking his meal and he immediately hitched up his buggy and drove to Timberville, six miles away to beg Elizabeth Rife to marry him. She agreed and they were married on October 14, 1858 when she was 22 and he 28.



Their home consisted of a stone house-
fort of the French and Indian War period.
It had one room just off the road above
and a walk-out room below, an attic, and
an outdoor oven.

A monument is presently built on an
existing wall marking the site.
They had five of their six children while
living here. One died in infancy.



During the Civil War, Elizabeth and John Zirkle were Union sympathizers so rather than join the Confederate army, they put up a cash bounty for a substitute to enlist in John's place. As the war proceeded and the need for soldiers increased, John left New Market and went west to Indiana to live with his brother, Isaac, until the war was over. Of course, this left Elizabeth to run the farm alone and care for two small children with one more on the way who was born five weeks before the Battle of New Market.



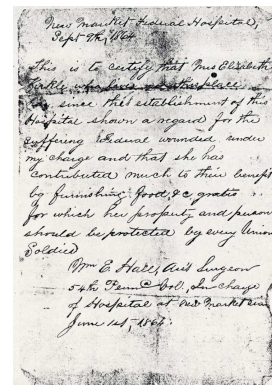
After the battle, the Smith Creek Baptist Church was made into a hospital. The *Shenandoah Valley* newspaper said in an article dated January 26, 1911, written following Elizabeth's death,

“After the Battle of New Market, May 15, 1864, the sympathies of Mrs. Zirkle were warmly enlisted in behalf of Northern sick and wounded in the Baptist church hospital. They especially needed something to eat—provisions were unobtainable—and she, without expecting reward, industriously went to work to relieve their wants. Mrs. Zirkle was always practical, and each week she came to town in a spring wagon, bringing sweet and buttermilk, bread, and ‘half-moon’ or ‘turnover pies,’ made and baked by her in a big old-fashioned bake-oven and other things for the wounded.”



As a result of her kindness she was given a letter by the Union doctor attending the wounded which said:

“New Market Federal Hospital, Sept. 9, 1864; This is to certify that Mrs. Elizabeth Zirkle, who lives near this place has, since the establishment of this hospital, shown a regard for the suffering Federal wounded under my charge, and that she has contributed much to their benefit by furnishing food, &., gratis, for



which her property and person should be protected by every Union soldier.

Wm. E. Hall,
Asst. Surgeon 54th Penna. Vol., in charge of Hospital at New Market, since
June 1, 1864.”

As Union General Philip Sheridan’s soldiers came up the Valley burning barns and mills and running off the livestock, she baked hundreds of little pies to give to the Union soldiers when they arrived at her farm. She showed them her letter from Dr. Hall and they posted a guard to protect her person, barn, and property.



When a relative of hers who was a Confederate soldier, Samuel Rife, died in a Federal prison, she took his nine-year-daughter, Martha, into her crowded home. She lived with Mrs. Zirkle and her family for eleven years, until she married Lewis N. Zirkle at age twenty.

In 1869 the Zirkles built a fine, brick house down by the Shenandoah River across from the stone house. Meanwhile, that same year, John’s brother, Isaac, attended some Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic meetings near Indianapolis and joined the Adventist Church. He sent tracts to John and Elizabeth and after reading them, they requested that Isaac arrange for an evangelist to come to New Market. On January 28, 1876, evangelists E. B. Lane and J. O. Corliss came from Adventist headquarters in Battle Creek, MI and stayed with the Zirkles. The evangelists held meetings in school houses, churches, and a tent in New Market and in surrounding towns and counties. During the summer, Elizabeth Zirkle was the first person baptized into the Adventist Church in the state of Virginia. Her husband and four of her children would follow later. A small church was organized on January 13, 1877.

John and Elizabeth’s third son, Charles, became a minister and after serving for awhile contracted TB. He came home to recuperate and built a house on the front part of the family farm along Depot Road, now Route 211. For



awhile he taught at the elementary school near Plains Mill along the Shenandoah River two and a half miles up river from his home. As his condition worsened, he thought about the future after he was gone. New Market was an education-conscious town. Seventeen private schools had functioned for awhile in the town by this time. Charles reasoned that if others can operate a private school, why shouldn't the Adventists. At this time, also, Adventist elementary schools, academies, and colleges were springing up around the world. So, Charles and his wife, Myra, asked his parents if they would give him his inheritance before he died—land from the family farm on which to build an Adventist academy. The parents agreed and four days before Charles died they staked off 42 acres for the school as he watched from his bedroom window. Three days later he died and within a month they deeded the property to the Virginia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on which to build Shenandoah Valley Academy. Charles's house was situated on the site where the school sign is located today.



The original main building contained living quarters for students and faculty, dining room, classrooms, chapel, and the spirit that continues to make SVA unique.

John Zirkle died in 1906 after seeing the junior academy opened in 1905. Six years later on January 19, 1911 Elizabeth died just before the first graduation in the Spring. Mrs. Zirkle had a big heart always willing to help both friend and foe in need. Also, with her husband, they magnanimously honored Charles' request for land on which to build a school. To date over

four thousand students have graduated from the Shenandoah Valley Academy most of whom have engaged in Christian service for mankind.

