

**St. John A.M.E. Zion Church  
(Forks A.M.E. Zion Church)  
AA-2104  
Odenton vicinity (Wilsontown)  
Built 1942  
Private**

St. John A.M.E. Zion Church is a small, frame vernacular Gothic-Revival style building. It was constructed in 1942 to replace the former church, which was purchased by the U.S. Army for the expansion of Ft. Meade. St. John A.M.E. Zion Church serves the African-American community of Wilsontown. The church was organized March 19, 1869 under the name Fork A.M.E. Zion. The name was changed to St. John A.M.E. Zion in 1967.

AA- 2104

Built 1942

**St. John African American Episcopal Zion Church**  
**2993 Conway Road**  
**Anne Arundel County**  
**Odenton, Maryland 21113**

private

**MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN**  
**STATEWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXTS**

**I. Geographic Organization:** Western Shore

**II. Chronological/Development Periods:** Modern Period (1930-present)

**III. Prehistoric Period Themes:** N/A

**IV. Historic Period Themes:** Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Community Planning  
Religion

**V. Resource Type**

Category: Building

Historic Environment: village

Historic Function(s) and Use(s): church

Known Design Source: Unknknown

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. AA-2104

### 1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Forks African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church  
 other St. John African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

### 2. Location

street and number 2993 Conway Road \_\_ not for publication  
 city, town Odenton x vicinity  
 county Anne Arundel

### 3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Trustees of St. John African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church  
 street and number 2993 Conway Road telephone  
 city, town Odenton state MD zip code 21113

### 4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. liber 0252 folio 426  
 city, town Annapolis tax map 36 tax block 07 tax parcel 174 tax ID number 4000-9008-1558

### 5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- Contributing Resource in National Register District
- Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
- Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Recorded by HABS/HAER
- Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
- Other: AA Co. Depart of Planning and Zoning

### 6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count		
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	1	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion	1	sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social		structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		1 objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress		Total
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown		
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use		
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:		
				Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory	

## 7. Description

Inventory No. AA-2104

### Condition

excellent       deteriorated  
 good             ruins  
 fair               altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

St. John A.M.E. Zion church stands on a sloping, 6.3 acre grassy lot in a rural section of western Anne Arundel County, about ½ mile east of the border with Prince George's County. The church is officially located in the municipality of Odenton, but historically this small, predominately African-American community is traditionally known as Wilsontown. The east-facing church is located on Conway Road, which runs through the center of the Wilsontown community. It is located 2 ¼ miles west of Patuxent River Road, and approximately ¼ east of the Amtrack railroad tracks, at which point Conway Road terminates. Built in 1942, this small vernacular Gothic Revival style church is in good physical condition, but its original character was altered by a renovation campaign that took place in the early 1980s

St. John A.M.E. Zion church is a small, rectangular, ½-story, gable-roofed, frame building. The main block measures, approximately, 20' x 45'. The building is enlarged on the front with a small, enclosed, gable-roofed entry portico. A square-shaped bell tower rises from the portico's peak and partially penetrates into the front wall of the main structure. The back of the church features an irregularly shaped shed-roof addition that appears to have been built in at least two stages. This simple church generally lacks embellishment, but the building's form and vertical emphasis affiliate it with the Gothic Revival style.

Exterior walls are covered with aluminum siding and rest on a metal-sheathed, concrete block foundation and full basement. The church's front (east) end is built into the bank of a hill, situating the entrance at grade level while exposing the basement's side and rear walls. Windows are uniform throughout the main body of the building, consisting of 1/1 wood sash windows with plain aluminum surrounds. Side walls each contain three regularly spaced windows. A narrow, exterior, brick, stove chimney stands between the first and second bays of the south wall. Front façade fenestration is regularly spaced and features one window opening on either side of the center doorway. In addition, a small, 1/1, aluminum sash widow is found in the rear addition's south wall. Directly beneath is a heavy-duty metal door. A similar door is centered on the north-side basement wall. The principal entrance consists of a modern pair of wooden doors. Each is embellished with three squares of applied molding. A wooden cross affixed to the wall of the louvered bell tower, directly above the door opening represents the building's only notable exterior ornament. A damaged and partially obscured date stone is found in the lower left corner of the front façade. It reads, in part, "Built May 5, 1942 by Rev. J. J. Howard".

The building's interior is divided into three spaces; two small rooms on either side of the main entrance used for storage and choir purposes, and the large worship area. Walls are white plaster and the floor (except in the storage/choir rooms) covered with wall-to-wall carpet. The ceiling, reportedly once open to the rafters, is now finished with modern acoustic block tiles. Pews are arranged in two rows, separated by a center aisle. The altar and pulpit are located in the west end upon a low dais. The basement is accessed through a doorway situated in the northeast corner. A cornerstone, bearing the date "1908" is visible from inside the basement. This stone was taken from the previous church and incorporated into the foundation of this building, which was constructed in 1942.

A cemetery containing marked and unmarked graves is located immediately behind the church and is considered to be a contributing resource. Among those buried in this graveyard are members of the Contee, Chisney, Duckett, Thomas, Wallace and Wilson families.

A modern sign built of wood and brick pears and measuring approximately 6' x 4', stands on the right side of the church entrance. This circa 1980 object is not considered to be a contributing resource.

# 8. Significance

Inventory No. AA-2104

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

Specific dates	Architect/Builder
Construction dates 1942	

Evaluation for:

National Register                       Maryland Register                       not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

St. John African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is a good example of a World War II-era, rural, vernacular African American church building. It is the third church associated with this congregation, which was organized on March 19, 1869 (1). St. John A.M.E. Zion plays an important and sustaining role in the African-American community of Wilsontown. Almost all of the parishioners, which at present numbers about 75 active persons, are descendents of original church members. Common family names include Contee, Chisney, Duckett, Thomas, Wallace, and as expected, Wilson.

The congregation was organized March 19, 1869 as Fork A.M.E. Zion. The name derives from the fact that the church was sited near the "Great Fork" of the Patuxent River. The first church building was the former Indian Spring Quaker meeting house. This building was located approximately 1/2 mile west of the present church, on the west side of the railroad tracks. The Quakers donated use of the 18<sup>th</sup> century fieldstone building for use by the congregation. On April 16, 1891 the building and two acres of land were sold to the trustees of the Forks A.M.E. Zion (2). This structure was partially razed and a new frame building constructed on its foundation in 1908.

The church remained in this location until 1942, when the U.S. Army acquired the church property and hundreds of surrounding acres for the expansion of Ft. Meade. The congregation used the money received from the Army to purchase approximately 6 acres of land on the east side of the Amtrack railroad tracks. The current building was erected on this site, and dedicated on May 5, 1942. In 1967 Fork A.M.E. Zion was renamed St. John A.M.E. Zion and in the early 1980s the church underwent a major renovation program (3).

The St. John A.M.E. Zion church serves the spiritual needs of residents of the African-American community known as Wilsontown. Wilsontown, named for one of the prominent families in the area, developed as a result of the establishment of the Baltimore and Potomac (later Pennsylvania and now Amtrack) railroad. Construction for the railroad began in 1867 and service started in 1872. Many Wilsontown residents were laborers for the railroad, which, according to church member and lifetime Wilsontown resident, Melvin Contee, remained the community's largest employer until prior to World War II (4). The rails are now owned and operated by Amtrack, but the railroad is no longer important to the local economy. Mr. Contee reports that, despite many changes, the church remains well attended and the community maintains a stable population.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. AA-2104

- 1) Rev. William Anderson, St. John A.M.E. Zion Church, undated pamphlet (c. 1985). In site files of Anne Arundel County, Office of Planning and Zoning, Annapolis, MD.
- 2) J. Reaney Kelly, Quakers in the Founding of Anne Arundel County, Maryland, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore (1963) p. 73
- 3) Anderson
- 4) Interview with Melvin Contee, March, 2000.
- 5) G. M. Hopkins, *Atlas of Anne Arundel County, MD*, (Philadelphia, PA)1878

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 6.39 acres  
Acreage of historical setting 2 acres  
Quadrangle name Odenton Quadrangle scale: 1:24:000

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Proposed boundary encompasses the acreage historically associated with this building and is the same as described in Anne Arundel County land records, Liber 252 Folio 426.

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## 11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Sherri Marsh		
organization	Anne Arundel County Historical Sites Survey	date	March 2001
street & number	2664 Riva Road	telephone	410-222-7441
city or town	Annapolis	state	Maryland 21401

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

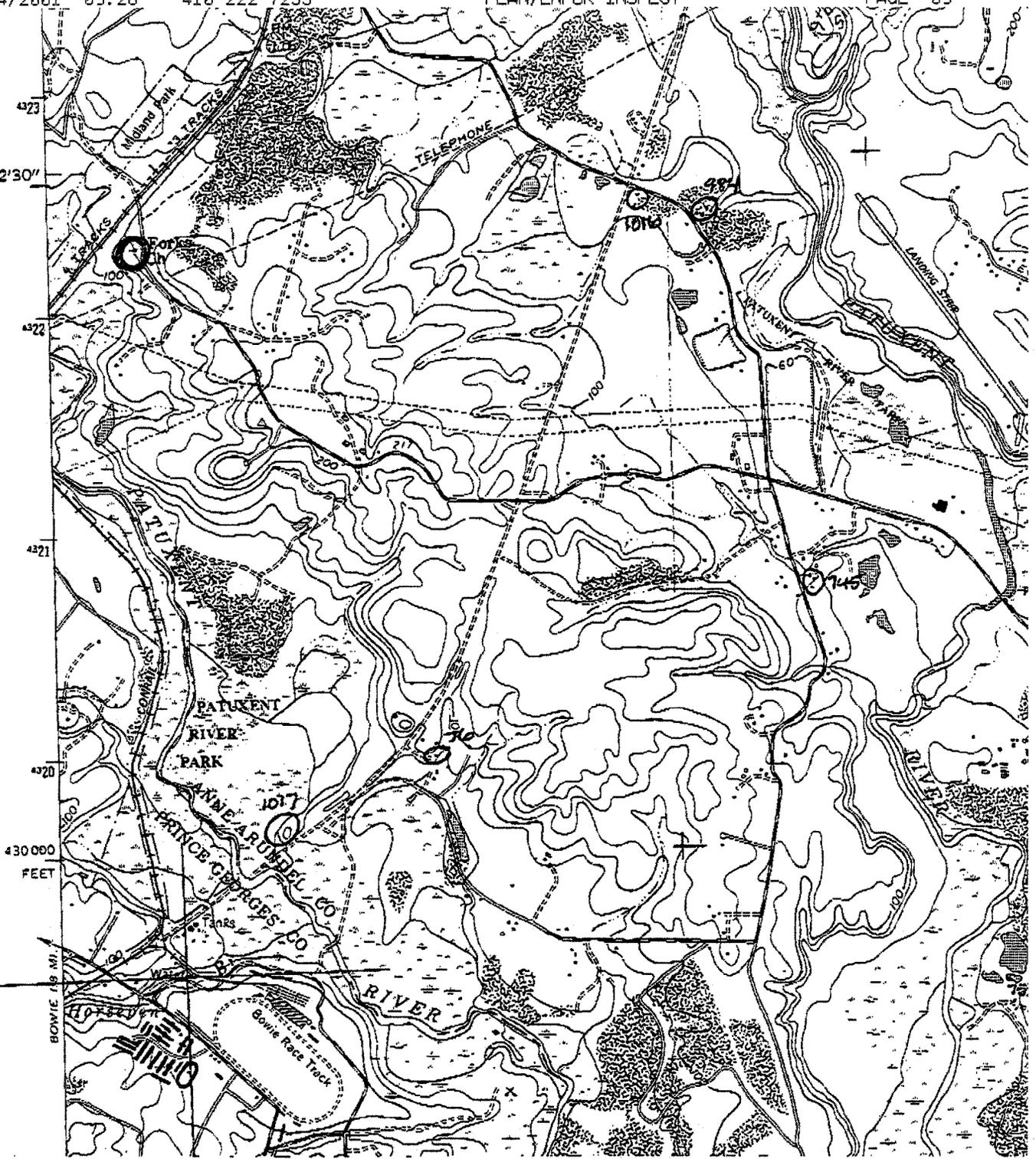
return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
DHCD/DHCP  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023  
410-514-7600



Name: ODENTON  
 Date: 3/28/101  
 Scale: 1 inch equals 4000 feet

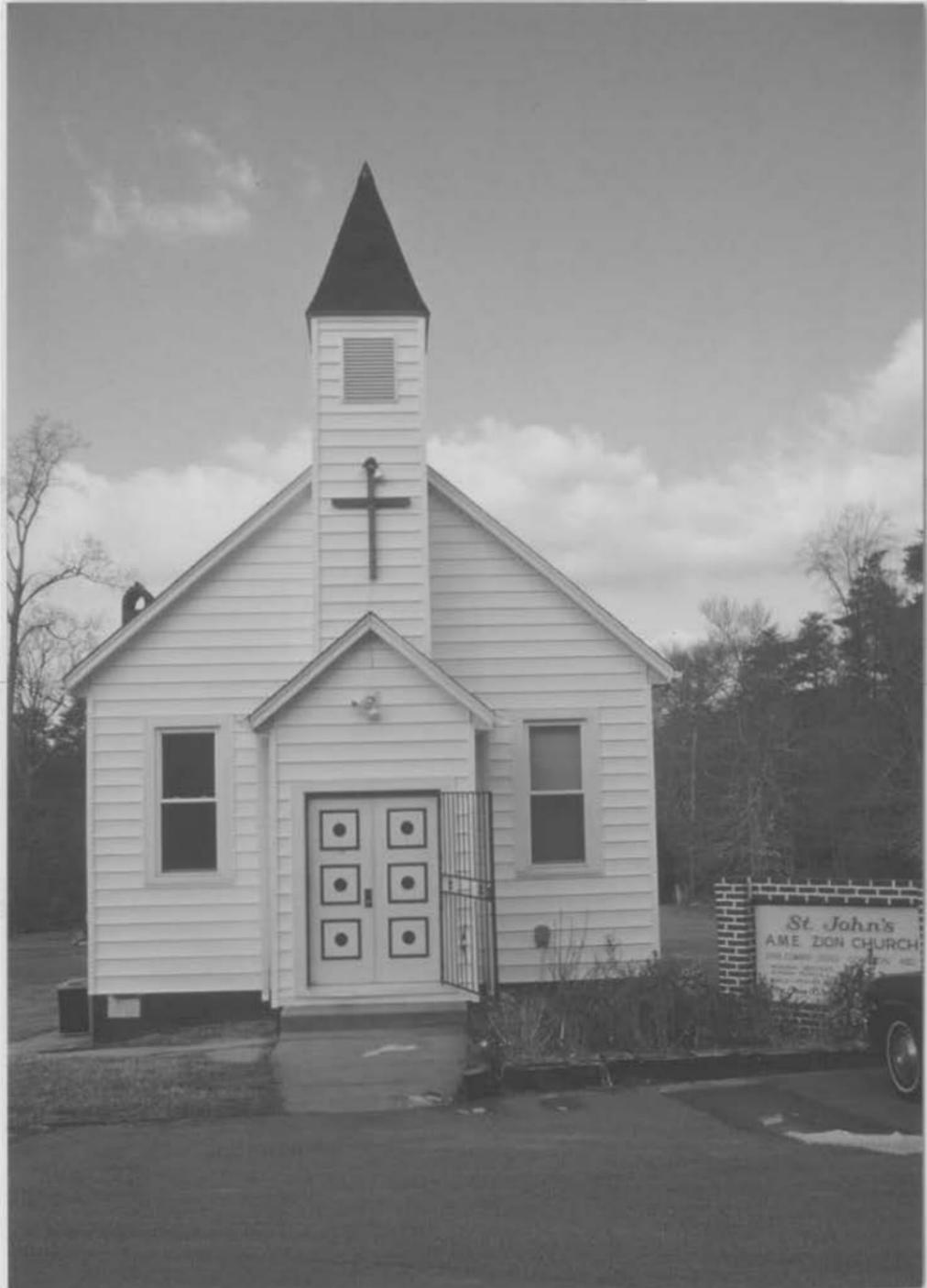
Location: 039° 03' 17.8" N 076° 41' 52.4" W  
 Caption: St Johns A.M.E. Zion Church  
 Conway Road, Odenton, MD

AA-2104



AA-2104  
 St. John A.M.E. Church (Forks Zion A.M.E. Church)  
 1993 Conway Road  
 Odenton, Maryland

USGS 7.5 minute series  
 Scale 1:24,000  
 1957, revised 1978



AA-2104

St John AME ZION (FORKS ZION AME.)

Odenton, Anne Arundel CO, Maryland

January 2001

By SHERRI MARSH

Negatives ~~at \_\_\_\_\_~~ Printed From Slide  
0-PFS000 N-ime040 U-

EAST FACADE

Photo 1 of 3

Severna Park Photo. Severna Park Photo



AA-2104

St. Johns A.M.E. Zion (FORKS ZION A.M.E.)  
Conway Road, Odenton, Anne Arundel Co, MD

Jan. 2001

By SHERRI MARSH

Reprint FROM SLIDE

0-PFS000 N-ims038 U-

CAMERA facing SW

Photo 2 of 3

Severna Park Photo, Severna Park Photo



AA-2104

St. Johns A.M.E. ZION (FORKS ZION A.M.E.)

Conway Road, Odenton, Anne Arundel CO, MD

Jan 2001

By Sherril MARSH

Reprint FROM SLIDE

0-PFS000 N-ims039 U-

CAMERA FACING N.W.

Photo 3 of 3

Severna Park Photo, Severna Park Photo