

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **FEB 13 1984**
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Northfield Union Church

and/or common Voice of Faith Chapel

2. Location

street & number Sondogardy Pond Road, N/A not for publication

city, town Northfield N/A vicinity of

state New Hampshire code 33 county Merrimack code 013

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Town of Northfield

street & number 21 Summer Street

city, town Northfield N/A vicinity of state New Hampshire

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Merrimack County Registry of Deeds

street & number P.O. Box 248
163 North Main Street

city, town Concord state New Hampshire 03301

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Northfield Historic Resource Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records Lakes Region Planning Commission

city, town Meredith state New Hampshire

7. Description

Condition
 excellent deteriorated
 good ruins
 fair unexposed

Check one
 unaltered
 altered

Check one
 original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Northfield Union Church is a one-story church, which stands on its own large lot on Sondogardy Pond Road in Northfield. The wooden frame building is composed of three rectangular sections, which correspond to its three rooms. The gable-roofed main block, which contains the church auditorium proper, is crowned by an open belfry and is set with its eastern gable end facing the road. In the center of that eastern gable end is found the church's small gable-roofed vestibule. To the rear of the main block is a narrower and lower rear wing, containing the vestry. The rear wing is covered by a shed roof, somewhat clipped on the north and south by extensions of the main block's gable roof, giving the rear wing what might be called a "half-jerkinhead" roof. All three sections sit on high brick foundations, and are clapboarded with sillboards and cornerboards. The wide cornices, with mouldings and friezes, have sloping soffits, save for the "jerkinhead" sections of the rear wing, where the soffits are horizontal.

The small vestibule is only one bay wide and one bay deep. In its eastern front is the church's main entry--tall, double, five-paneled doors with plain trim, reached by wooden steps. (The modern steps with a modern metal railing were built in 1982 to replace older deteriorated steps.) On the lintel is a small wooden sign, with the church's historic name and date. Beside the doors, beneath a modern electric light, is another sign with its common name, the time of services and the present pastor's name. The north and south long sides of the vestibule each have a single four over four sash window with plain trim and louvred shutters.

The large main block is three bays wide and three bays long. On each side of the vestibule in its main eastern gable end is a tall, large four over four sash window, with plain trim and louvred shutters. (Beneath the southern window is a low 20th century concrete basement bulkhead with a pair of wooden doors.) In the gable above the vestibule is a large trefoil-shaped ornament. The clapboards within the moulded frame of the trefoil are themselves ornamented with small incised trefoils.

The one stage open belfry at the eastern end of the main block's roof ridge completes the church's street front. The sides of the short sloping belfry base are sheathed with wide clapboards, without cornerboards, but crowned by a shallow moulding. The short chamfered cornerposts of the open belfry are topped by mouldings, but are continued visually as wide cornerboards to the wide plain frieze beneath the belfry's cornice. The trefoil arches found in each face of the belfry have moulded soffits. The spandrels, filled with vertical beaded boarding, are ornamented in the upper corners by small triangles of flush boarding with a scalloped lower edge. The belfry's cornice, like its counterparts below, has mouldings and sloping soffits. The belfry's steep pyramidal roof has flared eaves and an elaborate metal weathervane.

Both the north and long south sides of the main block have three tall and large six over six sash windows with plain trim and louvred shutters. These facades differ only in the number of short four-pane basement windows, with two on the north and three on the south. The main block's rear gable end has no windows, being largely covered by the rear wing. Towards the rear on the south slope of the gable roof stands a tall brick chimney with corbeled cap.

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The rear wing is two bays wide and two bays deep. The north facade and the rear west facade each have two six over six sash windows, again with plain trim and louvred shutters. The south facade has a single window of the same type, and, in its eastern bay, a four-paneled door with plain trim, reached by modern wooden steps with a modern metal railing.

The church's three rooms all have wooden floors, plaster walls with a simple baseboard, window and door frames ornamented only by a simple bead on the side trim, and plaster ceilings, which are slanted on the long sides of the rooms. (The walls of the vestibule and the auditorium are now wallpapered.)

The small vestibule, lit by a single window in both the north and south walls, has a small shallow "closet" in its western wall which houses the bell rope. The most important feature of the west wall, however, is the pair of tall, four-paneled doors which open into the auditorium.

The auditorium is lit in the day by tall windows, two in the east wall, three in both the north and south walls, and, at night by six modern electric lights suspended from the ceiling. Its walls are distinguished by a moulded chair rail. The west wall is divided into three bays by two small rectangular projections, the southern one containing the chimney, the northern one a false projection to balance the chimney. In the north and south bays are found tall four-paneled doors leading to the vestry. In front of the central bay is a short stage with vertical beaded boarding sides above a deep baseboard, and beneath a shallow moulding. Recessed steps on the north and the south lead up to the stage's carpeted floor. A short but wide pulpit, with paneled sides, wide baseboards, cornerboards and friezes, as well as a cushioned lectern, stands on the stage.

The vestry is a simple room, lit by a single light fixture and five windows. A four-paneled door in the south wall leads outside, while stairs lead down to the full basement. The basement, which was enlarged in the early 20th century, has concrete floors and walls, and an unfinished ceiling. One section has been partitioned off with a plasterboard wall to serve as a child care room, but most of the basement is devoted to storage and the furnace.

Save for the replacement of the deteriorated front and rear steps, and the addition of the low bulkhead and new basement windows when the basement was enlarged, the exterior has not changed since the church was built. Interior alterations are apparently also rare, limited largely to new wallpaper, modern electric lights, carpeting on the stage and the new basement. The Northfield Union Church appears today virtually as it did in 1883.

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Continuation sheet #2 DESCRIPTION

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Also found on the property, to the south and to the rear of the church, is a small, one-story, gable-roofed shed. The wooden shed is clapboarded with corner-boards, close eaves and verges. Its west and east gable ends are blank. In the north wall is a door of vertical beaded boarding, with plain trim. In the south wall are two small windows with plain trim. Each of these windows lights a one-hole privy closet, with walls, ceiling and door of beaded boarding. The rest of the shed is unfinished and devoted to storage.

Much of the two and a third acre lot is now grown up with trees, mostly with pine. But, around the church, the grounds are still open, being partially lawn and partially unpaved parking spaces. An unpaved driveway passes in front of the church, which sits somewhat back from the road on a slight rise.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1883

Builder/Architect Edward Dow, Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Northfield Union Church is significant as an architecturally interesting, albeit modest, Victorian country chapel designed by one of New Hampshire's most important late 19th century architects.

History. In the early 1880's, the residents of the southern section of the town of Northfield did not have an appropriate building for either church services or social events. A Sunday school, as well as religious and secular public meetings, were held in the Oak Hill schoolhouse. But the schoolhouse was really too small for the Sunday school and most meetings and services.

In December of 1881, a nearby newspaper reported "considerable talk just now about building a Union church in the southern part of the town somewhere in the vicinity of Oak Hill or the Depot."¹ Consequently, on January 7, 1882, the interested residents of the area met in the schoolhouse. They decided to build a public hall that could also be used for the Sunday school and would be open to all denominations for their services. Oliver L. Cross, one of the leaders in the movement, offered to donate a piece of land on Sondogardy Pond Road, near the Northfield railroad depot, and just south of the Union Picnic Grove, then used for large community picnics and occasional outdoor religious services. So, in February, the Northfield Union Church and Hall Association was formally organized to erect the building.

In March, the Association appointed five fund raisers, including Lucy R.H. Cross, Oliver L. Cross's wife. But, for most of the following year, their efforts were not very successful. Finally, Mrs. Cross approached the wealthiest man in the vicinity, Charles E. Tilton of Tilton, the town just north of Northfield. Tilton had made his fortune on the West Coast during and after the Gold Rush, and had returned to live in his native village. He was a generous supporter of projects to improve Tilton village and the surrounding area. And he now agreed to help the Union Church and Hall Association. In February of 1883, his offer was made public. Provided that the land, \$700 in cash and \$100 in labor were donated, Tilton would build a church and convey it to the Town of Northfield. The offer was subject to several conditions, the most important of which were that "Said property shall be held by said Town forever in trust and as church property exempt forever from taxation and not liable in any event for any indebtedness of the town", "The same shall be used by all Religious Denominations on equal terms and in equal proportion as to time of occupation, giving to each Denomination alternate Sundays if more than one desires to occupy it", "It may also be used at other times for any and all other purposes for which such a building may with propriety be occupied," and "The schoolroom connected with said church may be used first for church purposes as a vestry, kitchen or ante-room, and when not in use for church purposes may be used for school purposes" such as the local Sunday school.²

¹Merrimack Journal (Franklin), December 28, 1881.

²Lucy R. H. Cross - HISTORY OF NORTHFIELD, NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1780-1905 (Concord, 1905) pp. 41-42.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(see continuation sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 2 1/3 acres

Quadrangle name Penacook, N.H.

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UTM References

A 119 2880410 48050813
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

(see continuation sheet)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mr. David Ruell

organization Lakes Region Planning Commission date July 28, 1983

street & number Main Street telephone (603) 279-8171

city or town Meredith state New Hampshire

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

Commissioner, Dept. of Resources & Economic Development
title N.H. State Historic Preservation Officer

date JAN 26 1984

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

3/15/84


Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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At the annual town meeting in March, the voters of Northfield accepted the terms of the gift. The offer spurred the interest of contributors "and the sums specified were easily obtained"³. As promised, Oliver L. Cross donated his lot, while William Canfield gave another piece of land between the Cross lot and the picnic grove. Tilton then purchased an acre of the picnic grove itself to complete the parcel.

For the plans of the new church, Charles E. Tilton turned to architect Edward Dow of Concord, who had already designed at least two structures for him--the town hall he had built as a gift for the Town of Tilton in 1879-1880, and the Tilton Memorial Arch in Northfield, then under construction.⁴ Dow designed a small wooden church, whose cost was estimated at \$1,236.18. Construction began on May 14, and the cornerstone was laid without ceremony on May 24. Stephen Staples had charge of the stonework, while Leavitt Sanborn handled the brickwork. The carpenters were supervised by Leonard Conant and F.G. Berry. By June 1, "The body of the church [was] up and boarded".⁵ Work progressed rapidly, and by the end of the month the building was "painted and plastered"⁶. The bell was installed in the first week of July, and the church was completed by mid-August. On August 21, 1883, the Northfield Union Church was formally dedicated and presented by Mr. Tilton to the Town of Northfield.

Since 1883, the building has continued to serve as a church, although there have been periods in the past century, when services have lapsed. (The current congregation has used the church since 1938.) The building has been well maintained, with very few changes made since its construction. In the early 20th century, the basement was enlarged, with new windows and a bulkhead entry. The present congregation has installed electric lights, replaced the old stoves with a furnace, and refurbished the interiors with paint, wallpaper and carpeting on the stage. The Town installed new wooden steps in place of the deteriorated front steps in 1982. But for these minor changes, the Northfield Union Church appears today as it did when it was dedicated a century ago.

Architecture. Edward Dow (1820-1894) of Concord was one of the most prominent architects practicing in New Hampshire in the later 19th century. He designed a number of important buildings throughout the state. It would, however, be inappropriate to compare this modest chapel with Dow's more pretentious churches, such as the large brick Gothic Revival churches he designed for the Episcopalians of Concord and Tilton (St. Paul's Episcopal Church of 1859-60 in Concord and Trinity Episcopal Church of 1872-73 in Tilton). In size and materials, the Northfield Union Church is

³Ibid. p. 42.

⁴Both buildings have been listed on the National Register, the Arch as an individual structure, the Town Hall as an important element in the Tilton Downtown Historic District.

⁵Merrimack Journal, June 1, 1883.

⁶Merrimack Journal, June 29, 1883.

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more in tradition of the chapels found on back roads, throughout the Lakes Region. These country chapels are small wooden buildings, usually quite distinct from their village counterparts, which are normally larger and more elaborate in both composition and ornament. The chapels reflect the vernacular tradition of the rural builder, rather than the high styles of the architects. The typical 19th century country chapel of the Lakes Region is a rectangular, gable-roofed, clapboarded building, ornamented only by cornerboards or corner pilasters, a box cornice and perhaps, pilasters and entablatures framing the doors. A good example of this type from the same period would be the East Sandwich Chapel of 1879. Erected for much the same purpose, to provide a meeting place for a rural area that lacked an appropriate church or hall, the East Sandwich Chapel is a much plainer building than the Northfield Union Church. Undoubtedly, if Charles E. Tilton had not been so generous, the Northfield chapel would have been a similar, relatively simple building, without the Victorian embellishments of wide overhanging cornices with mouldings and sloping soffits, a vestibule, the trefoil ornament in the gable or an elaborate belfry on the roof. These few elements, modest as they may seem, raise the Northfield Union Church above the other members of its class. We may not be as enthusiastic as one local journalist who called it "the prettiest church edifice of its size to be found in New England"⁷, but we can recognize its superior quality, due both to the liberality of its patron and to the skill of its designer. The Northfield Union Church is easily one of the best Victorian chapels surviving in the Lakes Region today.

⁷Merrimack Journal, July 6, 1883.

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Continuation sheet #5 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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9. Lucy R.H. Cross - HISTORY OF NORTHFIELD, NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1780-1905
(Concord, 1905)

Franklin Transcript - January 4 & 11, February 22, March 16 & 23, May 4 & 25,
June 1, August 17 & 31, 1883.

Ed. D. Hamilton Hurd - HISTORY OF MERRIMACK AND BELKNAP COUNTIES, NEW HAMPSHIRE
(Philadelphia, 1885).

Laconia Democrat - December 23 & 30, 1881; January 13 & 20, February 24, March 24,
June 20, July 7, October 27, 1882; February 16, March 2 & 23, April 27, May 18,
June 8, July 6, August 17 & 24, 1883.

Merrimack Journal - (Franklin) December 28, 1881; January 6, 13 & 20, February 10
& 24, March 17, June 30, September 15, October 27, 1882; January 12, February
16 & 23, March 2 & 23, April 27, May 4 & 11, June 1, 8 & 29, July 6, August 17
& 24, 1883.

Interview - Albert Cross, Northfield, July 19, 1983.

Interview - Gordon Hill, Northfield, July 22, 1983.

Interview - Mrs. Ralph Maxwell, Northfield, July 22, 1983.

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10. The boundary of the nominated property is as follows: beginning at a stone boundary marker on Sondogardy Pond Road, located approximately 100 feet south of Northfield Union Church; then westerly approximately 140 feet; then northerly 310 feet; then westerly 165 feet; then northerly approximately 275 feet; then easterly approximately 200 feet to Sondogardy Pond Road; then southerly on Sondogardy Pond Road to the point of beginning. The nominated property includes the Northfield Union Church, its single outbuilding, and the parcel of land given with the Church to the Town of Northfield in 1883.

Boundries are highlighted in yellow on the attached sketch map.

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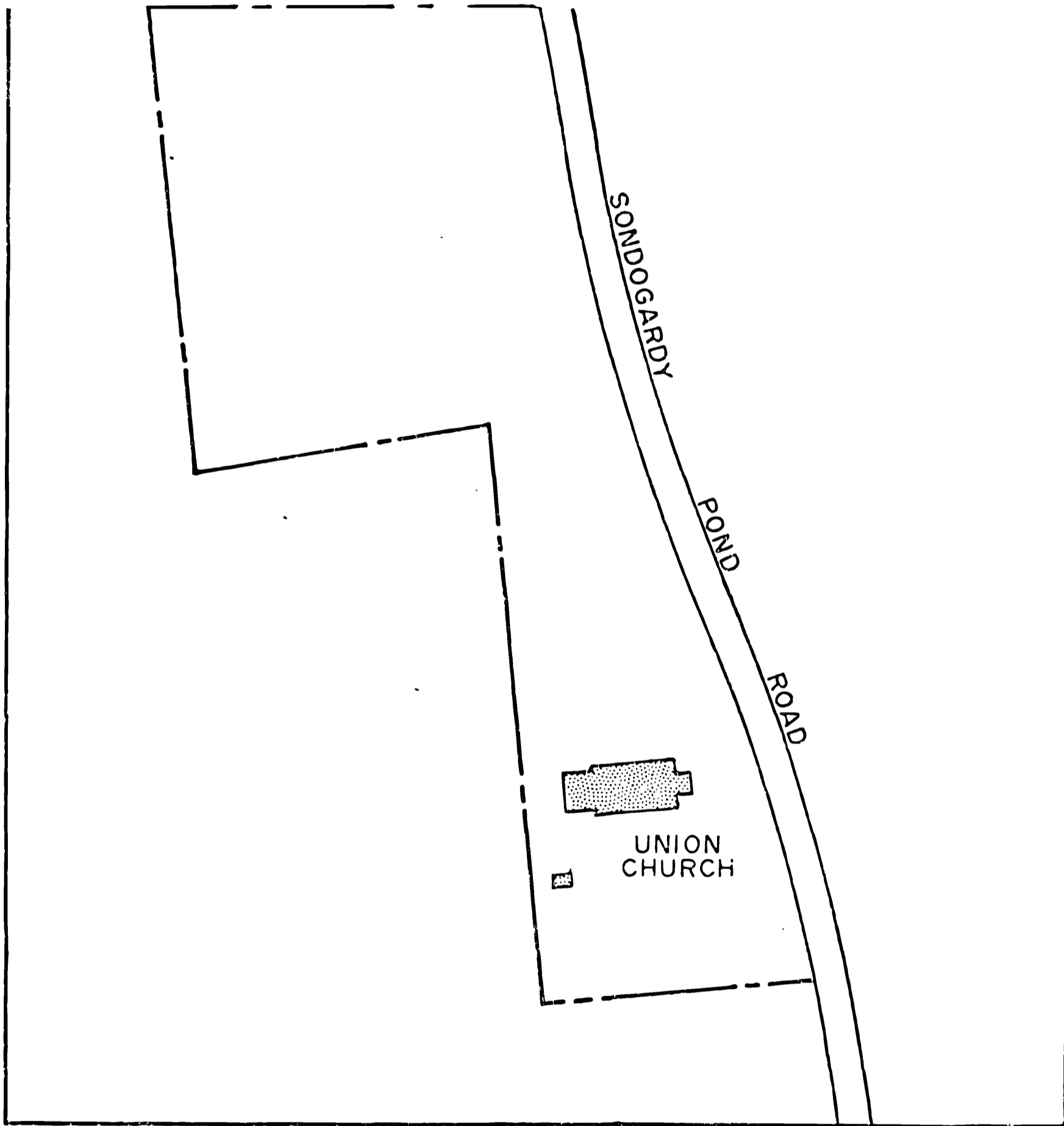
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**Northfield Union Church
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