

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name OAK HILL CEMETERY CHAPEL
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number off Pleasant Street N/A not for publication
city, town Bellows Falls N/A vicinity
state Vermont code VT county Windham code 025 zip code 05101

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> objects
			<u> </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

[Signature] 9/22/91
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

[Signature] 11-14-91

[Signature] Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Funerary

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Funerary

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls wood

roof asphalt

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

(Entire text appears on continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet

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The Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel stands at the northwest edge of Bellows Falls village's principal cemetery next to the forested east slope of the namesake Oak Hill. The small one-and-one-half-story, three-by-three-bay, gable-roofed vernacular building displays the influence of Gothic Revival style in its board-and-batten sheathing and a simple stick screen at the front gable peak. A three-bay, hip-roofed porch with turned posts and stick balustrade spans the front facade, contributing a vernacular Queen Anne element to the overall character of the building. The interior finish of the front room - three-bead matched boards on both the walls and ceiling - reflects its original religious or ceremonial purpose. The remainder of the interior lacks finish materials and has always served for cemetery maintenance and storage. The chapel retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Oak Hill Cemetery occupies a relatively flat terrace of lacustrine origin lying somewhat above the level of the southwest portion of Bellows Falls village. The rounded 870-foot Oak Hill rises at a moderate slope from the west edge of the cemetery while a steep bank descends from the opposite (east) edge. The main driveway into the cemetery from Pleasant Street passes through an arched iron gate and ascends a moderate grade to attain the elevation of the terrace. That driveway follows the west periphery of the cemetery while two other driveways diverge from it and traverse the interior along roughly parallel alignments.

The Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel is situated across the main driveway from the actual burial ground near the intersection of former Avenue E, a perpendicular interior pathway that has been infilled with graves. A small grassy yard and parking area flanks the south side of the chapel. The yard and chapel are surrounded on the north, west, and south sides by second-growth mixed forest that covers the hillside. The predominant tree species in the vicinity include the namesake oak, birch, and white pine.

Oriented perpendicular to the driveway, the one-and-one-half-story chapel possesses a simple rectangular plan with dimensions of 20.5 by 26.5 feet. The balloon-framed building rests mostly on a newly rebuilt brick foundation. At the northwest corner, however, an outcrop of bedrock rises above the general grade to support directly the wood sill. The exterior walls are sheathed

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with vertical boards-and-battens; the boards are ten inches in overall width and are overlapped by the two-inch battens with a rectangular profile. Plain five- and six-inch boards abut vertically to define the corners of the building.

A projecting molded cornice and plain frieze follow both the horizontal and raking eaves of the moderately pitched gable roof; partial cornice returns mark both the front and rear gables. The roof is sheathed with asphalt shingles applied in 1989 during an ongoing rehabilitation of the building. A square brick chimney with a corbeled cap straddles the ridge near the center of the building.

The three-bay main (east) gable facade is arranged symmetrically around a central entrance. The door has four molded panels in vertical pairs, the upper being taller. The flanking window bays are fitted with two-over-two sash, now covered with plywood to prevent damage by vandals. A full-size window is centered in the gable. All the door and window openings are enframed by plain surrounds made of five-inch boards. The gable peak is screened by simple dimension stickwork with a central pointed drop.

Spanning nearly the full length of the main facade, a three-bay porch projects about five feet from the wall plane under an asphalt-shingled hip roof with a projecting molded cornice along the eaves. The porch incorporates turned posts, a stick balustrade, a rectangular lattice skirt, and central projecting steps; both the balustrade and skirt on the south end of the porch were replaced in kind in 1989. The porch ceiling retains most of its original three-bead matchboard sheathing behind an added layer of plywood. The porch deck was relaid in 1989 with 3.5-inch tongue-and-groove boards of yellow pine.

The secondary three-bay south eaves facade possesses an interior sliding shed door near the left (rear) end. The door is made of beaded matchboards overlaid with exterior bracing of plain boards; within the perimeter bracing, diagonal braces mark the upper half of the door. A new wood-planked ramp leads from the ground to the door sill. The left-center and right bays of this facade are occupied by the two-over-two sash windows common to the building.

The opposite (north) eaves facade differs by being punctuated with only two bays of windows. These openings are centered within each (left and right) half of this facade; the left bay

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corresponds in position to its counterpart on the south facade.

The rear (west) gable facade contrasts with the arrangement of the main facade, having only one bay - a window opening - in a slightly left-central position on the first story. A full-size window is centered in the rear gable.

The chapel retains apparently its original exterior paint treatment of complementing body and trim colors. The body is painted a light blue-grey while the trim is a darker grey-blue. The paint is now severely weathered and faded, and the building will be repainted in the spring of 1990.

The interior of the chapel is partitioned into two rectangular rooms on the first story. The front (east) room of about eleven by nineteen feet is distinguished by its interior finish. Both the walls and ceiling are sheathed with varnished three-bead, tongue-and-groove boards 3.5 inches in width. The floor is laid with flush tongue-and-groove, yellow pine boards of the same width. The window and front door surrounds consist of varnished five-inch boards and bullseye corner blocks. Abutting the center of the room's rear (west) wall (the interior partition), a chimney ascends from the floor to the ceiling entirely enclosed by three-bead matchboard sheathing like that on the walls. The doorway between the front and rear rooms punctuates the partition next to the right (north) side of the chimney. Both the door and the surround have been removed from this opening; the unhinged four-panel door is now stored in the front room.

The utilitarian rear (west) room of about fourteen by nineteen feet contrasts by lacking finish sheathing, exposing the balloon frame of the exterior walls and the ceiling joists. The floor is covered with newly laid plywood. The exposed brick chimney appears flush with the surface of this room's east wall (the interior partition). A rectangular closet of about 2.5 by 5.5 feet projects into the room from the northeast corner; the closet is sheathed with the three-bead matchboard used in the front room. From the northwest corner of this room, an open two-flight stair with one landing ascends the west wall to reach a rectangular opening in the loft floor.

The unfinished loft extends the full length of the interior without a central partition. The exposed brick chimney rises through the loft at the position of the first-story division. A low kneewall rises to the slope of the roof along each side of

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the loft. The floor is laid with original tongue-and-groove, yellow pine boards 3.5 inches in width. These floor boards were produced by the Horse Shoe Lumber Co. of River Falls, Alabama; the firm's name and location are incised into the undersides of several individual boards. (The floor boards in the front room of the first floor presumably came from the same source.)

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

c. 1881

Significant Dates

c. 1885

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

(Entire text appears on continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Entire text appears on continuation sheet.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property approximately 0.1 acre

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Hugh H. Henry date January 1990
organization Historic Preservation Consultant telephone 802-875-3379
street & number Green Mountain Turnpike state Vermont zip code 05143-
city or town Chester 9418

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The Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel possesses significance for embodying the distinctive characteristics of a vernacular building type, a combined funeral chapel and cemetery maintenance building. The cemetery chapel occurs only rarely among the historic resources of Vermont, and the Oak Hill chapel constitutes the most modest example showing the influence of the Gothic Revival style. The building represents the latter nineteenth-century development of Oak Hill Cemetery into one of the state's largest and most handsomely landscaped burial grounds, a stature befitting the contemporary emergence of Bellows Falls as an important industrial and commercial center in southeastern Vermont.

Within the historic environment of cemeteries and associated buildings in Vermont, few examples exist of the cemetery chapel. Cemeteries in this predominantly rural state are generally situated next to churches, obviating the need for separate chapels. Many small cemeteries in the countryside serve only a sparsely populated, formerly agrarian district or neighborhood, and usually lack any buildings; a fence around the perimeter often provides the only distinction other than the gravestones. The larger and wealthier towns tend to have municipally owned, nonsectarian cemeteries, and these are generally furnished with ancillary structures such as a receiving tomb, hearse shed, gazebo, fountain, or ornamental entrance gate.

Only a small number of cemeteries in the largest cities and towns, including Montpelier, Burlington, and St. Johnsbury along with Bellows Falls, possess funeral chapels. These chapels were generally constructed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and share Gothic Revival stylistic character. The expression of that style ranges from the highly sophisticated and elaborate example found in Montpelier, the capital city, to the modest vernacular Oak Hill chapel.

Prior to 1845, the only cemetery in the village of Bellows Falls was the churchyard of Immanuel Episcopal Church. The land for the first public cemetery was acquired by the Town of Rockingham in June, 1845 from Solomon Hapgood. Its location on the so-called Old Terrace was then outside the settled area of the village to the southwest along the road to Saxtons River.

The following decade, a movement arose to transfer the cemetery to St. Charles Roman Catholic Church, and a favorable vote was recorded at the town meeting in March, 1858. However, for unknown reasons, the transfer was not then made. Two decades

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later, after another favorable vote at the March, 1877 town meeting, that cemetery - now known by the name "Restland" - was conveyed in August, 1878 to the "trustees of the Catholic Society" and subsequently it has remained in that ownership.

Meanwhile, efforts were being made to establish another cemetery in the village for public burials. A committee was formed in 1862 to investigate the matter but its choice of location, a parcel of land on the so-called New Terrace, was not popularly accepted. Ten years later, at the Rockingham town meeting in 1872, a motion was adopted "to authorize the Selectmen to purchase a lot and fence the same, suitable for a Cemetery for the Village of Bellows Falls." There ensued a dispute about the choice of land that was not resolved until a special town meeting held in February, 1875.

At that meeting, the Rockingham selectmen were pointedly "instructed and directed to select and purchase within five days from this date [February 8] a suitable and proper place for a cemetery for Bellows Falls." Furthermore, the selectmen were given a choice between two specific tracts of land, and if they failed to act within the allotted time, a specially appointed committee of three citizens was directed instead to make the selection and purchase. The selectmen apparently responded in time: on February 11, warranty deeds were signed transferring to the Town two parcels on a terrace next to Oak Hill a short distance to the south of, and somewhat higher than, Restland Cemetery. A twelve-acre lot was acquired from Seth Hapgood for \$1,200 while a smaller abutting parcel was purchased from Col. C. L. King for \$400. Hapgood's land extended southward into the adjoining township of Westminster.

A month later, at the annual Rockingham town meeting in March, 1875, the town's Selectmen received further instructions to begin development of the Oak Hill Cemetery. They were "directed to build a suitable fence around the new cemetery grounds at Bellows Falls, make suitable roads and streets on the same, [and] put in a receiving tomb if thought necessary." An amount "not exceeding \$1,500" was appropriated for those purposes. The fence and road(s) were built later the same year. In September and October, H. A. Nash and Moses Miller were paid a total of \$117.75 for their work on the fence. Also in October, S. S. Coolidge and C. L. Barber were paid a total of \$295.25 for "work on new road." In January of the next year, Webb and Wood (apparently a firm) received \$48.50 for "fence posts and work on cemetery road."

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None of these accounts mentions work on a cemetery chapel.

The primary force in the subsequent development of Oak Hill Cemetery came to Bellows Falls in 1876 in the person of James C. Day. A dry goods merchant, Day was undoubtedly attracted by the rapid industrial, commercial, and residential expansion then underway in the village. The availability of abundant water power at the Great Falls of the Connecticut River plus the floating of massive volumes of timber down the river enabled large-scale development of the paper industry during the latter half of the century. The junction at Bellows Falls of regional railroad lines connecting Boston, New York, and Montreal stimulated much other industry and commerce here. (See the National Register nominations for the Bellows Falls Downtown Historic District, entered in the National Register on August 16, 1982, and the Bellows Falls Island Multiple Resource Area, entered in the National Register on January 22, 1990). J. C. Day and Company's "Cash Dry Goods and Cloak House" expanded by the turn of the century into the largest such enterprise in Bellows Falls, having eight to ten employees and a great variety of merchandise. Day also became active in various municipal affairs. Among the latter, the Oak Hill Cemetery seems to have attracted his particular interest.

In 1883, a five-member commission was created to administer Oak Hill Cemetery and Day was elected chairman. The commission received an initial appropriation of \$300 from the Town for its use. Also in 1883, the Town acquired about 20 acres to enlarge the area of the cemetery. Burial lots were laid out and sold to the public. This revenue offset the difference between the annual town appropriation (about \$300 per year during the late 1880s and 1890s) and the expense of maintaining the cemetery. An exceptionally large appropriation of \$1,000 was approved at the 1884 town meeting, intended for "enlarging, repairing, and improving the public cemeteries in this town." Substantial portions of that amount were spent on three other cemeteries, and it is not known what specific improvements were made at Oak Hill.

It seems probable that the Oak Hill chapel was constructed during this period of extensive cemetery improvement. Its vernacular design shows the influence of the Gothic Revival style, especially in the board-and-batten sheathing and the simple stick screen at the front gable. Although the style was outmoded by that time in general architectural fashion, the Gothic Revival remained a "proper" style for religious and related buildings.

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The historical usage of the chapel for religious or funereal purposes has not been fully documented. In any case, only the front room would have been used in that manner; its interior finish of three-bead, tongue-and-groove boards on both the walls and ceiling distinguishes it from the unfinished utilitarian rear room. Entered by a sliding door on the secondary south facade, the rear room was clearly intended to serve as a tool and storage shed for cemetery maintenance purposes.

A significant improvement occurred at Oak Hill Cemetery during the latter 1890s when the present ornamental gate was erected at the main entrance from Pleasant Street. The gate incorporates square piers of rock-faced granite ashlar supporting a semicircular arch of iron openwork bearing the name "Oak Hill Cemetery" that spans the driveway. The owner of a local marble and granite firm, Dorr Moses Thayer, constructed the gate. Thayer conducted his business in Bellows Falls for fifty-four years between 1882 and 1936. There were only six other gravestones in Oak Hill Cemetery when he placed his first, and he accounted for many of the hundreds that were installed during the subsequent half-century.

The main entrance to Oak Hill Cemetery was probably moved to its present location next to the intersection of Pleasant and Birch Streets when the gate was erected. Inside the gate, the main driveway parallels Birch Street, which ascends the slope to the northwest edge of the cemetery. The Sanborn insurance map of 1920 labels Birch Street also as "Old Cemetery Rd." A barrier at the point a short distance north of the chapel where Birch Street now curves abruptly away from the cemetery probably marks the original entrance.

Early in the first decade (about 1902-03) of the present century, the chapel building may have been used temporarily for a residential purpose. The contemporary cemetery caretaker by the name of Rowell apparently lived here with his family during the summer working season. Nevertheless, a map of the cemetery drawn originally in 1908 identifies the building as "chapel."

The quarter-century after 1880 brought a large number of interments at Oak Hill Cemetery; by 1907, the aggregate had reached about 750. Apart from the number of graves, the cemetery was distinguished by its increasingly attractive appearance as a designed landscape. Lyman Hayes in his History of the Town of Rockingham published that year declares that "at this time there

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are few cemeteries in New England more beautifully located, laid out and kept than this." He gives the credit primarily to J. C. Day, who continued to serve as the "managing commissioner."

A photographic "glimpse" of Oak Hill Cemetery in Hayes' history affirms his aesthetic judgment. The grounds appear impeccably maintained. The grass-covered rectangular burial plots are precisely delineated by the north-south driveways, the shorter east-west "avenues," and the intermediate walkways that have a light-colored surface material, possibly crushed limestone or marble. Numerous shrubs and small trees are interspersed among the gravestones, and large deciduous and coniferous trees constitute a border along the east edge. The gazebo with its pyramidal hip roof occupies a focal position in the center. (The chapel stands outside the view of the photograph.) The cemetery clearly resembled an attractive urban park. Groups such as the Grand Army of the Republic held ceremonial events here and local residents came for picnics in the bucolic setting.

James C. Day remained the chairman of the cemetery commission for another decade after the publication of Hayes' history. In 1916, he sold his interest in the dry goods firm, and, two years later, he moved to Brattleboro, Vermont. He resigned from the cemetery commission the same year (1918) after thirty-eight years of service. His efforts were largely responsible for the transformation of the scrubby Oak Hill terrace into one of the largest and most park-like cemeteries in southern Vermont.

The usage of the chapel became solely utilitarian during recent decades. Concurrently the building was given only superficial maintenance, and by the middle 1980s both cosmetic and structural deterioration were evident. A proposal to demolish the building and replace it with a metal shed caused a group of citizens to take the initiative to preserve the chapel. In 1989, the Town of Rockingham received a matching grant of \$4,225 from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation to rehabilitate the building. The project was undertaken in the autumn and was mostly accomplished prior to its suspension for the winter; the work will resume in the spring of 1990. The building will continue to serve primarily for cemetery maintenance purposes.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Hayes, Lyman Simpson. History of the Town of Rockingham, Vermont Including the Villages of Bellows Falls, Saxtons River, Rockingham, Cambridgeport and Bartonville 1753-1907 With Family Genealogies. Bellows Falls, Vt.: Published by the Town, 1907.
- Lovell, Mrs. Frances Stockwell, and Leverett C. Lovell. History of the Town of Rockingham, Vermont Including the Villages of Bellows Falls, Saxtons River, Rockingham, Cambridgeport and Bartonville 1907-1957 with Family Genealogies. Bellows Falls, Vt.: Published by the Town, 1958.
- Plan of Oak Hill Cemetery, Bellows Falls, Vermont. A Copy of a Copy by B. A. Robinson, Oct. 1908 with Changes and Additions Drawn by H. H. Dole. May, 1949. Scale: 1 inch = 30 feet.
- Rockingham Land Records, Vols. 22, 24, and 40. Available at the Rockingham Town Clerk's Office, Bellows Falls, Vt.
- The Twenty-Second Annual Report for the Town of Rockingham for the Year Ending February 1, 1876. Bellows Falls, Vt.: Times Steam Job Printing Office, 1876.
- Walbridge, J. H., comp. Souvenir Edition of the Bellows Falls Times Devoted to Town of Rockingham. Bellows Falls, Vt.: W. C. Belknap and Co., April 8, 1899.

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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property being nominated consists of the Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel and approximately 0.1 acre of land surrounding the building and adjoining the west edge of the main driveway along the west periphery of the cemetery. The boundary begins at a Point A located in the west edge of said driveway at the intersection of a line twenty-five (25) feet north of, and parallel to, the north facade of the chapel. Thence the boundary extends westward along said north line to Point B located at its intersection with a perpendicular line twenty-five (25) feet west of, and parallel to, the west facade of the chapel. Thence the boundary turns southward and follows said west line to Point C located at its intersection with a perpendicular line twenty-five (25) feet south of, and parallel to, the south facade of the chapel. Thence the boundary turns eastward and follows said south line to Point D located at its intersection with the west edge of the main driveway. Thence the boundary turns northward and follows the west edge of said driveway to Point A, the point of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary of the Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel property closely encompasses the building on its original site within a larger tract of land historically associated with Oak Hill Cemetery. The building stands across the main driveway from the actual burial ground, and the latter has not been evaluated as to its eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Furthermore, the Town of Rockingham has received a grant from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation to assist the rehabilitation of the chapel, and Division policy assigns priority to National Register nomination of buildings involved in projects partly funded by grants of State and Federal funds.

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Photographs

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The following information repeats for all photographs:

Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel
Rockingham, Vermont
Credit: Hugh H. Henry
Date: April 1990
Negative filed at Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

Photograph 1
Setting of chapel in cemetery with Oak Hill in background; view
looking northwest.

Photograph 2
Main (east) and south facades; view looking northwest.

Photograph 3
Main (east) and north facades; view looking southwest.

Photograph 4
Rear (west) facade; view looking northeast.

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PROPERTY OWNER

Town of Rockingham
P. O. Box 370
Bellows Falls, Vermont 05101

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91001613

Date Listed: 11/14/91

Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel
Property Name

Windham
County

VT
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Sir 
Signature of the Keeper

11-14-91
Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

8. Statement of Significance: Period of Significance

The documented period of significance for the property is the same as the significant date, c.1885.

This information was confirmed with Elsa Gilbertson, VTSHPO, by telephone.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without attachment)