

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

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 Ridgetop Church  
other names/site number Highland Chapel Union Church (preferred)

2. Location

street & number Highland Avenue N/A not for publication  
city, town Ridgetop N/A vicinity  
state Tennessee code TN county Robertson code 147 zip code 37157

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</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>0</u> objects
			<u>0</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.  
Robert L. Hays 9/17/91  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission  
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. Entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet. 10/29/91  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain):  
for Signature of the Keeper  
Date of Action

---

**6. Function or Use**

---

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious structure

---

---

---

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious structure

---

---

---

---

**7. Description**

---

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne

---

---

---

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete block

---

walls WOOD

---

roof ASPHALT

---

other WOOD

---

---

---

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

---

Highland Chapel Union Church is located on Highland Avenue in Ridgetop (pop. 1,305), Robertson County, Tennessee. This small Queen Anne style church, built in 1906, sits on small lot near the Ridgetop Tunnel. On the south side of the church, there is an older house, a section foreman's house, and, directly in front or east of the church, there are several of the original summer residences in an area that was called the enclosure. In 1958, a small manse was built on an adjacent lot to the north of the church.

The church building now consists of the sanctuary and the original Sunday School rooms, approximately eight feet above the street level, and a rear Sunday School addition at grade. The building is sheathed with weatherboarding, which has always been painted white, above the high watertable line. The lower portion of the building is covered with cedar shake shingles, painted green. The lower portion of the exterior walls splays away from the upper walls about eighteen inches. The original portion of the church is covered by a cross-gable, bellcast, hip roof with wide overhanging eaves with modillions.

The approach to the church is from a broad parking space in the front, or east side, of the church and it consists of a wide entrance walk leading towards the center of the front of the building. This walkway then branches off to the north and south into two smaller walkways which lead to the two elevated entry porches, one on each side of the front, or east, facade of the church.

The east facade of the church consists of a projecting center bay, flanked by the two entrances. The central bay consists of three two-over-two windows, surmounted by a bellcast hip roof with a three-light hip roof dormer. On the south side of the central bay is the primary entrance porch, located under an open, square, bell tower. Entrances to the building from the porch are located on the north and east walls. The north wall entrance consists of the original double doors surmounted by a two-light transom. The entrance on the east wall is composed of a single-leaf door surmounted by a single-light transom. The tower is covered with shingle siding at the roof level, weatherboard siding on the posts that support the bell tower roof, and then shingles located under the bellcast, pyramidal roof. A metal finial tops the tower.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 2 Highland Chapel Union Church

To the north of the center bay is a recessed entrance porch covered with a shed roof supported by a square column. Matching pilasters are located on the south and east walls. Entrance from the porch includes the original double doors surmounted by a two-light transom on the south wall and a single door entry on the east wall topped by a single-light transom. The double doors open into the sanctuary, and the single door opens into the Sunday School room.

The north and south sides of the church are identical, each composed of four, two-over-two windows on the original portion of the building and a single-leaf glass and wood entrance door and small, paired, horizontally-divided, two-over-two windows in the slightly projecting addition. All windows in the original portion of the church are of textured glass with a painted diamond, or quarrels, pattern.

The rear, or west side, of the building consists of the 1967 Sunday School room addition with two sets of paired, horizontally-divided, two-over-two windows. The addition has a low pitched roof and no decorative features on the cornice.

The interior of the original sanctuary portion of the church follows the Akron plan found in many Sunday School buildings. It is primarily a single open room with square support columns between the sanctuary and the Sunday School rooms. The Sunday School rooms can be separated from the sanctuary portion of the room with doors that roll up into the wall. The inside walls, the high tray ceiling, and the pull-down doors to the Sunday School rooms are made of four-inch wide, maple, tongue and groove strips. These have been finished with clear varnish and have harmoniously mellowed into a soft brown color, consistently throughout the structure. The maple walls and ceiling of the sanctuary are unique in nature in that it has been fifty or more years since any new finish has been applied to either the walls or the ceilings. In 1967, the blank wall behind the pulpit was extended to provide for a small choir loft. The wall covering for this extended section is of veneer paneling.

The floors are of white ash and, until recently, they were left bare. Wear and tear, despite care and waxing, plus several sandings, took their toll and, in recent years, the congregation was advised that further sanding could not be done; as a result, carpeting was installed.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 3 Highland Chapel Union Church

The original church benches are still in use, they are metal castings with oak slat backs and seats. These benches are similar to the reversible benches found on streetcars of the late 1800's. In the rear corner of the Sunday School room, a rope hangs connected to the church bell.

Some natural light is furnished from windows around the sanctuary and from three windows in the upper part of the rear of the sanctuary. Originally, the church was lighted by kerosene lamps, followed next by carbide lights, until electricity reached the Ridgetop area. The original dark green (exterior) and white (interior) enameled fixtures were replaced by a church youth group project in 1955; the new glass fixtures are marked with the cross. The sanctuary retains its original integrity with its wood walls and ceiling, window, painted windows, and pews.

The sanctuary is raised above ground level by a number of feet. In 1952, the basement was extended from a small area to the entire underside of the original structure and more Sunday School space, a scout room, dining room, and a kitchen were added.

In 1967, a building program led to three new Sunday School rooms and two new bathrooms being added to the rear of the old structure. The interior wall of the Sunday School rooms are of veneer paneling. At the same time, central gas heating and air conditioning were added. In 1990, new kitchen appliances and counters were added and significant painting was done. The basement ceilings were lowered to cover the duct work installed at the time of the 1967 air conditioning.

Concrete walks have been added to each side of the building to provide rear access to the sanctuary, the new rooms, and the basement. Recently, a concrete ramp was added to one side entrance to enable the elderly and disabled more easily to enter the sanctuary.

Limited low shrubbery has been placed in front of the building. One large maple tree is on one corner of the land at street side and one ash tree, approaching four feet in diameter, is at the other corner.

**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  
1906

Significant Dates  
1906

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.

Highland Chapel Union Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C for its architectural significance to Ridgetop, Robertson County, Tennessee.

The Highland Chapel Union Church is located in the former resort community of Ridgetop on the Davidson-Robertson county line. Ridgetop was first settled as a small farming community. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the area attracted wealthy Nashville businessmen as a retreat from the city's heat. Because the incline was extremely steep at Ridgetop, all trains had to stop at the community for assistance from a "pusher" engine. This stop facilitated the commute from Nashville for the summer residents who began their summer migration in the early 1890s. Ridgetop flourished and reached its peak as a resort between 1907 and 1915, in part due to the completion, in 1905, of the Louisville and Nashville tunnel, which provided better train service to and from Nashville.

At the beginning of the development of the resort community and as the town grew and changed, church services were held whenever a preacher could be found. Year-round residents held special Christmas programs, Easter Egg hunts, and all the traditional events that were found in larger city churches, but without a church. Other churches were too distant. The summer residents soon recognized that a church building was required that would serve the needs of the permanent residents, as well as those of the summer residents. The community began an experiment in religious tolerance that was unheard of in the Robertson County area -- an interdenominational or non-denominational Independent Union Church was formed to meet the needs of all protestant members. On September 25, 1899, for the sum of \$1.00, land was bought on O'Bryan Avenue in Ridgetop from Theodore and Emma Woodruff for the purpose of building an Independent Union Church, the deed providing for the church's use by all protestant denominations. As a result, the Oak Dell Church was built in 1900. This church burned in 1905,

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A  
 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 less than one acre

UTM References

A 

1	6	5	2	0	2	0	0	4	0	2	7	5	5	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

  
C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

  
D 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Greenbrier, Tennessee 307NE

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundaries for Highland Chapel Union Church include all of lot 5 on the accompanying Robertson County Tax Map.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries for Highland Chapel Union Church contain all land historically associated with the building and are sufficient to protect the property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Rebecca Derseweh and Charles Wilson  
organization Highland Chapel Union Church date September 1991  
street & number Betts Rd and 1954 Woodruff Avenue telephone (615)643-0628 & 859-1725  
city or town Ridgetop state Tennessee zip code 37152

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2 Highland Chapel Union Church

---

and all of its records were lost. After the fire, Sunday School and church services were held in the Ridgetop City Assembly Hall, in the Railroad Station, and in White School.

While the church itself had no fire insurance coverage on the building, one of the church leaders, George O'Bryan, in some manner, individually had secured fire insurance coverage. From the insurance proceeds and from contributions, he led a successful drive to build a new church. In 1906, property was leased from the Louisville & Nashville Railroad on Highland Drive in Ridgetop for a term of thirty-five years, and the present church was built, bordering on the old railroad bed that ran through Ridgetop. The church was called Ridge Top Church until 1920, at which time it was changed to Highland Chapel Union Church.

The bell in the tower, through efforts of Nashvillians who spent summers in Ridgetop, was donated to the church in 1906 by Moore Memorial Church (now Westminster Presbyterian Church) in Nashville, which, at the time, had received a donation of new bells and was thus in a position to donate an old church bell to the Ridgetop church.

In the early 1900's, the railroad embarked upon a major project consisting of a tunnel almost directly under Highland Avenue and railroad track in front of the church. The completion of the railroad project brought about the removal of the above-ground railroad track and left a widened expanse in front of the church for parking and public travel. In 1941, the railroad deeded this property to the church for the sum of \$50.00, title to the property vesting in the duly-elected trustees of the church.

Soon after being organized, Highland Chapel Union Church became associated with the divinity school of Vanderbilt University, and it historically relied on the college to aid in finding qualified ministerial students who could furnish ministerial services to the church while, at the same time, they would receive experience in pastoring a church. At the George O'Bryan House (NR 2/23/89), located in the enclosure across the street is a small house known as the preacher house. This house served as a place for the student minister to study when he came up to Ridgetop on Saturday afternoon before going to prayer meeting on Saturday night. The church, until the last six years, relied upon part-time divinity school students and graduate students from Vanderbilt University School of Religion.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 3 Highland Chapel Union Church

---

Highland Chapel Union Church is an excellent example of a small, Queen Anne style church with its shingle and weatherboard siding. At the time of the construction of the second church building in 1906, there were no other church buildings inside the present Ridgetop city limits or within a broad adjacent area outside the Ridgetop community. Later churches built in the community were small frame buildings that have been replaced. A small white frame building built after Highland Chapel was constructed by the Church of Christ. The Church of Christ group merged with a group in Greenbrier which built a new church in Greenbrier city limits, retaining the Ridgetop structure for incidental use.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 2 Highland Chapel Union Church

---

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"A Summer House, A Winter House (A History of Ridgetop)," included in The Fifth Stanza of The Song of the Night Riders. Nashville, Tennessee: Watkins Institute, 1969.

Henderson, Deborah Kelley. Robertson County's Heritage of Homes. Springfield, Tennessee: Robertson County Antiquities Foundation, 1979.

"History and Charter." Highland Chapel Union Church, Church Office.

"Railroads and Resorts," The Times. Springfield, Tennessee. April 18, 1985, p. 8.

Ridgetop Historical Society. Ridgetop - A Unique Tennessee Community. Nashville: West Nashville Printing, Inc., 1985.

"Ridgetop Once Popular as Summer Retreat," in special supplement, "Recognizing Robertson County's Heritage," The Springfield Herald. Springfield, Tennessee. July 1, 1976, p. 11.

Robertson County Deed Records, 1893-1923. Robertson County Courthouse, Springfield, Tennessee.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Photos \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1 Highland Chapel Union Church

---

Highland Chapel Union Church  
Highland Avenue  
Ridgetop, Robertson County, Tennessee  
Photos by: Patrick Ralph  
Date: December 1990  
Negs: Tennessee Historical Commission  
Nashville, Tennessee

East facade, looking west  
#1 of 18

North elevation, looking south  
#2 of 18

South elevation and bell tower, looking northwest  
#3 of 18

West and north elevation, looking southeast  
#4 of 18

Detail, bell tower  
#5 of 18

Detail, bell tower  
#6 of 18

Detail, bell tower  
#7 of 18

Sanctuary  
#8 of 18

Sanctuary  
#9 of 18

Sanctuary  
#10 of 18

Sanctuary  
#11 of 18

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Photos \_\_\_\_\_ Page 2

Highland Chapel Union Church

---

Sanctuary  
#12 of 18

Sanctuary  
#13 of 18

Sanctuary  
#14 of 18

Hall between sanctuary and Sunday school addition  
#15 of 18

Sunday school room, addition  
#16 of 18

Fellowship hall, basement  
#17 of 18

Historic view, ca. 1908  
#18 of 18

