

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

MAY 16 1984

date entered

JUN 14 1984

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

1. Name

historic People's Unitarian Church

and/or common People's Unitarian Church (VY04-5)

2. Location

street & number 1640 "N" Street

na not for publication

city, town Ord

na vicinity of

state Nebraska

code 031

county Valley

code 175

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> na 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
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Roye and Nancy Lindsay

street & number Route # 1

city, town Burwell

X vicinity of

state Nebraska 68823

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Clerk

street & number Valley County Courthouse

city, town Ord

state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebraska Historic Building Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date On-going federal state county local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln

state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>na</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The People's Unitarian Church is perhaps one of the most unusual church buildings in Nebraska. The first level is a square plan with brick wall material; the second floor is octagon-shaped and covered in wooden shingles. The second floor houses one large room, the meeting hall for church services. The integrity of the building is good. Although the building has served various functions since the closing of the church, the exterior and the meeting hall are little changed.

Brick wall material on first level, wooden shingle wall material on second floor and in gables; square shape on first, octagonal on second; two stories; polygonal hipped roof with four gabled dormers; central bay on first level of main (south) facade projects from the main entrance; first floor is slightly below grade; fifteen-over-fifteen pane windows with prominent Palladian windows on the four compass-point walls of the second floor; 1901; the room arrangement on the first floor has been changed, the exterior and second floor are relatively unchanged; William Wentworth, Ord, builder.

The second floor is one open octagonal-shaped room thirty-seven feet in diameter with a domed ceiling. The staircase rises along the south (main entrance) wall and is decoratively topped with balustrade and finials (see photo # 6). The eight windows, including the four large Palladian windows, and the tall ceiling help create the feeling of a light, airy space, in a relatively small room.

The first floor is about three feet below grade and was originally divided into library, reading room, kitchen, furnace room, and cloak-room. It was last used as an apartment, but is currently vacant.

None of the various sources checked has revealed the name of an architect. The plans presumably originated locally, for it does not appear that the policy of the Unitarian Church nationally was to supply church plans. Also, octagon churches are rare in the denomination. A newspaper article of the time credits the pastor, Wayne P. Smith with ". . . laying plans and raising funds for . . . a new church building".¹ However, it is unclear if this means designing the building.

¹Valley County Times, July 5, 1901, p.: 2.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1901 **Builder/Architect** William Wentworth, Ord, Nebraska

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The People's Unitarian Church of Ord is significant to the architectural heritage of the state as one of the few octagonal buildings and one of two examples in religious architecture. The building is distinctive in the different shape and material of each floor, which reflect the different functions of the church. The Unitarian Church has had few churches or societies in Nebraska; this building is one of two old enough to be eligible for the National Register.

Unitarian societies are known to have been organized in five Nebraska communities, however, Lincoln, Ord, and Omaha are the only cities known to have extant Unitarian Church buildings. The first Unitarian Church of Omaha and the People's Church at Ord are the only ones which meet the fifty-year criterion of the National Register. The Omaha church was listed in the National Register on 3-20-80; with this nomination all eligible, known, Unitarian churches in the state have been nominated.

The Ord church was first organized in early 1899 when the Rev. A. H. Tyrer was compelled to resign from the Episcopal Church because of his liberal views. Some of his parishioners left the church with him and hired him to preach. A Unitarian Society was organized shortly thereafter.¹ Plans for a church building were started in 1901 with the site selected in April² and excavation beginning in August. The dedication was held November 11, 1901. The final cost was about \$2,500. The church maintained ministers from 1900 to 1909, but financial problems continued to plague the congregation. By 1911, services were discontinued. The association was disbanded in 1914 and the building was sold to the Commodore Foote Post No. 40 of the Grand Army of the Republic.

The building served as a club and meeting hall for the G.A.R. until 1921 and then for the American Legion, Ord Fidelity Post No. 38, until 1961. It then housed various commercial uses and the privately-operated Valley County Museum until purchased by the present owners in September, 1982.

Several octagonal buildings are known in Nebraska; two houses, two churches, barns, sale barns, pavillions, etc.; however, extant examples are rare. The two houses (William Nutter House, rural Buffalo County and the George F. Lee House, rural Otoe County, NRHP 11-23-77), were built in the 1870's and 80's and are, therefore, different in period of construction and original use. The other extant octagon church (the First Congregational Church, U.C.C., Naponee, Franklin County, NRHP, 9-14-82) is a one-story frame structure built in 1887. Few octagonal buildings were erected or have survived in the state, which emphasizes the significance of this rare example in religious architecture.

A major variation between this building and other octagons is the different plan and material on each floor. The octagonal portion was the meeting hall on second floor; the square first level was for the library, reading room, furnace, kitchen, etc. The separate functions of each level are reflected in the different plans and materials.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Ord, Nebr.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	4	5	0	5	8	4	0	4	6	0	5	3	2	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 5, Block 28, Original Town, City of Ord, Valley County, Nebraska, the property historically associated with this building.

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

state NA code county code

state NA code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Penelope Chatfield Sodhi, Preservation Historian

organization Nebraska State Historical Society date March 1984

street & number 1500 "R" Street telephone (402) 471-3270

city or town Lincoln state Nebraska

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 Merrin O'Knecht 5/7/84

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society date

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

J. Alvarado Byrne
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 6-14-84

Attest: _____ date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Significance Item number 8 Page 2

The various rooms on the first level may have required more space than was required in the hall. Newspaper articles indicate that the library and reading rooms were considered important to the mission of the church, and considering the size of this level compared to the second floor this appears to be true. The minister, Wayne P. Smith, who may have played a role in the design of the building, writes:

"The church that toils and wins men for freedom and accuracy of thought, nobility in character, and pure fellowship, is the church that abides forever growing and developing at every stage of social progress. It faces and seeks to master the new truths of science, new economic, moral, religious and social conditions, and insure men of the her(i)tage which is really theirs."³

The next month a notice in the newspaper stated the lower level will be "used for a reading room in which will probably be placed an extensive library."⁴ Earlier in May, the newspaper discussed the plans for the new Central Church in Chicago which included a twelve to fifteen story building with rooms for settlement work, library and reading, billiards and pool, kindergarten, and other educational activities. These ideas may have influenced the Ord church members.

A library was established in the church; it was called the Ord Unity Free Library, a public library. When the church building was sold to the G.A.R., the library went with it and apparently continued for a few years. After the First World War, however, the library was not maintained. The Ord Township Library was organized in 1922, and the books remaining from the Unity Library were turned over to the new public organization.⁵ Although the Unity Library was not the first attempt at a public library in Ord, it was an important part of the city's library development.

¹Letter. Mingerson Coombs, President, Unitarian Association of Ord, to National Unitarian Association, Boston, Massachusetts, August 30, 1899. Original in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Mass.

²Valley County Times, April 26, 1901, p. 8: 4.

³Valley County Times, July 12, 1901, p. 1: 2.

⁴Valley County Times, August 23, 1901, p. 5: 3.

⁵Ord Quiz, April 3, 1940

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CONTINUATION SHEET Bibliography ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Letters, Mingerson Coombs, president, Unitarian Association of Ord, to National Unitarian Association, Boston, August 30, 1899, and letter from Benjamin Bridgford to Mr. St. John, September 22, 1901. Located at Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Lindsay, Nancy. Nebraska Historic Sites Survey Form - The People's Unitarian Church of Ord. April, 1983.

Monroe, Lynn Lewis, "American Octagons," Early American Life, April, 1983, pp. 45-50.

Ord Quiz, April 3, 1940.

Ord Quiz, November 18, 1982.

Valley County Times, April to November, 1901.