**Form 10-300**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. **NAME**
   - Common:
   - AND/OR HISTORIC: Unity Chapel, S of Spring Green off WI 23

2. **LOCATION**
   - STREET AND NUMBER: South of Spring Green—3 miles—located on County Highway T, 2 mile east of State Highway 25.
   - CITY OR TOWN: Spring Green
   - CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Second
   - STATE: Wisconsin
   - CODE: 55
   - COUNTY: Iowa
   - CODE: 049

3. **CLASSIFICATION**
   - CATEGORY (Check One):
     - District
     - Site
     - Structure
     - Object
   - OWNERSHIP (Check One):
     - Public
     - Private
     - Both
   - PUBLIC ACQUISITION:
     - In Process
     - Being Considered
   - STATUS:
     - Occupied
     - Unoccupied
   - ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC:
     - Yes:
       - Restricted
       - Unrestricted
     - No

4. **OWNER OF PROPERTY**
   - OWNER'S NAME: William Wesley Peters
   - STREET AND NUMBER: Taliesin
   - CITY OR TOWN: Spring Green
   - STATE: Wisconsin
   - CODE: 55

5. **LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**
   - COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
     - Register of Deeds
     - Iowa County Courthouse
     - CITY OR TOWN: Dodgeville
     - STATE: Wisconsin
     - CODE: 55

6. **REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**
   - TITLE OF SURVEY:
     - Wisconsin's Historic Preservation Plan, Vol. 2: The Inventory
   - DATE OF SURVEY: 1973
   - DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
     - State Historical Society of Wisconsin
     - STREET AND NUMBER: 816 State Street
     - CITY OR TOWN: Madison
     - STATE: Wisconsin
     - CODE: 53706
     - ENTRY NUMBER: 55
Unity Chapel is a small, simple building with an "L"-shaped plan, steeply-pitched hipped roof, and small belfry on top of the roof at the intersection of the gables. A Shingle Style building, it is uniformly covered with a layer of wood shingles on both the roof and the walls, and it rests on rock-faced, rusticated stone foundation walls.

In plan, the building is a reversed-"L" with its short leg pointing due north, and its long leg pointing east. Entry to the chapel is gained from the north through the short leg and its open entry porch covered by the extended main hipped roof resting on two square corner piers. The porch is three steps above grade. The main chapel hall occupies the east-west leg of the "L".

The chapel hall is illuminated by double-hung windows placed in groups of three on the north, south, and west walls. The east wall is blank. Each window has twelve lights in the upper sash, and one large pane of glass in the lower sash.

The unusual belfry on the chapel is square in plan with a bell-cast inflected-hipped roof and battered base. Each of the four sides has a semi-circular, arched opening behind which is the chapel's bell.

The current appearance of the chapel is not changed from the original. It is boarded up most of the year, and is open only for short periods during the summer when its owner moves to Wisconsin with the Taliesin group. The chapel is used only by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation for occasional summer services.

The chapel is located in a graveyard which contains the grave of Frank Lloyd Wright as well as those of many of his relatives and associates.
Unity Chapel is architecturally significant because of its associations with two major Midwestern architects: Joseph Lyman Silsbee and Frank Lloyd Wright. It was designed in Silsbee's Chicago office and built in 1886, before Wright became an actual Silsbee employe. In spite of this Wright "looked after the interior," according to Unity magazine of August 28, 1886, in his earliest-known architectural work. This is not too surprising since Silsbee's client for the chapel was Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Wright's uncle, for whom Silsbee had designed All Souls Church in Chicago the previous year. Shortly after Unity Chapel was built Wright moved to Chicago and entered the employ of Silsbee for nearly one year: his first architectural employment.

Silsbee was a major Midwestern architect practicing in the Shingle Style, of which the chapel is a relatively simple example. As a teacher of young draftsmen Silsbee was penultimate, as is evidenced by his substantial influence on Wright and on other major architects in his employ of the latter's generation, including George W. Maher and George Grant Elmslie. Were it not for the fact that these several young apprentices found their way into Silsbee's office, however, history might well have recorded his practice as being that of a competent, but not altogether brilliant, architect. His designs during the 1885 to 1889 period were characterized by increasing simplification of the Shingle Style, which had achieved popularity in the East. Unity Chapel is simplified in the extreme, compared to preceding Shingle Style designs, and is practically devoid of ornamentation. This chapel is one of only two buildings designed by Silsbee known to remain standing in Wisconsin.

Wright was strongly influenced by Silsbee, both in his developing sense of residential design and his drafting techniques. After leaving Silsbee's office for that of Adler and Sullivan in about February, 1888, he continued designing independently in the Shingle Style for some time; and the romantic influence of Silsbee never left his designs. So proficient had Wright become under Silsbee's tutelage, that it is generally felt that he was given Adler and Sullivan's residential commissions for solution.

The Unity Chapel stands as the only remaining Wisconsin architectural example of the significant relationship which developed between Frank Lloyd Wright and his first "teacher," Joseph Lyman Silsbee.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Latitudes and Longitudes

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Approximate acreage of nominated property: less than one.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Jeffrey M. Dean, State Preservation Planner

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

816 State Street

Madison

12. STATE LIASON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National □ State □ Local □

Name: James Norton Smith

Title: Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Date: January 11, 1974

13. NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

AR[Signature]

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

ATTEST:

[Signature]

Keeper of The National Register

Date: 7/18/74

GPO 931-894