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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Little Church of the West

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 3960 Las Vegas Blvd. South not for publication

city or town Las Vegas vicinity

state Nevada code NV county Clark code 003 zip code 89119

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ronald M. Jones
Signature of certifying official/Title

7/23/92
Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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:)

for Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Antoniella Rose

9/14/92

Little Church of the West
Name of Property

Clark County, Nevada
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> | buildings |
| _____ | _____ | sites |
| _____ | _____ | structures |
| _____ | _____ | objects |
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

None

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/Wedding Chapel

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/Wedding Chapel

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals/Late Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Wood
roof Wood
other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Architecture

Period of Significance

1942

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Walter Zick and Harris Sharp, Architects

William J. Moore, Architect

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Little Church of the West
Name of Property

Clark County, Nevada
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---|----|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 6 | 64 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 0 |
| Zone | Easting | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

3

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Zone | Easting | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan E. Ramey

organization _____ date April, 1992

street & number 4509 Sun Valley Drive telephone (702) 458-6124

city or town Las Vegas state Nevada zip code 89121

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Description of Present and Historical Appearance

The Little Church of the West is a free standing, single story miniaturized replica of a Western mining town church. It sits on the South Eastern end of the Hacienda hotel grounds facing Las Vegas Blvd. South. The building is surrounded by lawns, trees and concrete walks edged with privet hedging. A hitching post located out front displays a wooden sign, with the name of the business, consistent with the Western flavor of the facility. Surrounding the immediate grounds is a paved parking area. This wedding chapel is constructed of cedar with a vaulted roof and steeple which make it unique in Las Vegas. The Little Church of the West is the only operating chapel which makes reference to Las Vegas' past Western and mining heritage. It is also one of only two remaining free-standing facilities engaged in performing marriages on the Las Vegas "strip".

The exterior dimensions of the building are 42 feet in length by 19 feet in width. The foundation and floor are concrete over which carpet has been laid. While the exterior is made completely from cedar, the interior is stained and varnished California redwood. The cathedral ceiling is open-beamed and vaulted. There are ten (10) windows of equal dimensions, 48" high by 30" wide. All have redwood frames and are fitted with screens, iron security bars and drapes. General entrance is gained through canopied double doors at the front of the building (facing Las Vegas Blvd.) which measure 48" wide by 80" high. There is also a single door used for private access under the steeple. Also above the main entrance is a three-lite decorative window covering a total area of 5 feet in width and 6 feet in height. There is also a smaller window over the steeple door.

In addition to the one main room, there is a small alcove under the steeple which is used by the employees for business purposes. The interior also contains a redwood altar at the east wall. The altar area measures 14 feet in width by 8 feet in depth. The right side of the area contains an antique pump

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organ which, while not originally in this property, adds to the feel of the building. A functional Hammond organ with pipes is located at the rear of the building. Seating is provided by 10 pine pews each 6 feet 2 inches in length with 5 placed on either side of a central aisle. These pews are probably the original ones built with the chapel in 1942. Lighting is provided by 4 hanging Victorian lamps located over the center aisle. According to Bob Flint, long time employee and photographer, (since 1958) these are also original to the building. They were gas lamps used in 19th-Century railroad cars and have been converted to electricity for modern usage. Other interior items consist of moveable or temporary business equipment necessary for the daily operation of the chapel which do not compromise the structure.

There are no visual signs of vandalism or physical change in the building since its construction as part of the Last Frontier Hotel resort complex in 1942. It has, however, been re-located twice. The first move was on June 9, 1954, at which time the building was moved in its entirety to a new location on the hotel's property. This was necessary because of a hotel expansion project at the original site. The second move took place in 1979 at which time, the building was located further South on Las Vegas Blvd. The building of The Fashion Show Mall necessitated this move. On both occasions the Little Church of the West retained its structural integrity as it was moved in its entirety. The only dismantling occurred during the second move when the top of the steeple was detached. It was re-secured upon arrival. Both moves utilized equipment, in the form of moving trucks, large enough to accomodate the complete building.

The integrity of the building and its sense of place was maintained during both moves. The first move was accomplished entirely within the Last Frontier Hotel complex. When moved a second time, the Hacienda Hotel provided a new site of like environment. The Last Frontier was located at 3120 Las Vegas Blvd, South so both locations are on the Las Vegas "strip" and both are involved in the same business of casino gaming and resort hotels which provide continuity of historical setting. Since its inception The Little Church of the West has also maintained integrity of purpose. At no time has the building been used for anything other than performing marriage ceremonies. Its original purpose as the first structure designed specifically for use as a wedding chapel remains intact fifty years later.

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In the past fifty years the Little Church of the West has contributed to the economic, architectural and cultural history of Las Vegas and Nevada. The chapel is qualified for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C. The chapel is distinctive architecturally while representative in activity of a concern of great importance to the state and its inhabitants. The wedding business is an economic venture long sought after by the government and the people and, consequently, affects many aspects of the past as well as the present. From the turn of the century, marriage, along with divorce, was viewed as a viable economic pursuit in Nevada thus providing a distinctive statewide history. Specialized laws to govern these procedures developed which became entwined with gaming and the eventual evolution of the resort hotel. The emergence of the wedding chapel and the businesses associated with the ceremony is an important part of Nevada history in many ways. The Little Church of the West is an excellent expression of the history of wedding chapels and the wedding industry in Nevada.

The Little Church of the West was conceived by William J. Moore Jr. in 1941 as part of his plans for a resort hotel, a relatively new venture in Las Vegas. Moore was architect and builder for his uncle R.E. Griffith of California. Moore described his reason for inclusion of a wedding chapel as an attempt to garner a share of the lucrative and expanding wedding chapel market in the area. The few chapels in operation at the time were located on the outskirts of the city on access roads. The highway to Los Angeles was oiled, using federal government funds made possible by the advent of W.W. II, thereby making the future Las Vegas Blvd. a prime location for the California markets.¹ Also, gaming was becoming an increasingly important aspect of the economy and the new resort hotels, like the Last Frontier, provided many added attractions designed to extend the length of stay and attract more tourists.

While the Little Church of the West was built to attract business to the Last Frontier, it was also the first such facility designed specifically as a wedding chapel. Others already in operation were converted from buildings which had a prior use. It is also one of only two free-standing wedding chapels on the Las Vegas "Strip". William Moore expressed in his oral history (1981) his interest in reflecting Western

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heritage and his choice of the church to make this statement. Making several trips to mining towns in Nevada and California, he finally selected a church still in operation in a Northern California mining town. (name of town unknown) After taking many photographs he returned to Las Vegas and employed a local firm of architects, Walter Zick and Harris Sharp, to scale down the measurements. They miniaturized the church and the resulting blueprints were used for construction of the Little Church of the West. William Moore and the construction crew of the original Last Frontier are responsible for the building and form of the wedding chapel which remains in its original state.² The use of the Western theme and replication of an authentic structure make this building unique in Las Vegas. It still reflects the mining heritage of the region while actively participating uninterrupted for fifty years in a business for which it was intended at the time of construction.

Architectural significance is not the only context for evaluating this important building. Its business of conducting weddings in a competitive and peculiarly Nevada business has continued unabated since opening its doors. Divorce and marriage were heavily promoted in Nevada in the 1930s and 40s to supplement economic development. The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce gained heavy support from member businesses to promote the uniqueness and ease of Nevada divorce and marriage laws. An appropriate brochure was commissioned which proclaimed "marriage licenses are issued immediately upon application to the county clerk, 24 hours a day, Sundays and holidays. No delay is required."³ Local newspaper reports include many statistics on growing numbers of weddings performed, the effects of neighboring state laws on the local market as well as such things as the difficulties presented by wartime gas rationing and state and local interest in the matter.

The extreme interest in the wedding industry expressed in the war years was not new to Nevada: as early as 1900 the state gained attention as a divorce mecca. Ten years later notoriety and widespread publicity created an outcry by reformers of the Progressive era. The current six month residency law required for divorce was changed to 1 year. This reform was shortlived, however, as local businessmen were more concerned with economics than morals. By 1915 the six month residency law prevailed once again. Politicians of this era were involved in promoting Nevada as a marriage and divorce center and defending it against attacks from other states. It was seen nationally as a threat to the fundamentals of the American family. Also clerical leaders were claiming Nevada was making quick marriage and easy divorce a national disease. State leaders countered that allegation by stating that wedlock was not a padlock and that in the beginning marriage was only a civil contract not a religious one.⁴

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By 1931 another Progressive era reform was negated when gaming was returned to the state after an absence of some twenty years. On May 1, of that year the divorce residency requirement was lowered to six weeks. (It had been reduced to 3 months in 1927) This enabled Nevada to stay ahead of reduced residence requirements in Idaho and Arkansas.⁵ While divorce continued to gain in notoriety, Las Vegas' reputation was being built as a marriage center. An unnamed county official is quoted as saying "we knot 'em as well as untie 'em." He further added that "to speed things up the whole town assists in tendering information." Weddings consistently out numbered divorces as shown in the statistics for 1932 when there were 3,989 divorces, representing 42 per 1,000 population, and 7,088 marriages or 76 per 1,000 population.⁶

By the outbreak of World War II many Westerners visited the state to take advantage of the gaming and new outdoor sporting facilities. There was skiing and water sports at Lake Tahoe and the newly created Lake Mead in the Southern part of the state provided additional opportunities. While gaming provided the most important incentive for attracting tourism, easy marriage and divorce laws made a significant contribution. Easy weddings were aided by no waiting period and no requirements for medical examinations. The only restrictions were on age: girls under 16 and boys under 18 could not marry and girls 16 to 18 and boys 18 to 21 required parental consent. The fee for a license was \$2 and the ceremony fee had a \$5 minimum and whatever else the groom contributed.

Easy marriage and divorce laws came to play a large part in the economic life of Reno and Las Vegas and, according to historian Richard Lillard, they also influenced how townspeople viewed them which was with tolerance. Gaming enhanced the commonly held view that Nevada was a place of daring. The economic aspect of easy divorce, weddings and gaming allowed for boosterism by city businesses north and south through the Chamber of Commerce and other methods such as newspapers. Participation in ceremonies at local wedding chapels such as the Little Church of the West by well known celebrities from many walks of life further fueled the notoriety and, subsequently, the growth of the industry.

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From the beginning the Little Church of the West has been the site of many celebrity weddings. In 1946 and 1992 the advertisement in the Las Vegas Review-Journal announces it as the "wedding place of the stars". Among the many famous weddings in the chapel are those of Robert Goulet, Judy Garland, Fernando Lamas and Arlene Dahl, Micky Rooney, Zsa Zsa Gabor and George Sanders, Betty Grable and Harry James, Margaret Whiting, Dudley Moore and Telly Savalas. From its inception as a gaming and resort town, Las Vegas drew many contemporary notables and continues to do so. This makes the business of weddings and this wedding chapel part of the cultural history of the city and the state.

Famous Hollywood stars, directors and other personalities were not the only providers of impetus to the marriage industry. Indirectly, the federal government became the largest contributor. The construction of Hoover Dam and birth of Boulder City, the placement of Basic Magnesium Incorporated (an important wartime industry which made magnesium, a lightweight metal used for bombs and aircraft) at Henderson, the build-up of the Gunnery School at current Nellis Air Force Base and other statewide defense spending made a huge impact. All these federally funded projects in Nevada and, indeed, in surrounding states like Arizona and California brought more money, easier transportation and most importantly, a large population base upon which Nevada tourism could draw.⁷ Las Vegas experienced a huge surge in the number of tourists who had money to gamble. The result of this new-found prosperity saw the growth of non-gaming related attractions. It was in this period that the Last Frontier and The Little Church of the West came into being ensuring it a prominent role in the history of the business of marriage and the state.

World War II and its aftermath provided an unprecedented number of marriages and divorces. As men and women went off to war, often for an undetermined amount of time, many married in haste only to divorce and re-marry upon their return. Las Vegas was the destination that a great many people used to solve their matrimonial woes. This service enjoyed a steady growth and an increasing share of the economy. The Clark County Recorder Volume of Recordings from 1909 to the present shows the volume expanding gradually in the 1930s and a more dramatic climb in 1941 and 1942 and again at war's end in 1946 and 1947. The Little Church of the West maintained its generous share of this growing market.

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Tourists and celebrities did not provide the whole market for the wedding chapel business. Many local couples also participated. In fact, the Little Chapel of the West continues to record more than a thousand local couples marrying there each year, and this is not a recent phenomenon as newspaper articles show.

The land for the Last Frontier and the wedding chapel was purchased in early 1941 with the grand opening of the resort following in 1942. William J. Moore Jr. designed the chapel specifically to participate in what was a growing service and which would attract customers to the resort. In Moore's own words "marriages were promoted quite thoroughly at the time."⁸ It later became part of a larger added attraction to the hotel and casino called Frontier Village. This was also designed by Moore. When the chapel first opened, a director was hired by the hotel. According to Moore's oral history the first director was Jerrie Wycoff and the only other one he remembered and mentions by name is Helen Connors. The Frontier Hotel was sold to Summa Corporation in July, 1976 which decided to remove the wedding chapel. The ground it occupied had been sold and would soon accommodate the Fashion Show Mall. The building was then sold to a Merle Richards who was responsible for its move to the Hacienda property in 1979. The Southern Nevada Historical Society applauded this undertaking and saw fit to award Mr. Richards a Certificate of Appreciation to be presented at their annual banquet on April 21, 1979. The current owner, Greg Smith, acquired the chapel in 1983. As previously stated, this facility has never been used for any other purpose than the one for which it was intended.

Not only has the Little Church of the West been an active participant in a business distinct to Nevada, it is also distinct in Las Vegas in design. The wedding industry has been actively pursued on a statewide level for almost one hundred years. This particular chapel was designed fifty years ago, making it a participant in half the industry's history and making it eligible for listing on the National Historical Register. In addition, its unique architectural design and integrity of original materials and form give it aesthetic value as well as providing an attempt to make reference to the state's mining heritage.

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¹Eugene P. Moehring, Resort city in the Sunbelt (Nevada, 1989) 12.

²William J. Moore Jr., An oral History, conducted by Elizabeth Nelson Patrick in 1981, (Reno, 1985) 41.

³Richard Lillard, Desert Challenge, (New York, 1942) 335-376.

⁴Ibid

⁵Russell R. Elliott, History of Nevada, (Nebraska 1973) 284-5.

⁶Richard Lillard, Desert Challenge, (New York, 1942) 369.

⁷Eugene P. Moehring, Resort City in the Sunbelt, (Nevada, 1989) 13.

⁸William J. Moore Jr., An Oral History, conducted by Elizabeth Nelson Patrick in 1981, (Reno 1985) 41.

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Section number 9 Page 1

Elliott, Russell R. History of Nevada. Nebraska, 1973.

Hulse, James W. The Silver State. Reno, 1991.

Las Vegas Age.

Las Vegas Review - Journal.

Last Frontier Collection. Special Collections, James Dickinson Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Lillard, Richard. Desert Challenge. New York 1942.

Manis Collection. Special Collections, James Dickinson Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Moehring, Eugene P. Resort City in the Sunbelt. Nevada, 1989.

Moore, William J. Jr. An oral History, conducted by Elizabeth Nelson Patrick, 29 August, 1981. Oral History Program, University of Nevada, Reno, 1985.

Nevada State Museum and Historical Society Research Facility, 700 Twin Lakes Drive, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Roske, Ralph. Las Vegas: A Desert Paradise. Tulsa, 1986.

Special Collections. James Dickinson Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The historic property nominated to the National Register of Historic Places includes the building itself (42' x 19') and not the land on which the building is located. The building is situated at the southeastern corner of the following described tract:

A portion of the Northwest Quarter (NW $\frac{1}{4}$) of the Southeast Quarter (SE $\frac{1}{4}$) Section 29, Township 21 South, Range 61 East, M.D.B.&M., Clark County, Nevada being more particularly described as follows:

Commencing at the Northeast (NE) corner of the Southeast Quarter (SE $\frac{1}{4}$) Section 29; thence North 89°46'53" West along the Northerly line of the Southeast Quarter of said Section 29, a distance of 150.01 feet to a point on the Westerly right-of-way line of U.S. Highway No. 91 (Las Vegas Blvd., South); thence continuing North 89°46'53" west along the Northerly line of the Southeast Quarter (SE $\frac{1}{4}$) of said Section 10 a distance of 1052.58 feet to a point on the Easterly right-of-way line of Interstate No. 15 and U.S. 91 and 466; thence South 00°07'28" West along said right-of-way a distance of 1000.00 feet to a point; thence South 89°46'53" East a distance of 2061.15 feet to a point on the Westerly right-of-way line of U.S. Highway No. 91 (Las Vegas Blvd., South); thence North 00°22'00" West along said right-of-way a distance of 1000.05 feet to the TRUE POINT OF BEGINNING.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary includes the historic building, which is owned separately from the property below it. There are no plans to move this building in the future, and it's location is considered to be fixed in space.