

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

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JAN 4 1985

date entered FEB 7 1985

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

1. Name

historic Union Congregational Church and Parsonage

and/or common (Congregational Church)

2. Location

street & number 110 Bennett Street _____ not for publication

city, town Buffalo N/A vicinity of

state Wyoming code 056 county Johnson code 019

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Members of the Union Congregational Church

street & number 110 Bennett Street

city, town Buffalo _____ vicinity of state Wyoming 82834

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Johnson County Courthouse

street & number 76 North Main

city, town Buffalo _____ state Wyoming 82834

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wyoming Historic Sites Survey _____ has this property been determined eligible? _____ yes no

date 1981 _____ federal _____ state county _____ local

depository for survey records Wyoming Recreation Commission 122 West 25th Avenue

city, town Cheyenne _____ state Wyoming 82002

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date 1911-1912 _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The architecture of this first church in Buffalo, Wyoming, might best be described as distinctive rather than distinguished for it is the product of necessary and ingenious additions and alterations over nearly one hundred years. The end product is a rather handsome church on a difficult site.

In 1884 a small group of individuals, ten adults to be exact, organized the Union Congregation Church. By the end of that year they had acquired lots to build on. Situated on the top of a steep hill, the church was a plain, gable-roofed, rectangular, frame structure about 26 x 29 feet, with the length running north-south. The exterior finish was unusually narrow beveled siding (less than three inches weather exposure) which is preserved on the present church. On the south end of the building was an entry hall with a three-sided truncated hip roof. This entry ran the width of the building and was about 10 feet wide. There were two pairs of tall six-paned windows on the west, south, and east sides of the church, a main door on the south in the center of the entry hall, and a small belfry on the south end of the gable roof. The builders added some decoration in the exposed rafters which were carved and pierced and backed by a dentate-carved board, still visible today on the east side of the church.

The present configuration of the church is the result of a remarkable plan formulated by the Reverend Charles Gray Miller and put into effect in 1911-12 to enlarge the church. A basement was constructed on the lower slope of the hill to the west and the church was moved onto it. The basement was constructed 14 feet wider than the sanctuary and thus it was possible to add 14 feet to the width of the room above. The gable roof over this addition runs west from the north-south alignment of the original roof. The north-south gable roof was extended to cover the entry hall, and the door to the building was moved to the east end of the entry hall where it opened out onto ground level on the higher slope of the hill. In the angle formed at the southwest juncture of the two gable roofs a belfry tower was constructed reaching from ground level on the west to two feet above the peaks of the roofs. This square tower provides an entry hall for the basement level and a stairway to the church above. In the large square open belfry which crowns the tower hangs the bell which has called members to Sunday services since 1886. The basement, which opens out to ground level on the west, provided more space for meetings and social activities as well as for Sunday School classes. Almost obscured from view by the main part of the church are two rooms added north of the sanctuary in 1938 and 1958. Beneath these rooms is a large basement room brightly decorated for primary classes and opening out to ground level on the west.

In 1913 the lovely stained glass windows were installed, gifts of members and organizations. A bad fire in 1922 damaged the first floor interior extensively and caused the irretrievable loss of the large west window. However, all the other windows are the originals.

Over the years some interior alterations have been made and much redecorating done. In 1974 church members hauled the sandstone flagstones from the country 60 miles southwest of Buffalo for the stone facing on the basement walls. This was a handsome improvement to the general appearance of the church.

SEE ADDENDUM

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 type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input 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 1886–1915 **Builder/Architect** Thomas B. Hutton

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Union Congregational Church, which was the first church in Buffalo, is historically significant, not only to the town, but also to Wyoming as an example of the development of the Christian ethic in the later days of the Old West. Its architecture represents the process of ingenuity and adaptation so often required of early pioneers. In a town where bawdy houses and saloons abounded, the church offered, besides religious services, the first acceptable social activity for families. The Ladies' Aid Society, the Young People's Christian Endeavor, and the Sunday School, provided centers of religious and social life for all ages. As the first organized church in the community, the Union Congregational Church was vitally important to the early residents of this Western town.

SEE ADDENDUM

9. Major Bibliographical References

Church minutes, October 1884-1891
 Congregational meetings
 Council meetings
 Trustee meetings

Ladies' Aid Society minutes
 Scrapbooks, clippings, histories

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Buffalo, WY

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

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3	6	4	8	2	10
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 Zone Easting Northing

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 Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Northeast corner of Lobban Avenue and Bennett Street to include the parsonage, Church building and parking area. The nomination includes lots 24, 25, 26, 27 for the church and parsonage in Buffalo, Wyoming.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dorothea Knepper

organization Church clerk date December, 1981

street & number 144 Thom Street telephone 307-684-7679

city or town Buffalo state Wyoming 82834

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 Alvini J. Bastrom

title State Historic Preservation Officer date Dec. 17, 1984

For NPS use only

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

date 2/7/85

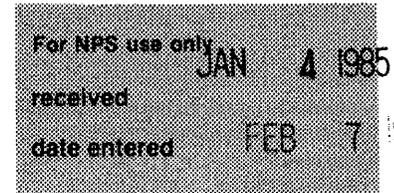
[Signature]
 Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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The parsonage, which was built in 1910, is just northwest of the church and on a level with the west side of the basement. It also is a frame structure with a gable roof and tall paired windows. There is a shed-roofed porch on the south. Before 1912 it must have looked rather like a small replica of the church just above it on the hill.

The present building site is only the width of the original building west of the original site and is still on the brow of the hill and on the same lot.

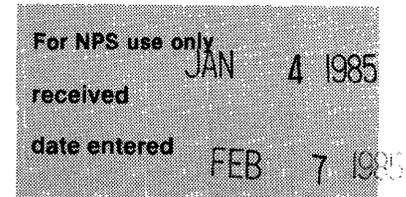
Internally the original structure is pretty much intact. The entry hall is just as it was first built with the two large double doors into the sanctuary; the woodwork around the window openings and the doors is the original; the tin ceiling with its elaborate stamped design is as it was in the first structure; the stained glass windows are the original ones installed in 1913 except the west window which was blown out by the heat of the fire in 1922.

The exterior still has the unusually narrow beveled siding and the pierced rafters backed by a dentate-carved board. The addition of 1911-12 did not alter the lines of the original structure from the south or east. The truncated hip roof over the entry hall is covered by the extension of the north-south roof line but is still visible from inside the bell tower. The foundation now covered with stone siding is the original cement cast when the 1911-12 basement was built.

The fire in 1922 did not damage the sanctuary and was confined to the northeast corner of the basement area. The heat buildup on the second floor blew out the west window, but the fire itself did not reach there. Also there was no appreciable exterior damage.

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Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

Page 1

This first church in Buffalo is historically significant to the town, to the state, and to the Rocky Mountain area for the social and religious influence it provided at a time when the Indian wars were still strong in the memory and the struggle between the cattlemen and settlers was building to the battle known as the Johnson County War. The Union Congregational Church, one of the first two churches established in northern Wyoming Territory, was incorporated in 1884, the same year the town of Buffalo was chartered. The community was only six years old, having grown along the banks of Clear Creek, when the establishment of nearby Fort McKinney in 1878 gave the town some assurance of freedom from Indian raids. It was a rough and tough town with plenty of saloons, gambling rooms, and bawdy houses catering to the largely male population. The situation was somewhat comparable to the gold rush towns of Alaska except that a few men who recognized the ranching possibilities in the area brought their wives and children with the intention of settling here.

By 1883 there was a post office, a general store, a small log schoolhouse, and a newspaper office. In 1886 the members of the newly organized church constructed a church building large enough to hold 200 people and to serve as a center for religious and social activities for men, women and children. This structure housed, besides religious services, dramatic productions, concerts by local talent, old-fashioned spelling bees, and other gatherings of a "refined nature." It was the only structure in town large enough and adaptable enough to be used thus. After the lower floor was added in 1911-1912, meals were served to any group willing to pay 50¢ or even 75¢ for the delicious home-cooked food prepared by the members of the Ladies' Circle. For example, the Commercial Club held their annual banquet here as did the graduating high school senior class each year. On their regular meeting days every two weeks, the ladies also served lunch for 15¢ and many business people took advantage of this treat. Needless to say, it was the good ladies of the church who kept the church afloat financially many times when the minister's salary was in arrears or the mortgage payment was overdue.

The financial struggle of those early years is the story of many early churches, but few had to contend with the problems this church did. The community was not hospitable to ministers. The first minister was dismissed at the end of six months because some of the church members objected to being "preached at in public." The second minister left town hastily after being hanged in effigy for preaching a sermon against gambling. During the church's first eight years there were seven ministers and there were long spells when the church was without a minister. Then came the Johnson County War, a battle between the established large stock owners and the settlers (or rustlers, depending upon your point of view.) The tensions building up to this war nearly wrecked the church in 1890 when half the membership withdrew and another minister was forced out. But in 1892, the year of the Johnson County War, came Samuel Weyler, a small swarthy German Jew who had converted to Christianity after he came to this country at the age of 18. He stayed in Buffalo for three important years. According to an anonymous report

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by one of his contemporaries, "He was not a man of prepossessing appearance, but as soon as he began to speak, either in public or private, his hearers forgot all about his small stature and dark complexion. Mr. Weyler did a great deal for this community and for the Congregational Church, having the happy faculty of being able to pour oil on troubled waters. He was a great preacher and worthy of a much larger salary and field than this place could offer." The church never again came near dissolving and grew and prospered from that time as did the community.



ORIGINAL STRUCTURE
OF
UNION CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
BUFFALO, WYOMING
ERECTED 1886