

Built in 1931, the Cathedral of the Woods in Medford Lakes, New Jersey, has attracted lovestruck couples for decades.



Cleo McCall photo

Goin' to the Chapel

Couples discover nothing's more romantic than getting married while surrounded by the natural beauty of logs.

AT 5 O'CLOCK one cold Valentine's Day morning a few years back, the Little Log Wedding Chapel in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, opened its doors, and, despite the early hour, excited couples began pouring in. Gatlinburg, America's No. 2 tourist-wedding destination (after Las Vegas), specializes in rustic log cabin weddings. The Little Log Wedding Chapel normally conducts about 50 weddings a month, but on this official day of romance, 45 couples were scheduled to walk through the door and begin their lives together.

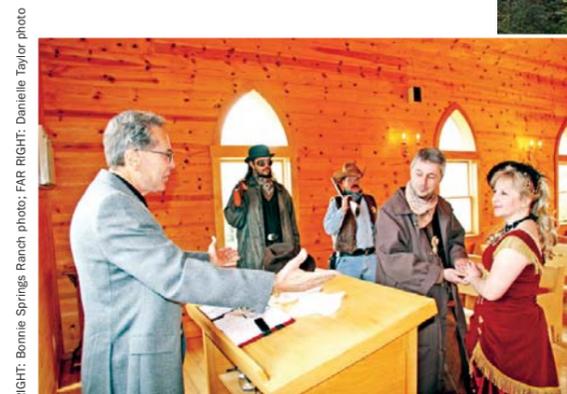
"We worked through 2 a.m. the

following day," co-owner and photographer Scott Holman remembers. "We had them spaced out to every hour or every 30 minutes — when one couple would be walking to the car, the next would be arriving."

Log cabin weddings are hot these days, and the phenomenon isn't limited to this one facility. There are at least seven log wedding chapels in Gatlinburg alone, and several local wedding services highlight their availability to perform services at any honeymoon vacation cabin. While many couples gravitate toward the glitz and glamour

of a more formal celebration, thousands more flock each year to log wedding chapels all across the country for a simpler experience that for them is every bit as meaningful.

"My husband and I love the outdoors and the log-cabin type of atmosphere," reflects Penny Madden Hamm, who was married at the Little Log Wedding Chapel in October. "We visit Tennessee twice a year on vacation, so there wasn't even a second thought about getting married down there. We did extensive research and visited Tennessee several times last year looking



RIGHT: Bonnie Springs Ranch photo; FAR RIGHT: Danielle Taylor photo

ABOVE: Bonnie Springs Ranch just outside Las Vegas, Nevada, offers couples a Wild West wedding experience.

RIGHT: The Little Log Wedding Chapel in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, is but one of several log-cabin wedding venues found in America's No. 2 wedding destination.



for a chapel that gave us everything, the cabin and the feel of the mountains and of Tennessee. As soon as I saw the Little Log Wedding Chapel, it was absolutely perfect. They gave us the most wonderful day."

Services, amenities and prices range from location to location. So does the ambience. For example, the 105-year-old Log Chapel on the campus of Indiana's University of Notre Dame offers a reflective, reverent atmosphere that pays tribute to its history. A replica of the original 1831 cabin that housed the area's first Catholic mission, as well as the founders of the school during its establishment, this chapel is frequently used for weddings, baptisms, Masses and other religious ceremonies. Notre Dame community members who wish to get married there (students, alumni, administrators and local parishioners only) must complete an extensive marriage preparation program, and the sacrosanct ceremony is performed according to Catholic tradition.

In contrast, Bonnie Springs Ranch, just outside Las Vegas, Nevada, offers guests a hell-raising Wild West experience, complete with gunfighters, saloon girls, line dancers, cowboys on horseback, mechanical bulls and more. The ranch, which wedding parties can

rent in its entirety for their exclusive celebration, is modeled after an Old West town and features a rustic, log-styled chapel for wedding ceremonies.

In most cases, log chapel weddings tend to be relatively inexpensive. Many facilities offer a variety of packages that give a wide range of options. The Little Log Wedding Chapel in Gatlinburg, for example, starts its package offerings with a simple, candlelight service for two that includes music and 10 professional photographs, all for \$249. Its top-of-the-line package offers an elaborate fantasy wedding experience for up to 100 guests that includes extensive photography and videography, flowers, a three-tier cake, tuxedo rentals, five nights of honeymoon lodging and more for \$3,499. To keep things really simple, another Gatlinburg enterprise offers a \$75 "Hillbilly Wedding" service conducted by an overalls-clad preacher — you provide the cabin.

So, whether you're looking for a quaint, rustic ceremony that hearkens back to a simpler time or a quickie elopement performed by a Jed Clampett impersonator, there are plenty of log wedding chapels out there that can provide a special day you'll remember for the rest of your shared lives. 🏡

Getting Hitched

Ready to marry the beginning of your life together with your love of logs? Check out these possibilities for an unforgettable experience.

- **Little Log Chapel:** Gatlinburg, Tennessee (800-554-1451; logchapel.com)
- **Wedding Chapel in the Glades:** Gatlinburg, Tennessee (877-436-3338; chapelsofgatlinburg.com)
- **Hillbilly Weddings:** Gatlinburg, Tennessee (865-436-3817; gatlinburg.com/hillbillyweddings)
- **Log Chapel at the University of Notre Dame:** Notre Dame, Indiana (574-631-4288; basilica.nd.edu/marriage-and-baptism)
- **Bonnie Springs Ranch:** Blue Diamond, Nevada (702-875-4191; bonniesprings.com)
- **Log Chapel of the Ozarks:** Branson, Missouri (800-238-6630; logchapeloftheoark.com)
- **Dogwood Chapel:** Branson, Missouri (417-335-8941; dogwoodchapel.com)
- **Log Cabin Community Church:** Smyrna, Georgia (404-351-8530; logcabinchurch.com)
- **Mountain Top Inn & Resort:** Warm Springs, Georgia (800-533-6376; mountaintoppinga.com/weddings)
- **Cathedral of the Woods:** Medford Lakes, New Jersey (609-654-4220; protestantcommunitychurch.org)
- **Hocking Hills Wedding Chapel:** Hocking Hills, Ohio (888-222-4691; valleyviewcabins.com/chapel)
- **Chapel in the Pines:** Senatobia, Mississippi (662-562-9642)