

## Haines (South Mountain) Chapel



Perched at the top of a knoll overlooking South Mountain, the chapel is situated at the boundary of Nelson and Rockbridge Counties. Haines Chapel, also known as South Mountain Chapel, has a rich and interesting history and is one of the most picturesque mountain churches in our area.

Although the church no longer holds regular Sunday services, the white weatherboard sanctuary is still used for an annual homecoming service, an Easter sunrise service, funeral services and many weddings. In fact, my husband Billy and I chose to elope and exchange our wedding vows standing on the front porch steps of the chapel back in April of 1993.

At the junction of Route 56 and the Blue Ridge Parkway, the chapel is off the main road, tucked away in the Virginia hills with breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. The church has no electricity, making every Easter sunrise service a nostalgic trip back in time as you wind your way back on the dirt road and see the soft yellow glow of coal oil lamps illuminating the chapel in the early morning darkness. The scene is reminiscent of what the early mountain forefathers must have seen some two hundred years ago and never fails to make an impression on those attending the service.

George Hite (sometimes spelled "Hight") was born on July 3, 1755, in King and Queen County, Virginia. In 1776, he moved with his father to Botetourt County. While living there, he volunteered and served as a private in Captain Gilmore's Company, Colonel Christian's Virginia Regiment, on an expedition against the Cherokee Indian nation.



On August 14, 1777, he volunteered as a private in Captain Caswallader Jones's Troop, Colonel George Baylor's Third Regiment of Light Dragoons. At the battle at Monks Corner, he, along with fifteen others, was captured and confined on board a prison ship until August of 1781. After a prisoner exchange, he went to Jamestown, where he rejoined his regiment and served until discharged in the fall of 1782. He spent the remainder of his life on his farm, which he bought near Montebello. George Hite married Lovia Lunsford and raised nine children; five boys and four girls.

On August 5, 1835, George Hite, wishing to make a much-needed religious contribution to his community, donated two and a half acres of land to the trustees of the Methodist/Episcopal Church. The trustees were James Cash, Howell G. Humphries, John Kiger, John Albright,

George Hite, David Shewey, and Frederick Albright. The land was located near the top of the eastern slope of South Mountain in the eastern corner of Rockbridge County, butting up to Nelson County. On many maps, the chapel is shown as being located in Nelson. The land that was given was to be used for a church site and graveyard. The first church erected there was built from logs from the surrounding forest. George Hite died on August 21, 1837, and was buried in the new graveyard under a large tree. The Virginia Historical Society placed a marker over his grave several years back.

The chapel was first on the Lexington circuit, and, according to a report, the preacher's salary for the conference year of 1835 was \$3.50. In 1837, they paid \$28.56 to Reverend John C. Lynn, who was the preacher in charge.

The Fairfield circuit was formed in 1849, which then included South Mountain, Emory Chapel, and White's Gap.

South Mountain, with George Hite as its leader, cast its lot with the Northern branch of the church and did a good work for many years. As George Hite, along with all the other elderly members, passed on to their heavenly reward, the church was neglected for the want of a leader as well as a preacher.

About the year 1870, the Southern branch of the Methodist/Episcopal Church built a small frame church on the south side of the road, on top of the mountain where the road forks to the Irish Creek Road. This church thrived for many years under the leadership of Robert S. Hite, a local preacher and great-grandson of George Hite.



**Chapel interior: beadboard, raised dais, and brass oil lamp chandelier**

In 1915, the old South Mountain Chapel was rebuilt, and the name was changed to Haines Chapel. This chapel thrived for some years and had an active Sunday school, but by 1955, the only use the church had was for funeral services for those wishing to be buried in the graveyard. As stated above, Haines Chapel is now used for a yearly homecoming, an Easter sunrise service, as well as many weddings and funerals.

Many years ago, the church's exterior weatherboard was covered with vinyl siding to protect it from exposure to the elements and a wooden fence as well as a picnic pavilion was added—all from donated money for the upkeep of the church. The chapel continues to draw many visitors and family members whose loved ones are buried in the adjoining graveyard.