

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR 4/23/08

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 Community Center #1

other names/site number Earl Bell Community Center/ Site #CG0246

2. Location

street & number 1212 South Church St.

not for publication

city or town Jonesboro

vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Craighead code 031 zip code 72401

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 for 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.)

Carrie Macleod

11/29/07

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

State or 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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Community Center #1

Name of Property

Craighead County, Arkansas

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 count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
--------------	-----------------	--

1	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	_____	Total

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

"An Ambition to Be Preferred: New Deal Recovery Efforts
and Architecture in Arkansas, 1933-1943"

Number of Contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE BLOCK

walls BRICK

roof Composition Shingle

other

Narrative Description

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

Community Center # 1
Name of Property

Craighead County, Arkansas
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Eligible 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 birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- 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.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)
local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance
1936-1958

Significant Dates
1936-1958

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder
ELMER A. STUCK

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Community Center # 1
Name of Property

Craighead County, Arkansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 707494 3967696
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

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 Jason Wilkie, Director, Jonesboro Parks and Recreation; edited by Van Zbinden, National Register Historian
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 4 October 2007
street & number 323 Center Street, Suite 1600 telephone 501.324.9880
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

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 City of Jonesboro
street & number 1212 S. Church St telephone 870.933.4604
city or town Jonesboro state AR zip code 72401

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 listing. 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 20303.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Summary

The Jonesboro Community Center # 1 was built in 1936 and was designed by Elmer A. Stuck. The entrance of the Jonesboro Community Center faces Church Street. On the east side of Community Center there is the Community Pool, and Julian James Memorial Park. The community center is made of buff brick walls, supported by a continuous concrete foundation and covered in a tar or built up roof. The east and west portions of the building have a flat roof. The center of the building has a gable roof. The community center has gone under several changes since it was originally built in 1936, but it still features art-deco architecture and is a wonderful example of that style in Jonesboro and Northeast Arkansas.

Elaboration

Located in downtown Jonesboro, Community Center # 1 is near the middle of old Jonesboro. The Community Center is in close proximity to the federal building, Craighead County Courthouse, and other important government offices in downtown Jonesboro. Due to its central location and easy access to downtown Jonesboro, the community center has been a hub of recreation and entertainment in Northeast Arkansas. The building currently contains a basketball gym, meeting rooms, a rock-climbing wall, and administrative offices for Jonesboro Parks and Recreation. Historically the building has been used as a gymnasium and auditorium. The large open space has also been used in local and regional emergencies.

Community Center # 1 has a continuous concrete foundation and walls of common bond, buff brick. The words, "Earl Bell Community Center" are affixed on the southside of the front of the building, noting the name change made in 1984. When the community center was built in 1936, the building had steel casement windows around the entire building. Since then, many of the windows have been bricked in for security reasons.

Front/West Façade

One of the most noticeable things about the Jonesboro Community Center is the entrance. In the Art Deco style, the front of the building prominently features smooth, white concrete projections and towers. These towers and projections rise high above the doors and feature graceful curving lines and horizontal channels and accents in concrete. The effect is to give the building a strong vertical massing. The front doors are recessed into the building and reached by a set of low concrete steps. In order to comply with the American with Disabilities Act, a ramp was placed in the middle of these steps to allow for wheelchair access. The ramp is made out of concrete with steel handrails set into the concrete. The original steel casement windows on the west façade have been replaced with three paned stationary windows.

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Side/South Façade

On the south side of the Community Center there is little in the way of architectural detail, befitting of the minimalist nature of much Art Deco architecture. The side walls have a concrete base and are made with the basic common bond buff brick that was used in the front of the building. Originally, the gymnasium and auditorium area of the building was lit and ventilated by two sets of windows. The first, high on the façade near the roof and the second closer to the ground. After constant attempts by vandals and burglars to break in to the building through these lower windows, the City of Jonesboro decided to remove the windows. The windows on top, located just above the bleachers, are still extant, allowing light into the gym. However, as on the front of the building the original windows have been replaced with both stationary single pane windows and sliding, three pane windows. Windows in the southwest and southeast corner have replaced with brick.

Rear/East Façade

The east façade of the Community Center faces Julian James Memorial Park and the Community Center Pool. In the past, this side of the building had been painted. The rear entrance has been designed with small towers on the left and right of the door to reflect the front of the building and to give the rear of the building a small vertical emphasis. The majority of the windows on the rear façade have been removed and replaced with brick of similar color. There are two stationary, single pane windows on the left and right of the rear entrance. There are two stationary single pane windows on the north side of the rear façade near the entrance to the Jonesboro Parks and Recreation Department offices. Both of these entrances on the rear of the Earl Bell Community Center have aluminum awnings.

Side/North Façade

On the northeast corner of this side, one of the windows has been removed for air conditioner access and the other has been replaced with a sliding window. As on the South Façade, the lower, gymnasium windows were removed and replaced with similar color and style of brick. In the northwest corner of the building the north side windows have been removed though the public exit remains.

Integrity

Although the Community Center has gone under several changes, the overall integrity remains good. The Art Deco details and features on the front of the building remain intact. Though many of the windows have been bricked, the difference in color of brick highlights the original window location and gives the feel of a window.

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Summary

The Jonesboro Community Center # 1 is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** for its significance as one of the few federally funded projects Public Works Administration Projects in Jonesboro, and for its association with the entertainment and recreation for Jonesboro. The Community Center was funded by the Public Works Administration as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal economic relief package. The Community Center is also being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion C** as an excellent example of the Art-Deco Style in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Elaboration

The great depression began on "Black Friday" October 24, 1929, when the stock market took a horrifying plunge. The average daily shares that were sold were roughly 3 million; however on that day 10 million or so would be sold. Small traders were wiped out and large and respectable brokerage houses were severely shaken, financially and mentally. On October 28, the market hit the skids again, this time older and more reliable stocks fell as well, instead of dropping \$.50-\$1.50 they dropped \$10-\$20, or in the case of General Electric \$41.50 in one day.

However, this meant very little to the citizens of Craighead County, it was far away and did not affect them directly. Some said it served them right to be making money off of the labor of others. The price of cotton had dropped, but the crop was good. There were other things that were happening in Craighead County. The state highway department promised new concrete roads going from Jonesboro to Walnut Ridge and Nettleton to Lake City. On May 29, 1930 rain came and everybody thought there would be a good "season in the ground". The stock market was still slipping but who cared, rows of cotton meant money when fall came. However, it would be 76 days till it rained again. In mid-June farmers became concerned when the temperature reached 106. Crops were being damaged by blistering winds and heat. July had 12 days of 105°, and greater, temperatures. In August the cotton leaf worm appeared. This pest loved the hot weather and it was thriving, the cotton crop was badly damaged. On August 9, Jonesboro City, Water, and Light asked citizens to curtail use of water as a conservation measure. The drought was over on August 13, but the crops had already been damaged. Leaders in business and farming appealed to President Hoover for help and he promised immediate aid. The citizens of Jonesboro and Craighead County quickly learned there is no such thing as immediate aid from the federal government.

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The "immediate aid" was not immediate, the President presented the situation to Congress, however they didn't fully understand, but the department of Agriculture rushed to the rescue with the idea that farmers' plant feed crops for fall and winter use. The suggestion was not well received, and as one farmer put it, "it's like handing you a cup of ice when you home is on fire." The first relief came from the American Red Cross. They set up a headquarters in Jonesboro and began a study of needs. The needs were real and great. Families had no money to buy food, the cash crop was cotton and there wasn't any.

Jonesboro Baptist College finally gave up in 1930, on November 1 the American Trust company shut its doors. On November 6 the Jonesboro Roller Mill burned, it was one of Jonesboro's oldest and most stable business institutions. The Jonesboro Grocer Company also caught fire, but no damage was done to it. In 1931 the American Red Cross estimated that 150,000 were suffering from hunger in Northeast Arkansas. There was actually an agreement to take care of the needy: The Salvation Army would take care of Jonesboro, and the American Red Cross would take of Craighead County.

The summer of 1931 was a good one for the crops. Cotton was 5 cents a pound, but farmers had taken out loans expecting cotton to be selling for 10 cents a pound. The bottom of the depression hit Jonesboro, when the Bank of Jonesboro shut down on December 11, 1931. Less than a month later on January 6 the Mercantile Bank of Jonesboro opened, under the direction of investors from outside Jonesboro. Times were still tough, but some economic relief was on its way.

The fundamental purpose of the New Deal was to provide useful employment to many jobless people during the depression. These various programs left Craighead County with a legacy of almost inestimable value in physical improvements alone. These programs did accomplish their purpose and their payrolls put much needed circulation into the economy. One interesting characteristic is that nearly all of the programs had the requirement that somebody put up money for the project as well.

The idea for the Jonesboro Community Center was developed through the minds of the Young Mens' Civic Club, known today as the Jonesboro Jaycees. The idea for the Community Center was brought before the City Council on May 6, 1935. The City Council was not sure where to receive funding for this project, but applied for funding through the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. In July of 1935 the City Council approved the plan to apply for funding, and another wrinkle was added to the community center plan: to add a swimming pool, and a golf course. The swimming pool was added to the community center project, but the golf course idea never materialized. The swimming pool would later be covered up, and a new pool was built in its place in 1979.

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Construction on the Jonesboro Community Center would begin in late 1935 and continue into 1936. Records indicate the funding of 45% of the project was made available through the Works Progress Administration. The rest of the funding for the project came in a bond issue. Later on, a two-mil tax increase was established to pay off the interest of the bonds. Total cost of the Community Center construction was over \$100,000.

The first function ever held at the community center was the Craighead County Fair, held on Oct. 30 and 31, 1936. Officials estimated the attendance to be over 20,000 for the two-day event. Ever since that opening day the community center has been a hub for entertainment and recreation for Northeast Arkansas. Over the years the center has been used for many different events, such as: talent shows, minstrel shows, concerts, and performances, including two famous performances by Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison. The most popular event held at the community center that Jonesboro residents still talk about is the wrestling matches that used to happen in the gym.

It has also been used for athletic events over the past several years as well. Every day you can walk into the gym and find somebody playing basketball. Many classes have also been taught over the years, such as: dancing, martial arts, and rock climbing.

However, the Earl Bell isn't simply known for its recreation and entertainment history, it has been through some rough times as well. On May 15, 1968 a tornado ripped through downtown Jonesboro killing 34 people and injuring more than 300. A temporary morgue was set up at the community center because there wasn't another alternative at that time.

The Community center has gone through several name changes over the past 70 years. It was simply named community center #1 when it was built. It was later turned into a YMCA, until a new facility was built for the YMCA in the late 1960's. On October 15, 1984 the City council passed a resolution to name the community center after Earl Bell, the bronze winning Olympic pole vaulter from Jonesboro. Today, the community center is still being used for recreational activities and teaching classes for the community. The center also houses the administration for Jonesboro Parks and Recreation and is used by over 40,000 patrons each year.

Community Center # 1

Name of Property

Craighead County, Arkansas

County and State

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Statement of Significance

The Jonesboro Community Center # 1 is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** for its significance as one of the few federally funded projects Public Works Administration Projects in Jonesboro, and for its association with the entertainment and recreation for Jonesboro. The Community Center was funded by the Public Works Administration as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal economic relief package. The Community Center is also being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion C** as an excellent example of the Art-Deco Style in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

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Bibliography

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Craighead Country Historical Quarterly, Vol. 22 No. 1. 1984
- Fugate, Larry. "Officials recall '68 tornado response." *Jonesboro Sun*. May 17, 2003
- Keith, David. "Earl Bell Center More Than A Gym." *The Jonesboro Sun*.
November 23, 1986. pp.1D
- Lord, Leslie. "New Deal Work Relief Projects in Craighead County, Arkansas."
Craighead Historical Quarterly, Vol. 12 No. 4. 1974
- Stuck, Charles A. *The Story of Craighead Country: a Narrative of People and Events
Northeast Arkansas*. Hurley Company, 1960

Community Center # 1

Name of Property

Craighead County, Arkansas

County and State

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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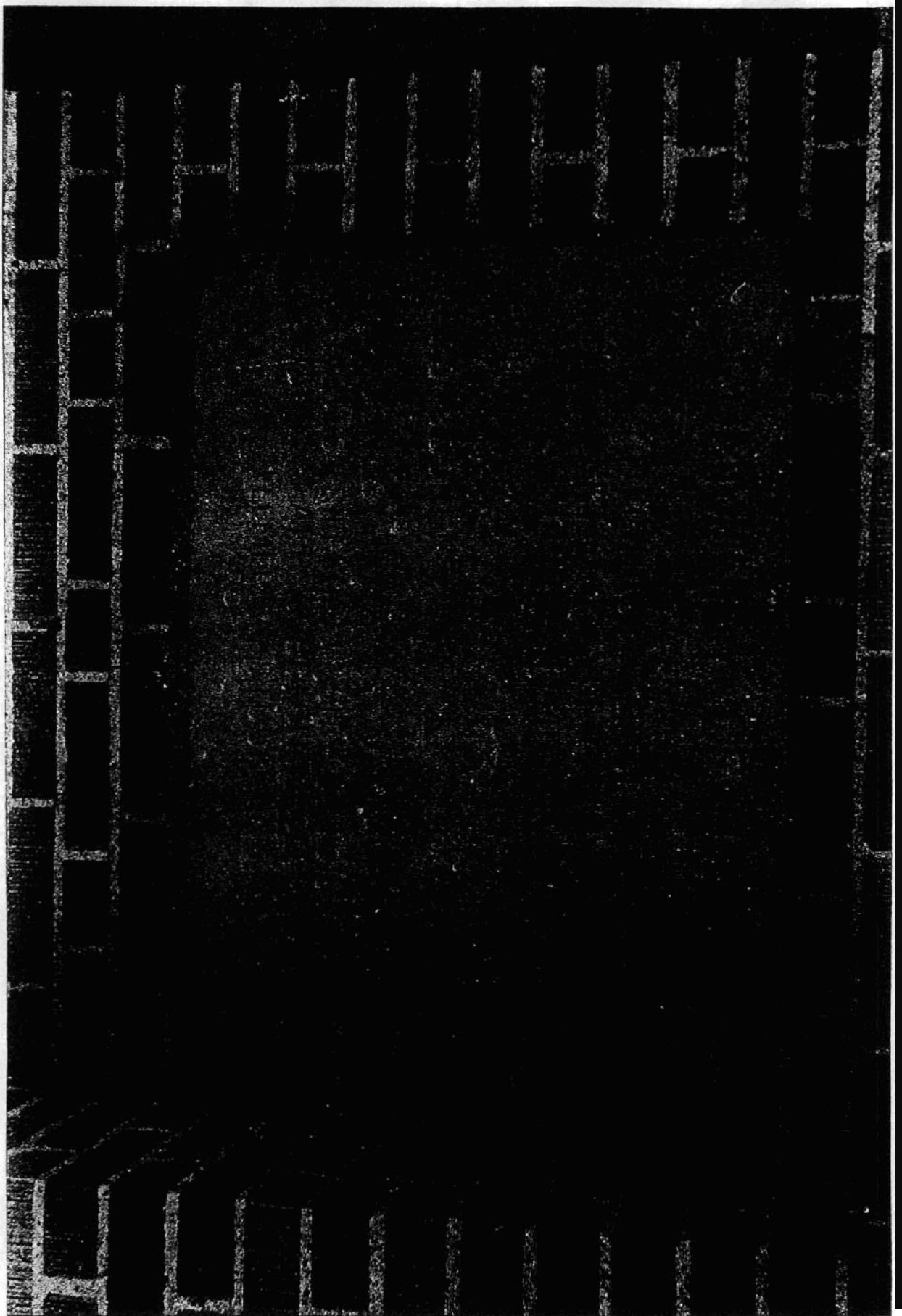
Section number 10 Page 1

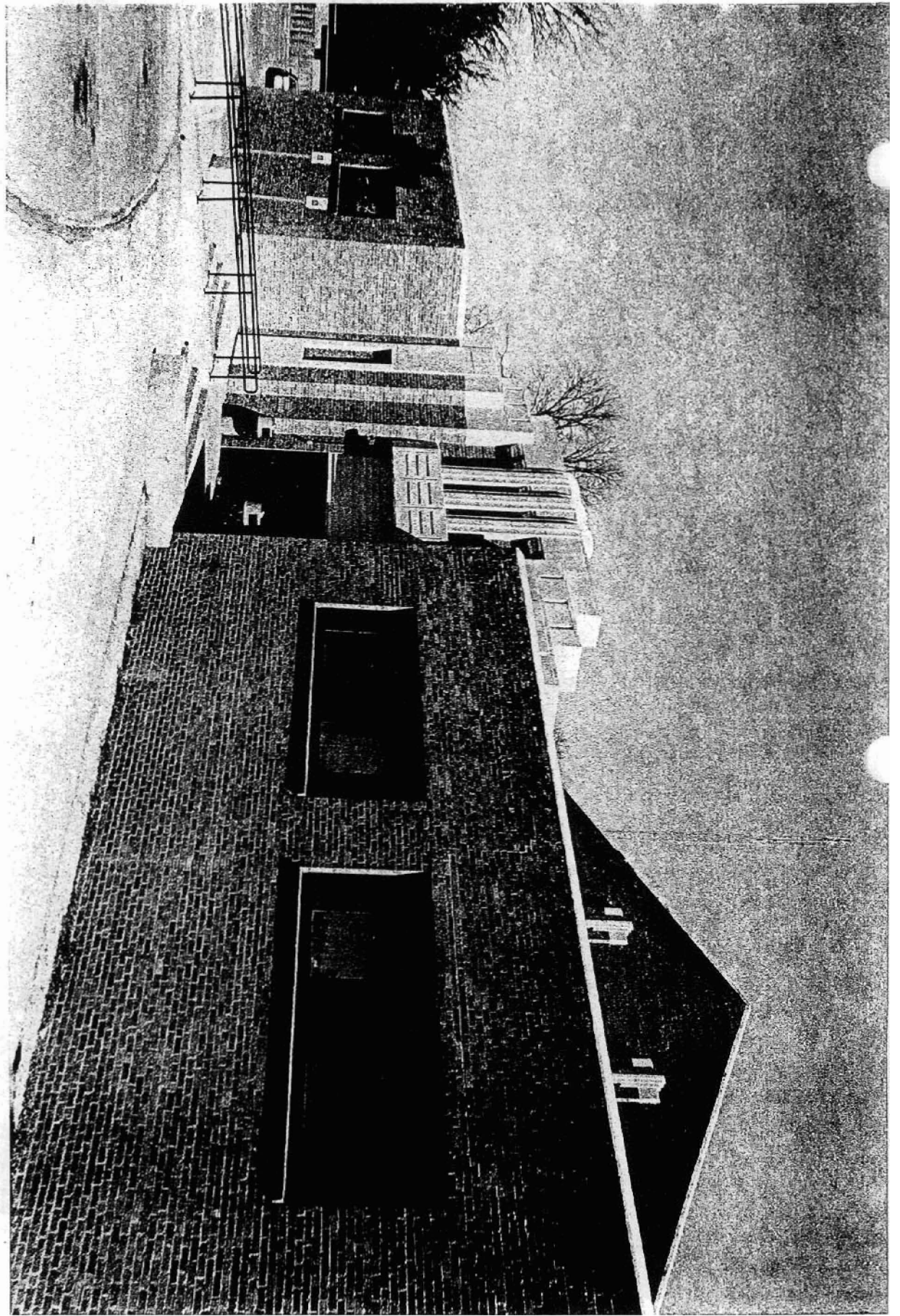
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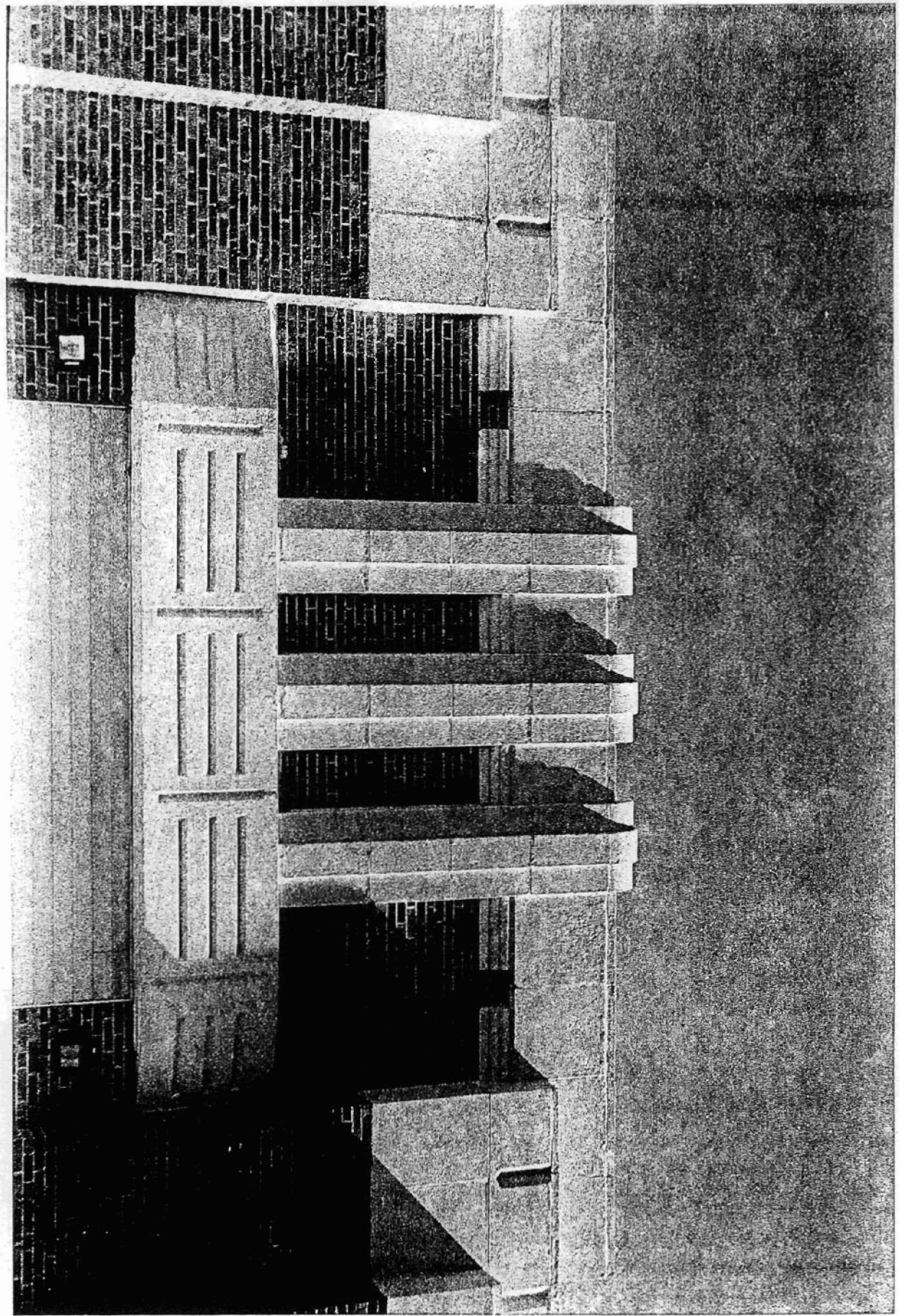
The Community Center # 1 occupies lots 8, 9, and 11 of Section 19-14-4 of the Cobb's Survey.

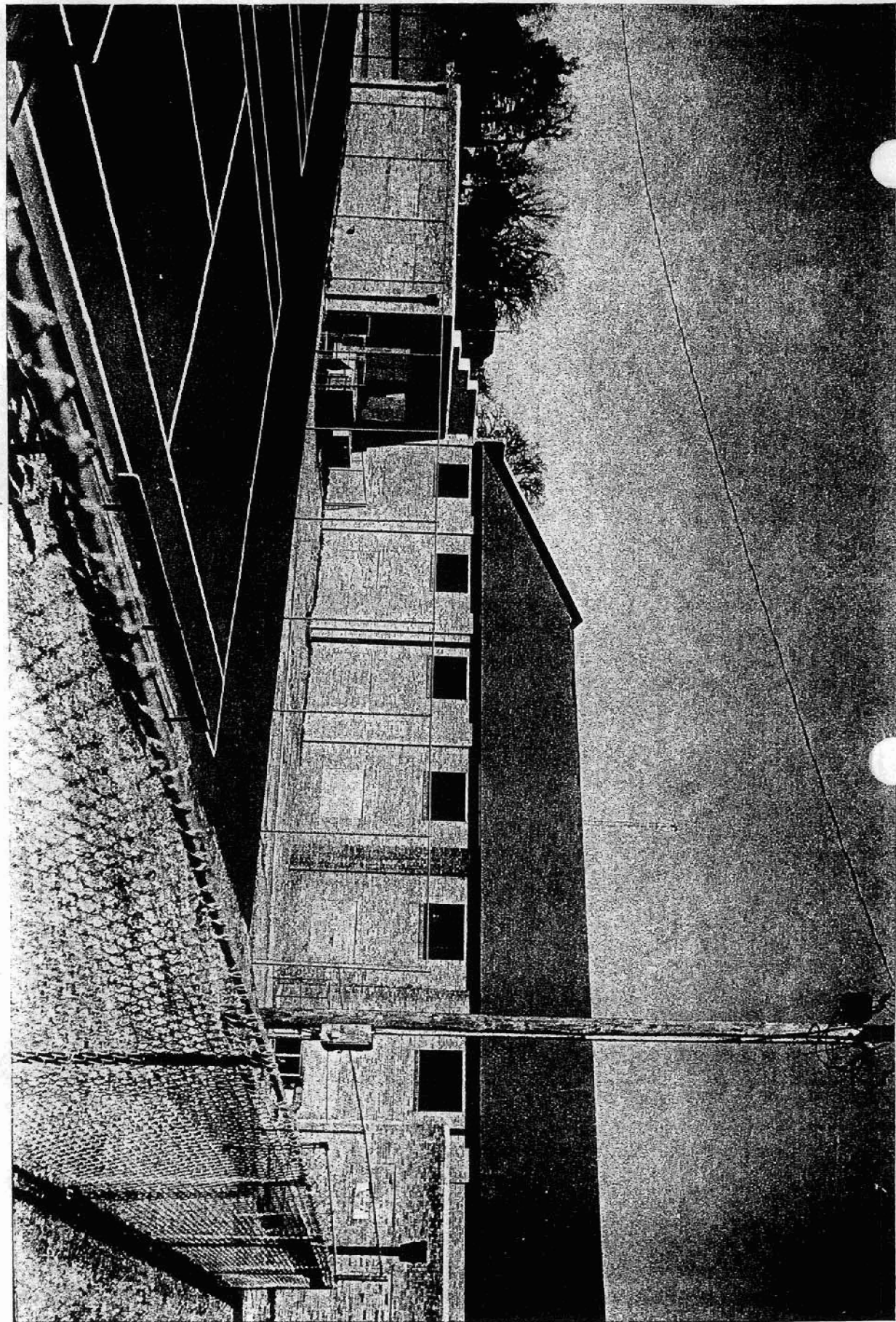
Boundary Justification

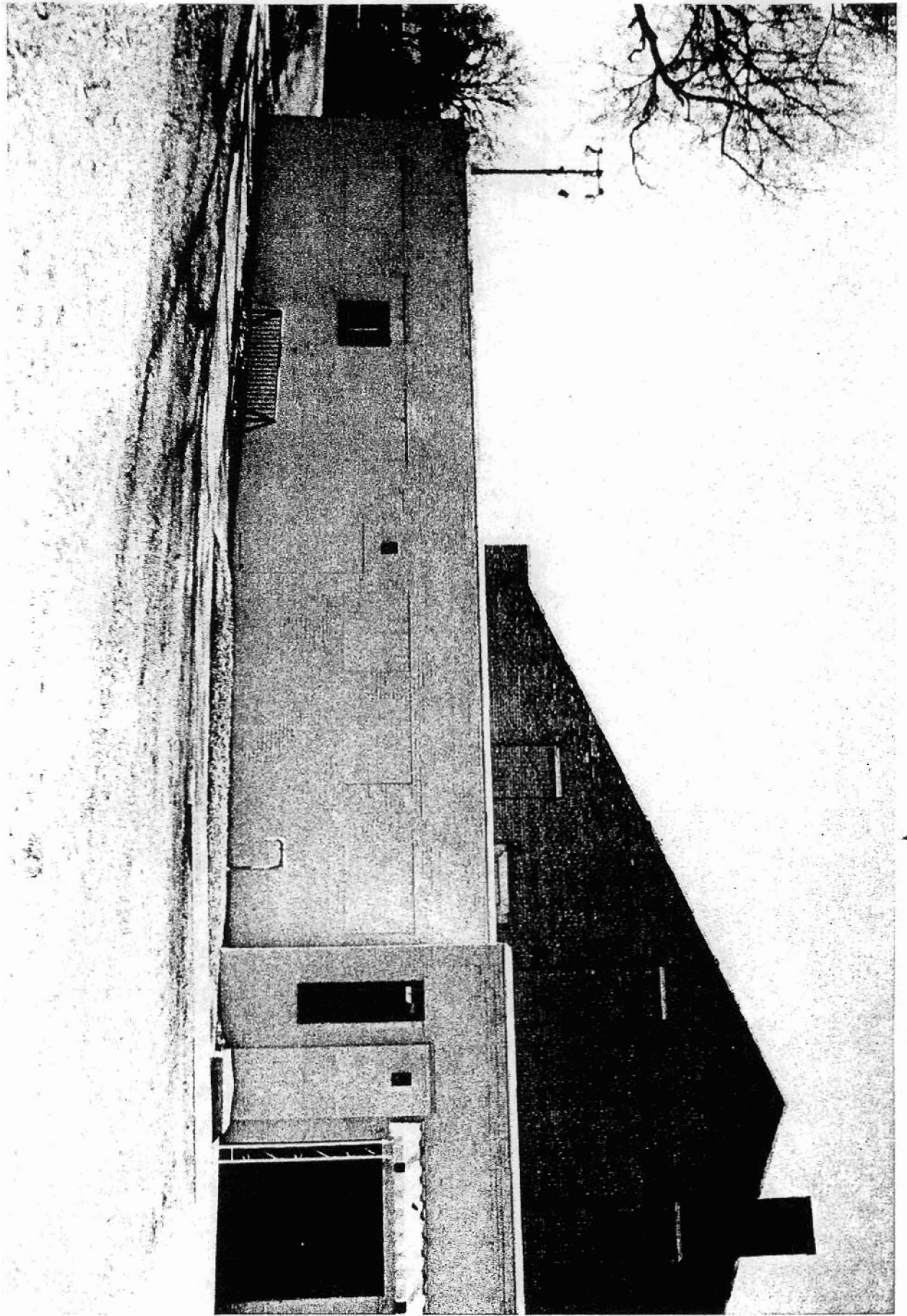
The boundary encompasses all the land historically associated with the Community Center # 1.

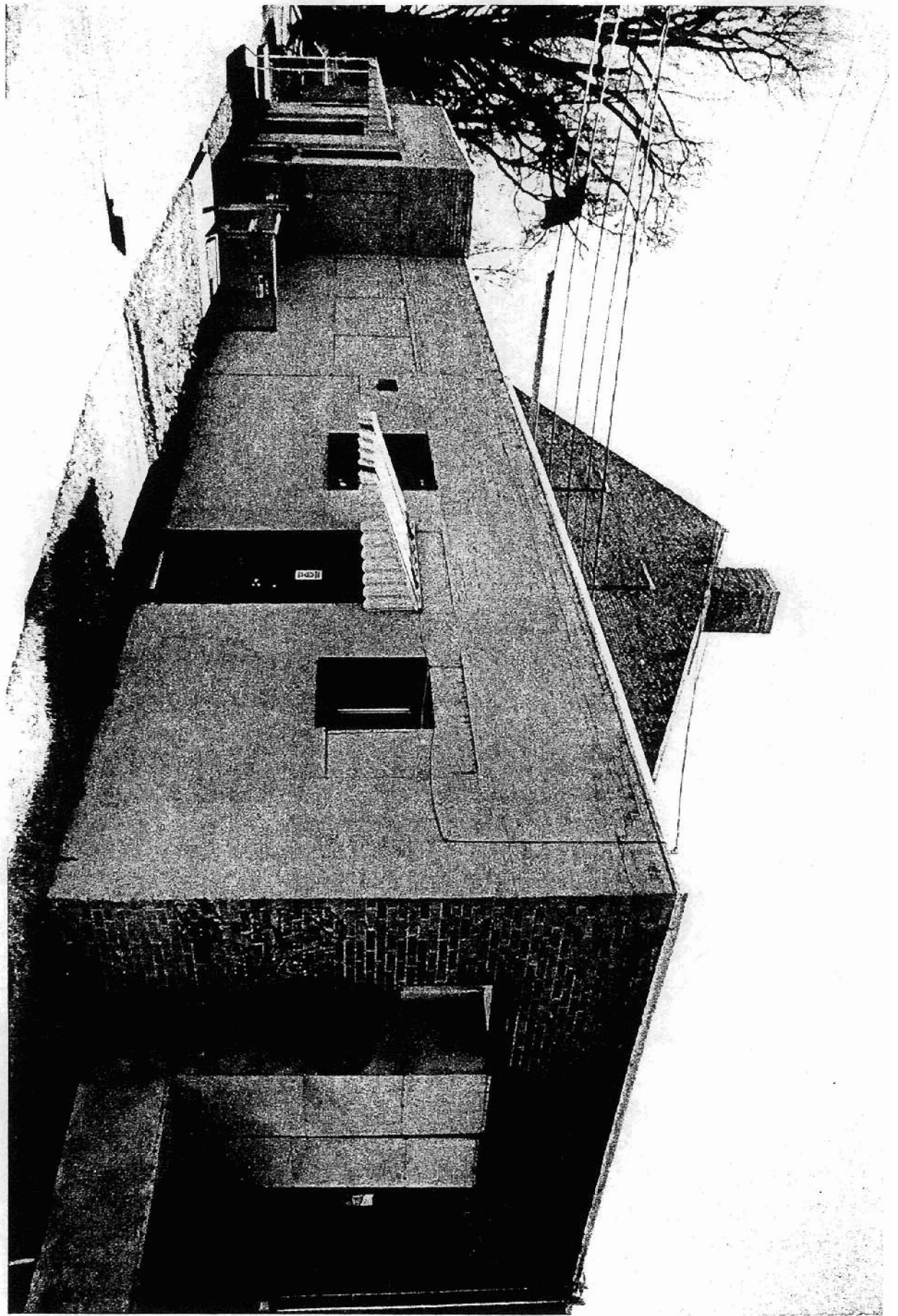




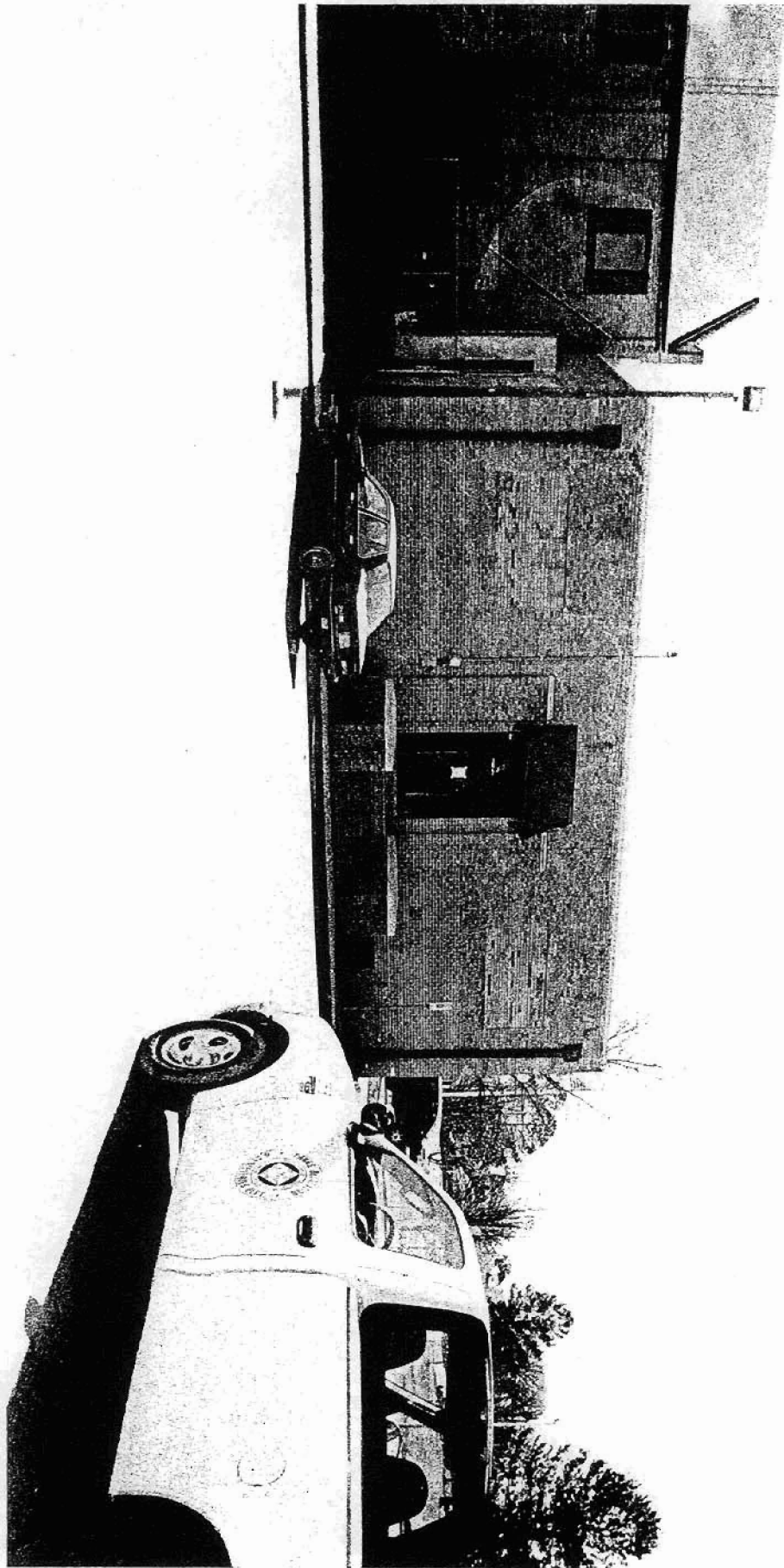


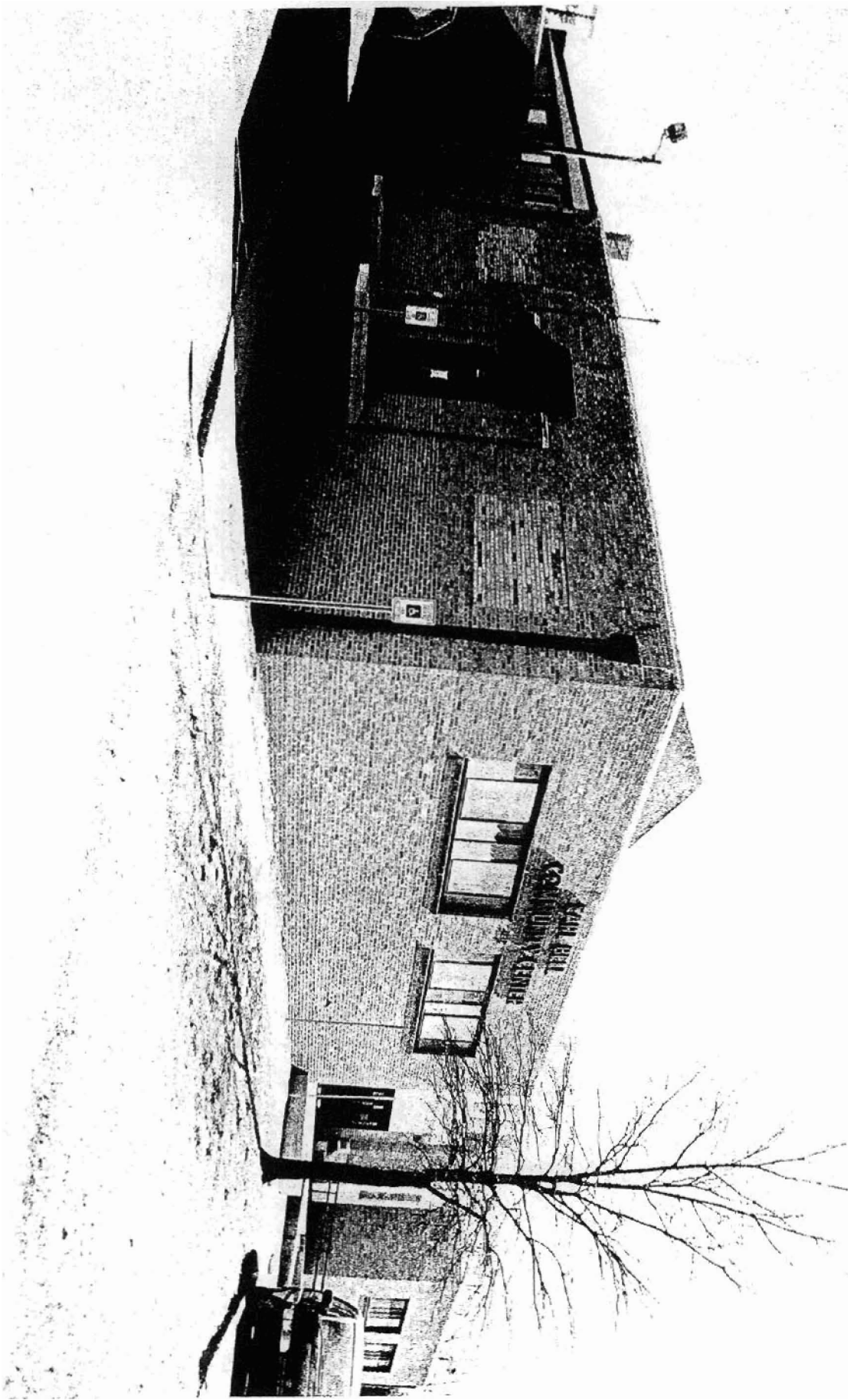












COMMUNITY CENTER #1
JONESBORO,
CRAIGHEAD CO., AR
UTM REFERENCE: 3967
15/707494
3967696



47' 30"

JONESBORO