

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium

other names/site number Site #CL1022, Simmons High School Gymnasium

2. Location

street & number 767 Layne Street

not for publication

city or town Okolona

vicinity

state Arkansas

code AR

county Clark

code 019

zip code 71962

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.)

Cathie Matthews

7/15/11

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

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

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

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

Contributing Noncontributing

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

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

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/Plain-Traditional

foundation CONCRETE

walls CONCRETE BLOCK, METAL

roof METAL

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 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)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/Black

Period of Significance

c.1950-1961

Significant Dates

c.1950

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approximately 1.5 acres.

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>468576</u>	<u>3761560</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

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 James Lockett, edited by Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date June 6, 2011
street & number 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street telephone (501) 324-9787
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 Simmons High Alumni Association, c/o James Lockett
street & number 12699 Highway 51 South telephone
city or town Okolona state AR zip code 71962

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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Section number 7 Page 1

SUMMARY

The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium is a clay tile and metal building located at 767 Layne Street on the south side of Okolona, Clark County, Arkansas. The building was built in c.1950 and rests on a continuous cast-concrete foundation. Metal-framed awning windows fenestrate the building and a gabled metal roof caps the building.

ELABORATION

The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium, which is the last remaining building from the African-American school campus, is located at 767 Layne Street in Okolona, Clark County, Arkansas. The building was built c.1950 on the southern edge of Okolona. The building is a utilitarian, plain-traditional building, without any form of stylistic ornamentation.

The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium rests on a continuous cast-concrete foundation and has clay tile walls near the front of the building. The rest of the building's walls are corrugated metal. The gable roof is metal. The main entrance of the building is on the west side and is sheltered by a shed-roofed awning. Metal-framed awning windows fenestrate the building.

Front/West Façade

The front facade of the original building is oriented around the central entrance with double doors. The lower part of the façade, to the top of the entrance, is built out of clay tile blocks, while the rest of the façade is covered in corrugated metal. To the right and left of the central entrance were restroom entrances. In the 1970s, the central entrance was widened from a single door to double doors. Circa 2000, the doors to the right and left of the central entrance (the bathroom entrances) were bricked in. However, the shed-roofed awnings remain above these entrances. A louvered rectangular vent is also present in the gable peak.

Side/South Façade

The south side of building is mainly covered with the corrugated metal, except for the lower part of the façade near the east west end, which is comprised of the clay-tile blocks. The clay-tile block portion of the façade is fenestrated by two four-pane, metal-framed, awning windows. Just to the east of the clay-tile block section of the façade is a four-pane, metal-framed, awning window low in the façade. Another window of this type is present at the west end of the façade. In between these windows, four, nine-pane, metal-framed awning windows are present near the top of the façade.

Rear/East Façade

The rear facade of the building is sided with corrugated metal. The façade has a rectangular louvered vent in the gable peak and an original steel door near the north side of the façade.

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Side/North Façade

The north side of the building, like the south façade, is mainly covered with the corrugated metal, except for the lower part of the façade near the east west end, which is comprised of the clay-tile blocks. The clay-tile block portion of the façade is fenestrated by three four-pane, metal-framed, awning windows. The metal-sided portion of the façade is fenestrated by four, nine-pane, metal-framed awning windows near the top of the façade.

Integrity

The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium retains good integrity. The only change to the building since it was built is the modification of the front entrance. The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium retains its original windows – although many of the panes are missing – siding, and roof material. The setting around the building has changed somewhat as buildings from the Okolona Colored High School campus have been demolished. However, Okolona has remained a small town, just as it was c.1950, so that the setting around the Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium still reflects the small-town setting of the 1950s.

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SUMMARY

The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** with **local significance** for its associations with African-American education in Okolona and Clark County. The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium, which was built c.1950, is the last remaining building from the Okolona Colored School campus, which was Okolona's African-American school. As the site of sporting events and other community gatherings, the Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium has been an important community center and gathering place for Okolona's African-American community over the past fifty plus years.

ELABORATION

Settlement in the area that is now Clark County began in 1811 in the vicinity of Arkadelphia and Okolona. In addition, Jacob and Abram Wells settled in the Hollywood vicinity in 1811 or 1812 and William Stroud also settled in the area shortly afterwards.¹ Settlement in the southern part of the county, however, did not occur until around the middle of the 1800s. By 1854, only one road reached into southern Clark County, and it connected Arkadelphia with Rome on the Ouachita River. Only one other settlement was present. The settlement of Beech Creek, which had a post office from 1852 until 1866, was isolated in the south-central part of the county.²

Okolona came into existence prior to the 1850s, since its post office was established on June 8, 1858, with Ashley Sloan as the first postmaster. The town quickly grew with a general store run by W. J. Bell established in 1868. By the late 1880s, Okolona was described as follows:

Okolona is situated in the western part of the county on the Southwestern Arkansas & Indian Territory Railroad, fourteen miles in a direction a little north of west from Smithton, on the Iron Mountain Railroad. The population is about 500. It is surrounded with the best agricultural lands of the county, and has the trade of a large scope of country. It is a neat and pretty town, and its principal business is the cotton trade. Several thousand bales of cotton are annually shipped away. The place contains five general stores, two drug stores, a millinery store, a furniture and undertaking store, several steam cotton-gins and corn-mills, a livery stable, a number of mechanics' shops, three hotels, five physicians, a weekly newspaper, a post-office, three churches – Methodist Episcopal, South, Missionary Baptist and Christian – a public school, and a lodge each of Masons and Knights of Honor. The Okolona

¹ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas*. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890, p. 115.

² *Colton's railroad & township map of Arkansas*. Map. New York, D. F. Shall, 1854.

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Messenger, a seven-column newspaper, is owned by Ross & Hays, and is edited and published weekly by S. P. Meador, editor and publisher. It is Democratic in politics.³

From its earliest days, education was an important part of life in Okolona. The town's first school was a log building that had been built specifically for school and as a place to hold public gatherings. However, by the 1850s, a new building was needed, and a two-story building was built in 1859 at the same location. Information on the building is conflicting, but it was either a log building covered with siding or a frame building. In any case, it was owned by the local Masonic lodge, which had been formed in 1857, and they used the upper floor as their lodge.⁴

One school that operated out of the two-story building was the Okolona Male and Female Institute, which, according to an advertisement in the *Southern Standard* had begun classes in January 1871 and was managed by J. C. Wright. Charles Cargile was president of the Institute's board of trustees. Tuition fees for the Institute "ranged from two dollars per month for First Class Spelling, Reading and Writing, to five dollars a month for Fourth Class Ancient Languages and Higher Mathematics." In addition to the Institute, W. B. Carpenter opened a Male and Female School in January 1873, and advertisements from the period indicate that Carpenter, who "came highly recommended as an accomplished gentleman and successful teacher," was assisted by "competent teachers."⁵

Although the first Okolona High School was built in 1890, "The Academy," as the two-story building was referred to, remained until 1927 when it was demolished. After the building's demolition, the Masons deeded the site to the Okolona School District.⁶

Interestingly, it was not just the education of whites that was important to the people of Okolona in the late 1800s. African-American education was also important to the town's residents. The first school for black children consisted of a five-month term that was taught by Jim Townsend in the black Baptist church. When Townsend left, Ap Weir served as the next teacher. Both Townsend and Weir were white, and it was not until the early 1900s that a man named Tennison was hired as the first black teacher. Charles Cargile, the

³ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas*. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890, p. 121.

⁴ Richter, Wendy, ed. *Clark County, Arkansas: Past and Present*. Arkadelphia, AR: Clark County Historical Association, 1992, p. 290.

⁵ Richter, Wendy, ed. *Clark County, Arkansas: Past and Present*. Arkadelphia, AR: Clark County Historical Association, 1992, p. 290.

⁶ Richter, Wendy, ed. *Clark County, Arkansas: Past and Present*. Arkadelphia, AR: Clark County Historical Association, 1992, p. 290.

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president of the Okolona Male and Female Institute's board of trustees, donated the land for the first black school, which was located where the Okolona School Gymnasium is today.⁷

Although it is not known when the first school was built on the site, it is known that the Rosenwald Fund helped fund a building in 1928. The two-room building, which also had a small lunch room, was built for a total of \$3,000. Of that cost, \$500 came from the local black community, \$2,000 came from public funds, and \$500 came from the Rosenwald Fund.⁸ By 1940, the school had four teachers, including principal Robert L. Wiley.⁹

By the 1946-1947 school year, the school term lasted seven months and there were eight teachers at the school. In addition, the school became an accredited junior high school. The following school year, the school term increased to eight months, sometimes referred to as a split term because it consisted of a six-month regular term and a two-month summer term. During the late 1940s, there were three other school districts, namely, Pleasant Grove, Holly Grove and Burtzell, but they were soon consolidated into what became known as the Okolona Colored High School. During the 1948-49 school year, the school became an accredited four-year high school. Also, during the late 1940s, three busses were purchased and the number of faculty members had increased to fourteen.¹⁰

However, the changes that occurred to the school campus, were not just limited to the length of the term and the number of faculty. By the late 1940s, it became necessary to enlarge the school's physical plant, and a vocational agriculture building, a cafeteria and three more classrooms were built. During the 1949-1950 school year, a new home economics building was built, as was the gymnasium.¹¹

The gymnasium needed to be a functional building that could serve the school community, as well as the Okolona community at large. The building chosen was developed by Armco, and would have been an easy building to construct for the campus. Armco entered into the building business in 1929 when the Dixie Culvert and Metal Company bought a majority interest in the Harry Brothers Company of New Orleans. Dixie got full ownership of the company in 1934 and it was renamed the Iron and Steel Products Company,

⁷ Richter, Wendy, ed. *Clark County, Arkansas: Past and Present*. Arkadelphia, AR: Clark County Historical Association, 1992, p. 290.

⁸ Porter, David. W. "A Brief History of the Julius Rosenwald Fund Building Program with Special Reference to Arkansas." Unpublished Master's thesis, Fisk University, Nashville, TN, 1951, Table IX.

⁹ Richter, Wendy, ed. *Clark County, Arkansas: Past and Present*. Arkadelphia, AR: Clark County Historical Association, 1992, p. 290.

¹⁰ Information on the Okolona School Gymnasium in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

¹¹ Information on the Okolona School Gymnasium in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

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Inc. In December 1942, the company was dissolved when it became a part of Armco Drainage and Metal Products, Inc. The company remains in business today as AK Steel.¹²

Shortly after the gymnasium was built, during the 1951-1952 school year, further changes came to the campus, most notably a change in the school's name. The people of the community felt that the school needed a name change. Elnora Gatlin made the motion and it was seconded by many to change the name in honor of a faithful and loyal teacher, Mrs. Alma Frazier Simmons. As a result, the school became known as Simmons High School.¹³

By the late 1960s, further consolidation struck Clark County and in 1969 Simmons and Okolona high schools consolidated. During the late 1970s and early 1980s all of the buildings on the Simmons campus were demolished except the gym and agri. shop. The shop was torn down in the mid 1980s, leaving the gymnasium as the last remaining building on the Simmons campus.¹⁴

Today, the Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium is an important surviving building related to African-American education in Okolona and Clark County. As an integral part of the Okolona School campus since c.1950, the Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium was an important meeting place for students and members of Okolona's African-American community. Hopefully, through the efforts of the Simmons High School Alumni Association, the Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium will remain an important part of Okolona and an important resource for its residents.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** with **local significance** for its associations with African-American education in Okolona and Clark County. The Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium, which was built c.1950, is the last remaining building from the Okolona Colored School campus, which was Okolona's African-American school. As the site of sporting events and other community gatherings, the Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium has been an important community center and gathering place for Okolona's African-American community over the past fifty plus years.

¹² Information on Armco found at: http://www.steelox.com/pdf/history_brochure.pdf.

¹³ Information on the Okolona School Gymnasium in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

¹⁴ Information on the Okolona School Gymnasium in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890.

Colton's railroad & township map of Arkansas. Map. New York, D. F. Shall, 1854.

The Clark County Historical Journal, Volume Number 2. Published by the Clark County Historical Association, Spring 1978.

Information on Armco found at: http://www.steelox.com/pdf/history_brochure.pdf.

Information on the Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

Porter, David. W. "A Brief History of the Julius Rosenwald Fund Building Program with Special Reference to Arkansas." Unpublished Master's thesis, Fisk University, Nashville, TN, 1951.

Richter, Wendy, ed. *Clark County, Arkansas: Past and Present*. Arkadelphia, AR: Clark County Historical Association, 1992.

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Section number 10 Page 1

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

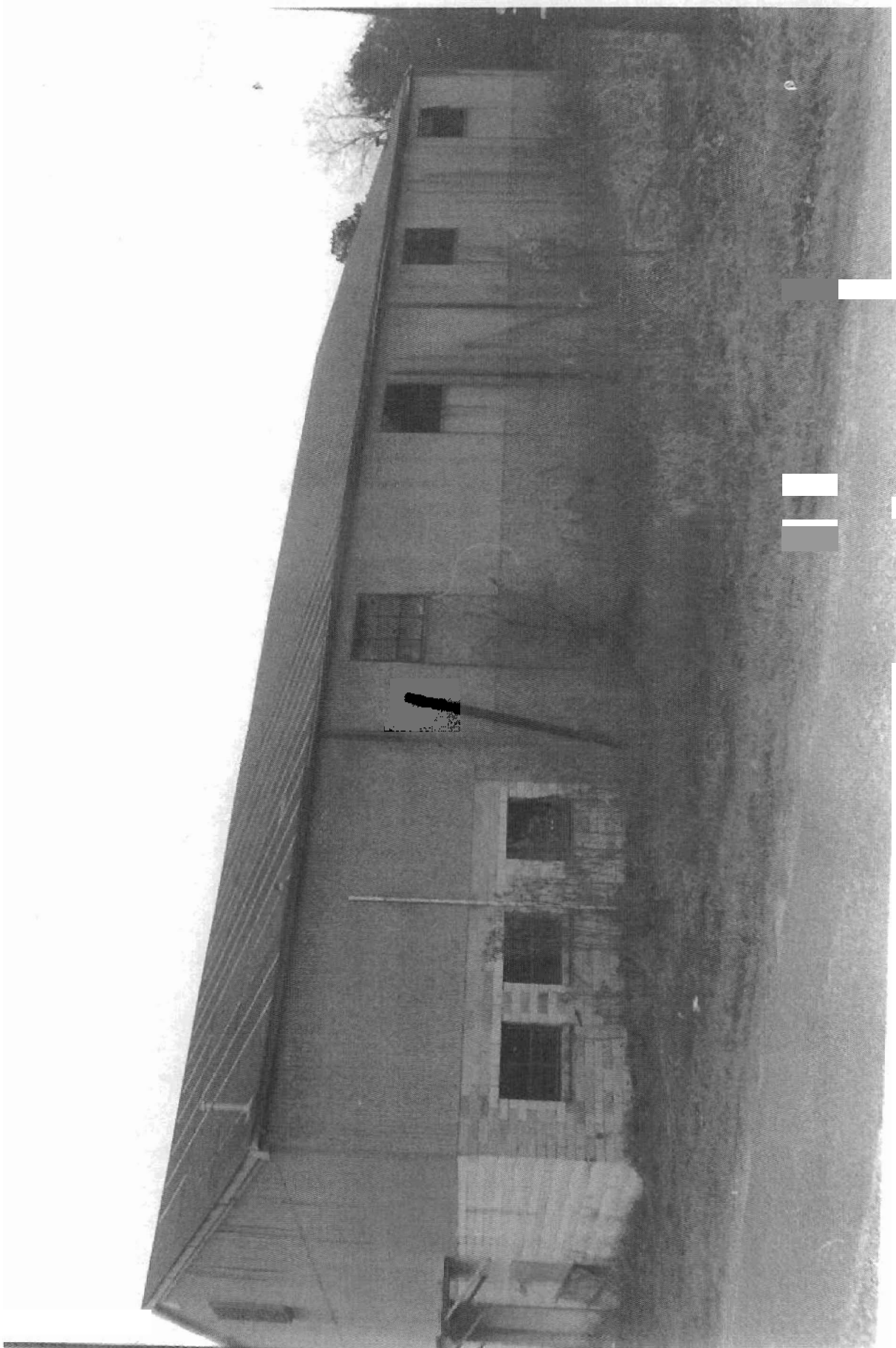
Beginning at a point 90 feet North of the Southwest corner of the Northwest Quarter (NW $\frac{1}{4}$) of the Northeast Quarter (NE $\frac{1}{4}$) of Section 3, Township 9 South, Range 22 West, and run thence North 210 feet, thence East 300 feet, thence South 210 feet, thence West 300 feet to the point of beginning, containing approximately one and one-half acres of land, more or less.

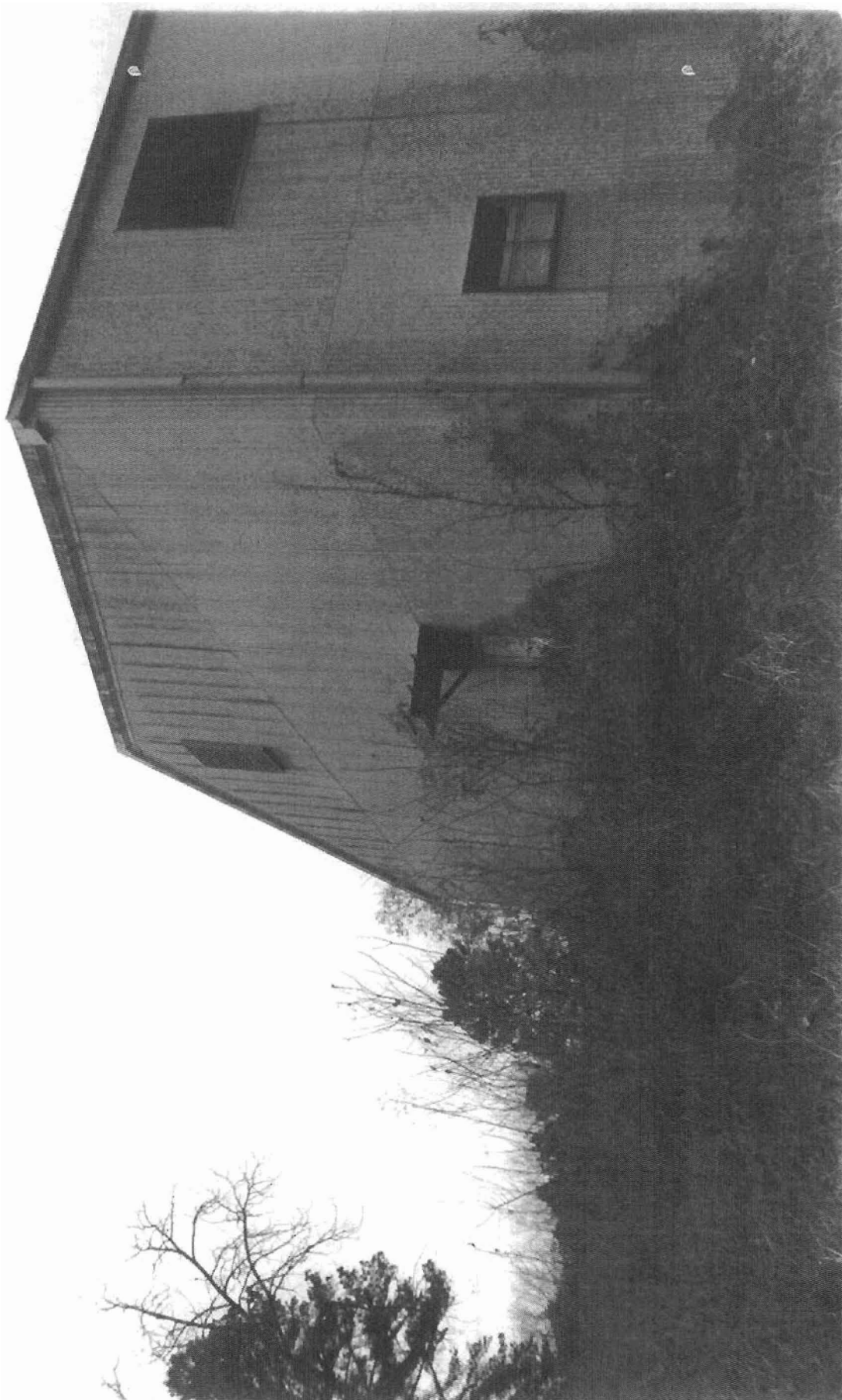
BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary contains all of the land historically associated with the Okolona Colored High School Gymnasium.

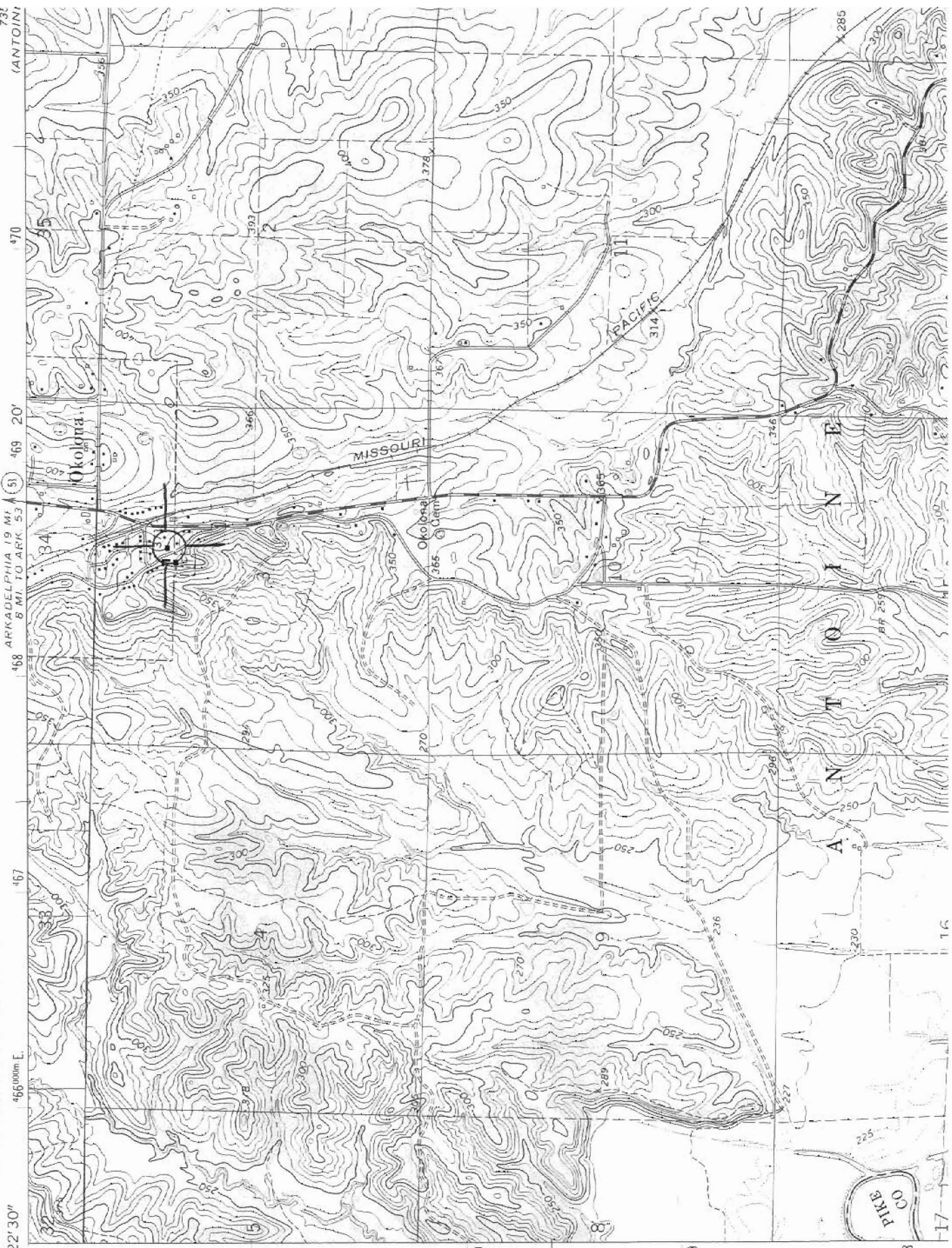








UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



93° 22' 30" 34° 00' 466,000m E. 732 (ANTOINE) 470 469 20' 468 ARKADELPHIA 19 MI. 5 MI. TO ARK. 53 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500

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KOLONA (CORED)
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KOLONA, CLARK
COUNTY, AR
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