

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: Visitors Chapel A. M. E.

other name/site number: N/A

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2. Location

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street & number: 319 Church Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Hot Springs

vicinity: N/A

state: AR

county: Garland

code: AR 051

zip code: 71901

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**  
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Cathryn A. Slatu \_\_\_\_\_ 4-19-95  
Signature of certifying official 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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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**5. National Park Service Certification**  
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I, hereby certify that this 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 Keeper Date  
of Action

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**6. Function or Use**  
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Historic: RELIGION Sub: Religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Current: RELIGION Sub: Religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

=====  
**7. Description**  
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Architectural Classification:

Gothic Revival

Classical Revival

Other Description: N/A

Materials:        foundation CONCRETE        roof ASPHALT/METAL  
                  walls        BRICK                    other STAINED GLASS

Describe present and historic physical appearance.    X See continuation sheet.

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Locally.

Applicable National Register Criteria:   C  

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):   A  

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1913

Significant Dates: 1913

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Northington, J. H.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet.

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:

- X State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>495380</u>	<u>3818360</u>	B	<u>15</u>	_____	_____
C	<u>15</u>	_____	_____	D	<u>15</u>	_____	_____

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Beginning at a point formed by the intersection of the eastern edge of Cottage Street with the northern edge of Church Street, proceed easterly along said edge for approximately 150 feet east to its intersection with a perpendicular line running parallel with the church's eastern elevation; thence proceed northerly along said line for approximately 200 feet to its intersection with a perpendicular line running parallel with the church's northern elevation; thence proceed westerly along said line for approximately 150 feet to its intersection with the eastern edge of Church Street; thence proceed southerly along said line to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

This boundary includes all the property historically associated with this resource that retains its integrity.

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

Name/Title: Ken Story, NR/Survey Coordinator

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: April 18, 1995

Street & Number: 1500 Tower Bldg, 323 Center St. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201

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National Park Service

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### Summary

The Visitors Chapel A. M. E. in Hot Springs is a single-story, brick masonry church building designed in an unusual synthesis of the Gothic Revival and the Classical Revival. The symmetrical Greek cross plan is rendered axial by the existence of the twin towers flanking the southern or front gable. Five small brick flues vent the church. The metal and asphalt shingle roof shelters the brick walls and the continuous poured concrete foundation. The building also contains a full basement.

### Elaboration

The Visitors Chapel A. M. E. in Hot Springs is a single-story, brick masonry church building designed in an unusual synthesis of the Gothic Revival and the Classical Revival. The symmetrical Greek cross plan is rendered axial by the existence of the twin towers flanking the southern or front gable. Five small brick flues vent the church. The metal and asphalt shingle roof shelters the brick walls and the continuous poured concrete foundation. The building also contains a full basement.

The southern or front elevation is composed of the pair of tall, pyramidal-roof towers that flank the central gable and the side walls of the main hipped roof section behind. The central gable displays a recessed basement entrance fronted by three concrete entrance arches. Placed centrally above are three rectangular stained-glass windows, which in turn are surmounted by a small semi-circular window, followed by a full oculus window placed near the gable peak. The flanking towers each contain two rectangular basement windows, two pair of stained-glass lancet windows on each of the two levels above, and are finished by a pair of rectangular louvered vents placed just below the cornice. The tall pyramidal roofs complete the towers, and each originally displayed four small brick towers at each corner, set into the bases of the corners of the pyramidal roof (several of these have deteriorated over the years). The single-storey walls to either side of the towers are each fenestrated with a large lancet door opening, containing a double-leaf door and transom, and a lancet window, with both surmounted by a single oculus window. The sides of the towers also each contain a double-leaf entrance and a window. Directly behind the central gable rises the metal-roofed dome, rising from the circular drum fenestrated with clear oculus windows and capped with another smaller round drum and dome.

The eastern and western elevations are almost identical. The projecting central gable is fenestrated in a fashion identical to that on the front, with the exception of the basement level

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being lighted by three square windows. The wall surfaces to either side are punctuated with a single lancet window (below each of which is another single square basement window). The side wall of the towers to the south are fenestrated with a pair of lancet windows on the upper level and a pair of rectangular vents above. The side wall to the north is fenestrated with a pair of arched windows on the second storey and a single central arched window opening below (now bricked-in) on the western elevation, while that of the eastern elevation is punctuated on the first storey by a single-leaf entrance and window on the first storey and a pair of arched windows above.

The northern (rear) elevation is symmetrically-organized around the central projecting bay. This bay is fenestrated with three small rectangular windows in the basement, three larger rectangular windows on the main storey, and a small blind semi-circular window above. The wall surfaces immediately flanking the central bay are fenestrated with a pair of arched windows on each of the upper two levels and a pair of smaller rectangular windows in the basement. Each end of the building is completed with side walls that are fenestrated with a simple arched window above a larger lancet window.

The significant exterior details include the polychroming of the door and window moldings, and of the quoins on the southern elevation; the small brick towers placed at the corners of the tower caps; the concrete entrance arches in the basement on the southern elevation; the oculus and lancet windows throughout; and the massive metal-sheathed dome over the crossing.

The sanctuary within is a large auditorium space interrupted only by the panelled wood columns that support the wooden balcony that extends around the eastern, western and southern sides. The curved pews face the raised dais, behind which are the four large arches that separate the sanctuary from the organ and choir loft. Directly above the sanctuary is the soaring dome that is actually taller than it appears from the exterior due to the fact that the interior ceiling begins at the top of the exterior walls. The panelled wooden balcony is stained a rich light brown, the walls and ceilings are plastered, and most of the glass is clear, the stained-glass being concentrated on the southern or front elevation.

There have been few alterations worthy of note to the Visitors Chapel A. M. E. It is in very good condition.

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**Summary**

Criterion C, local significance

The Visitors Chapel A. M. E. is locally significant under Criterion C as a unique example -- and the only one known in the entire city of Hot Springs -- of a fundamentally Gothic Revival design that has been combined with a Greek cross plan and a dome.

**Elaboration**

Native Americans from throughout the surrounding region had been visiting the valley between North and West Mountains for many years prior to the arrival of settlers of European descent. Like those later settlers, the Native Americans visited the valley for the natural springs that emanated from both hillsides, and particularly the hot springs that were to give the later community its name. The Native Americans were the first to believe that the hot springs in particular -- heated through a natural process the actual physics of which remain unknown today -- possessed medicinal and restorative properties (though, according to legend, the abundance of distinct springs in the valley led them to believe in the almost mystical nature of the entire valley), a belief shared by the first trappers and hunters of European descent that passed through the valley. These early white travelers took stories of the hot springs back with them to civilization, and awareness of the springs spread widely thereafter.

The first actual white settlement took place by the second decade of the nineteenth century, though by all accounts it was sparse and of limited tenure. These earliest settlers, typically sufferers of various, poorly-understood maladies, would relocate individually to the vicinity of the springs and erect a small, temporary shelter that would serve them for the duration of their stay, and which they would then abandon when they felt that they had benefitted all that they could from the waters. There is documentation of one known early settler attempting to establish a commercial enterprise near the springs for the accommodation of visitors, but even these efforts were short-lived, and the structures erected were crude and insubstantial.

The first recorded successful attempt to exploit and develop the "valley of the vapors" was conducted by Ludovicus Belding, a settler from central Massachusetts who immigrated to the area with his father-in-law and mother-in-law, Jonathan and Temperance Bassett, and his wife, Lydia Bassett Belding, along with various other family members and children. Arriving to the area via what was then the principal route to the springs area from the territorial capital at Little Rock, the road that has since become the roadbed for modern U. S. Highway 270 (also known as the Hot Springs - Malvern Highway), it is not surprising that they settled near the first springs



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they encountered along the route, located approximately five miles southeast of the present site of downtown Hot Springs. Almost immediately after their arrival, Ludovicus Belding (1792-1833), Jonathan Bassett's son-in-law, initiated the permanent development of the area around the hot springs, first with the repair and improvement of several of the abandoned earlier structures, and then with the establishment of the first mercantile store nearby. He soon followed these efforts with the construction of the area's first hotel, and for a time this budding community became known as "Thermopolis." In spite of both the bad roads into the valley from Little Rock and these humble beginnings, Belding succeeded at establishing the spa community that would become known as Hot Springs.

Little is known about the earliest African-American settlement in the area, though it is certain that there was at least a small community of some size in 1868, as it was in that year that the Rev. Henderson Patillo and Rev. B. W. Whitlow came to Hot Springs from Malvern via the old highway in a wagon to preach to a small group of Negro worshippers that met outdoors. The construction of the first railroad to Hot Springs from Malvern in the mid-1870's -- the "Diamond Jo" Railroad (named after its builder, "Diamond Jo" Reynolds, a steamboat magnate who frequented the springs because of his rheumatism; because he could not stand the jostling of the coach ride over the poor road between Malvern and Hot Springs he built his own railroad running parallel to the coach road) -- proved to be propitious for the fledgling congregation, as "Diamond Jo" donated this plot of land to the congregation for the establishment of a permanent church. Reportedly the first church was a "log cabin" structure that burned in 1878, as did the next two buildings constructed, the first in 1905 and the second in 1913.

Construction on the present building was begun that year under the Pastorate of the Rev. H. G. Montgomery (at some point the congregation had aligned themselves with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the large African-American church that had organized congregations nationwide, though particularly in the South). The Building Committee was S. B. Carey, L. F. Amos, William Carleton, Wiley Graham, Tobe Washington Harris, C. Montgomery, and Frank W. Polk. J. H. Northington was the architect.

The church was renamed the Visitors Chapel at that time in honor of the visitors from across the nation who come to worship with this congregation. This building has continued to serve this congregation ever since and remains active today.

The Visitors Chapel A. M. E. is architecturally significant by virtue of its status as a unique synthesis of both the Gothic Revival styles and the Classical Revival styles. Overall, the church is primarily Gothic Revival in style, to which the pyramidal towers, lancet window and door

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openings, and stained-glass attest. The round, metal-clad dome, however, is distinctly of Classical origin. The combination lends the composition an almost Byzantine appearance, an effect quite possibly intended by the architect, as African-American congregations, though Christian, frequently identified with Moslem symbols and forms. Whatever its origins, this marriage of the Classical and Gothic traditions is most remarkable by virtue of how aesthetically successful it is. Rather than looking like one style crudely pasted on top of another, the rising of the low, hipped roof into the round dome strikes the eye as a perfectly natural resolution of the roof, and of the design as a whole. This effect is carried over into the interior also, as the round base of the dome is echoed by the rounded arches that punctuate the loft spaces directly behind the dais.

For the uniqueness of the vision, and for the success with which it is here carried out, the Visitors Chapel A. M. E. is locally significant under Criterion C.

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*Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Central Arkansas*, (Chicago, Nashville and St. Louis: 1889).

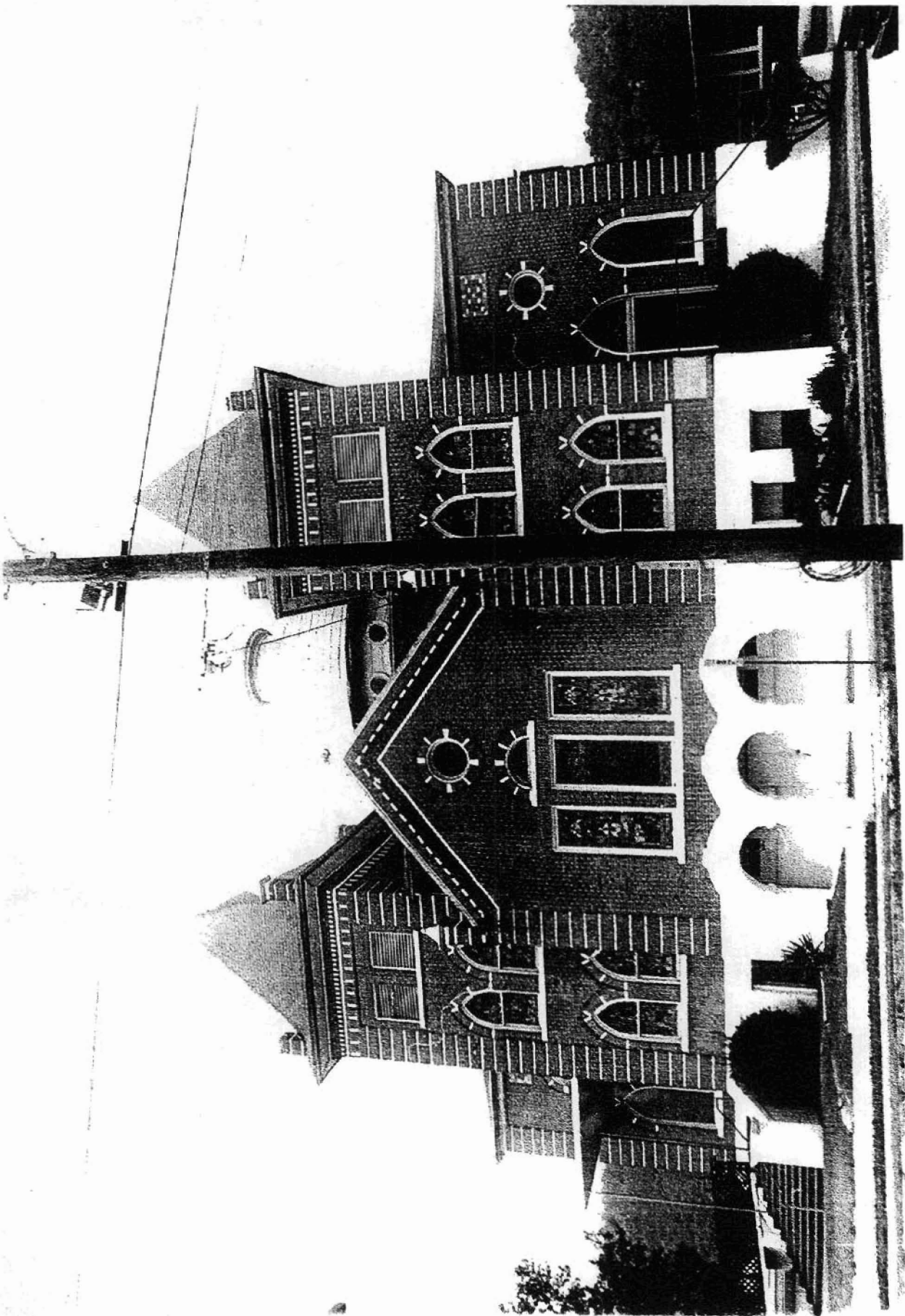
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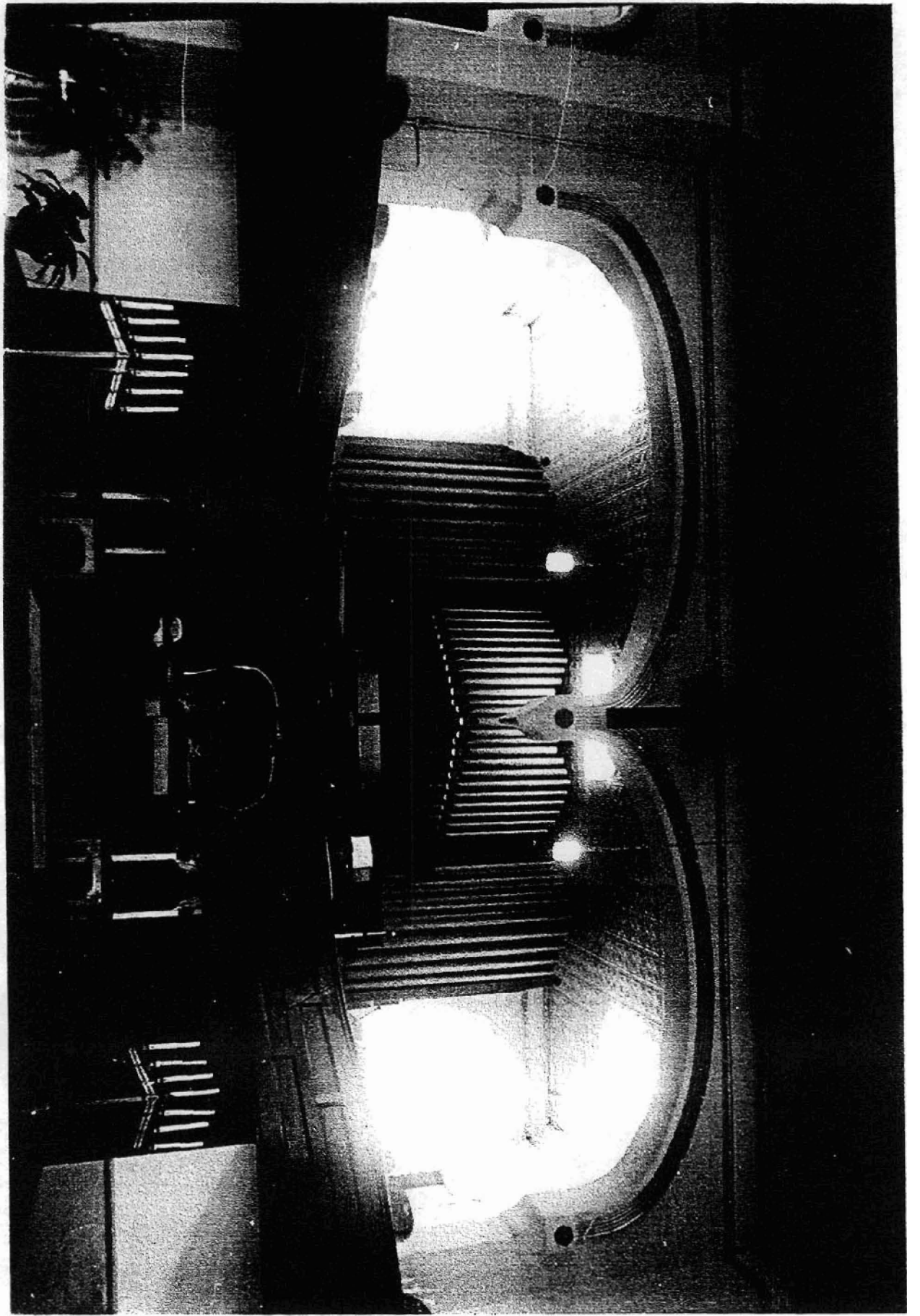
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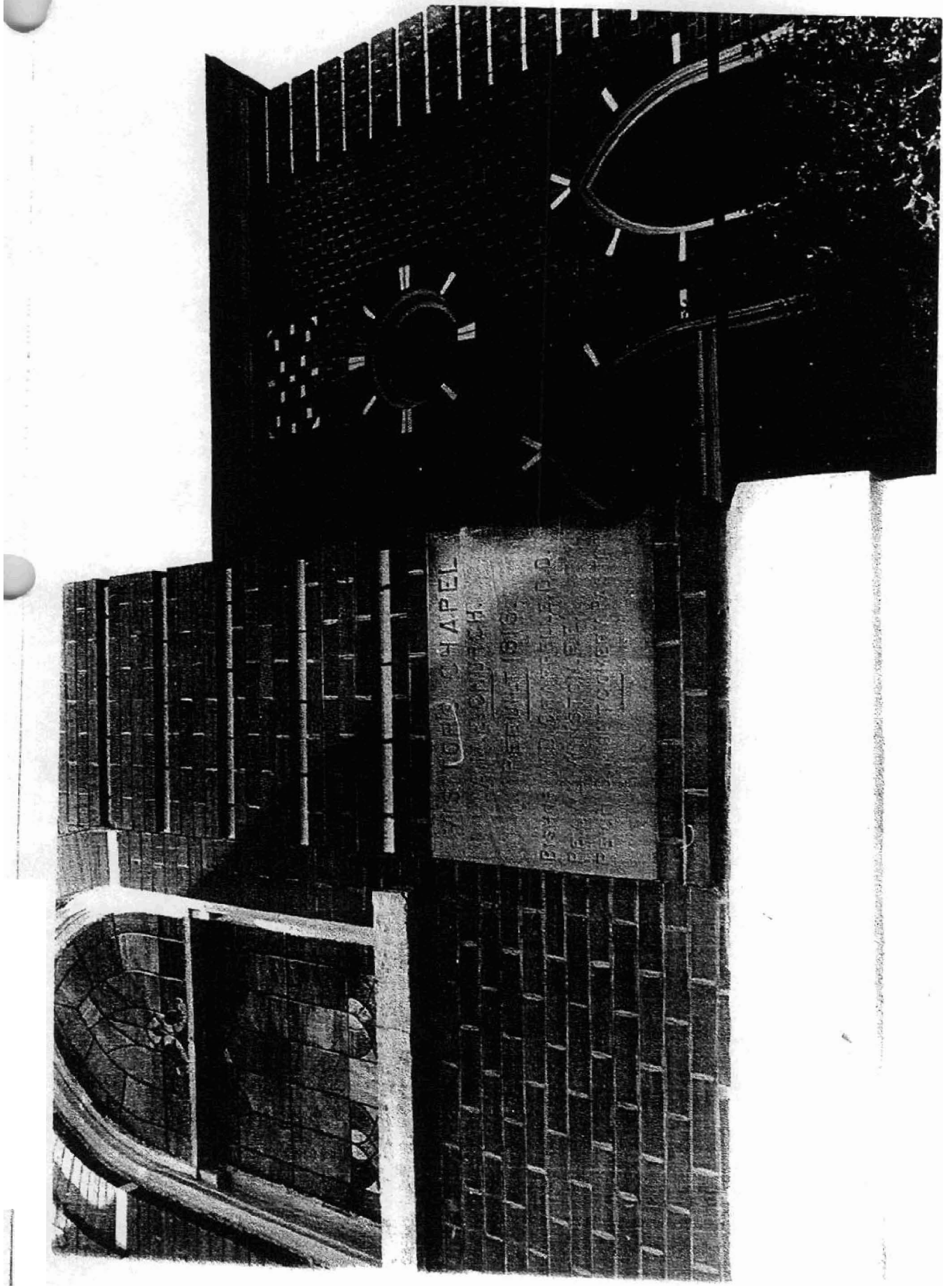
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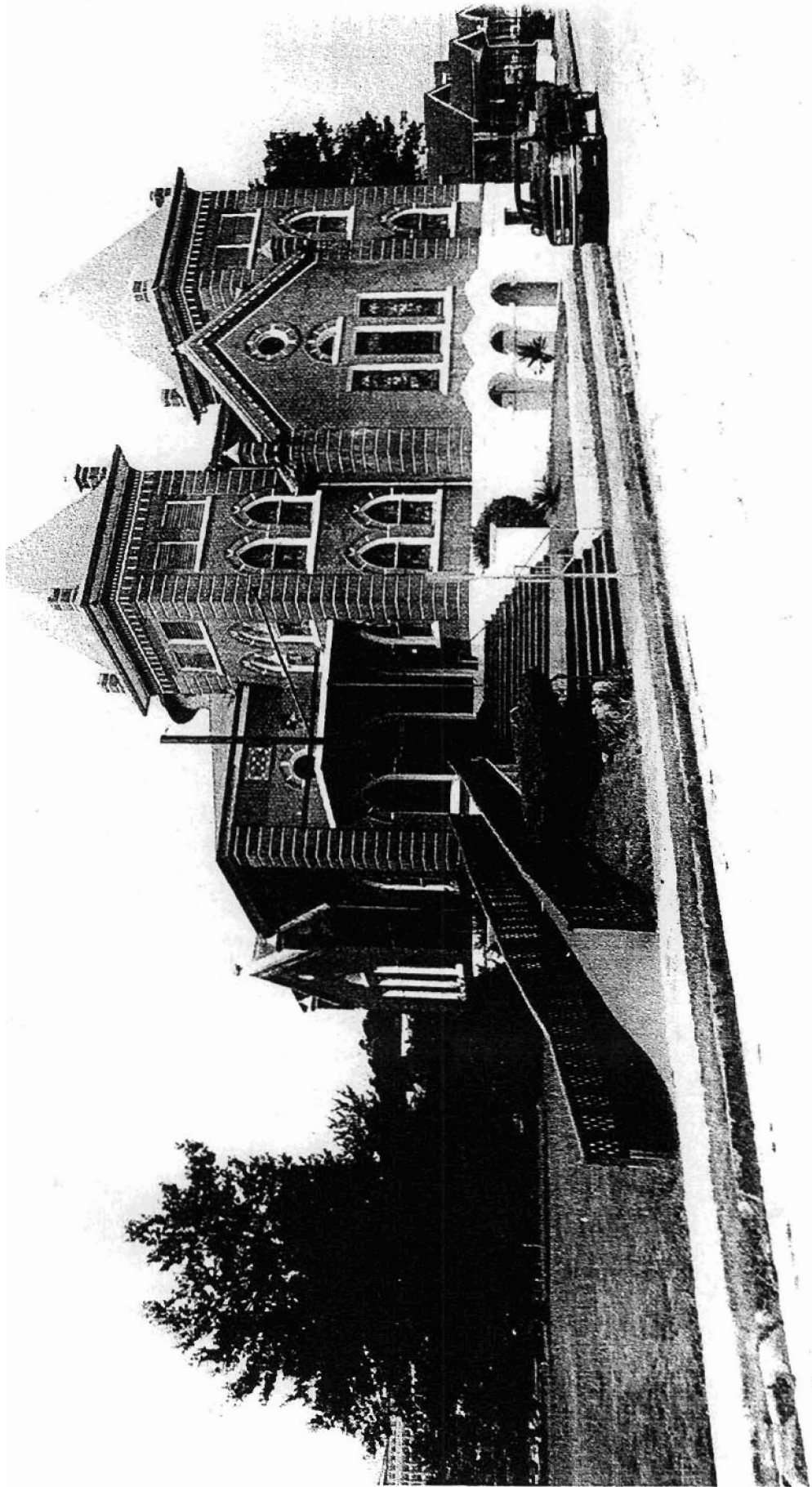


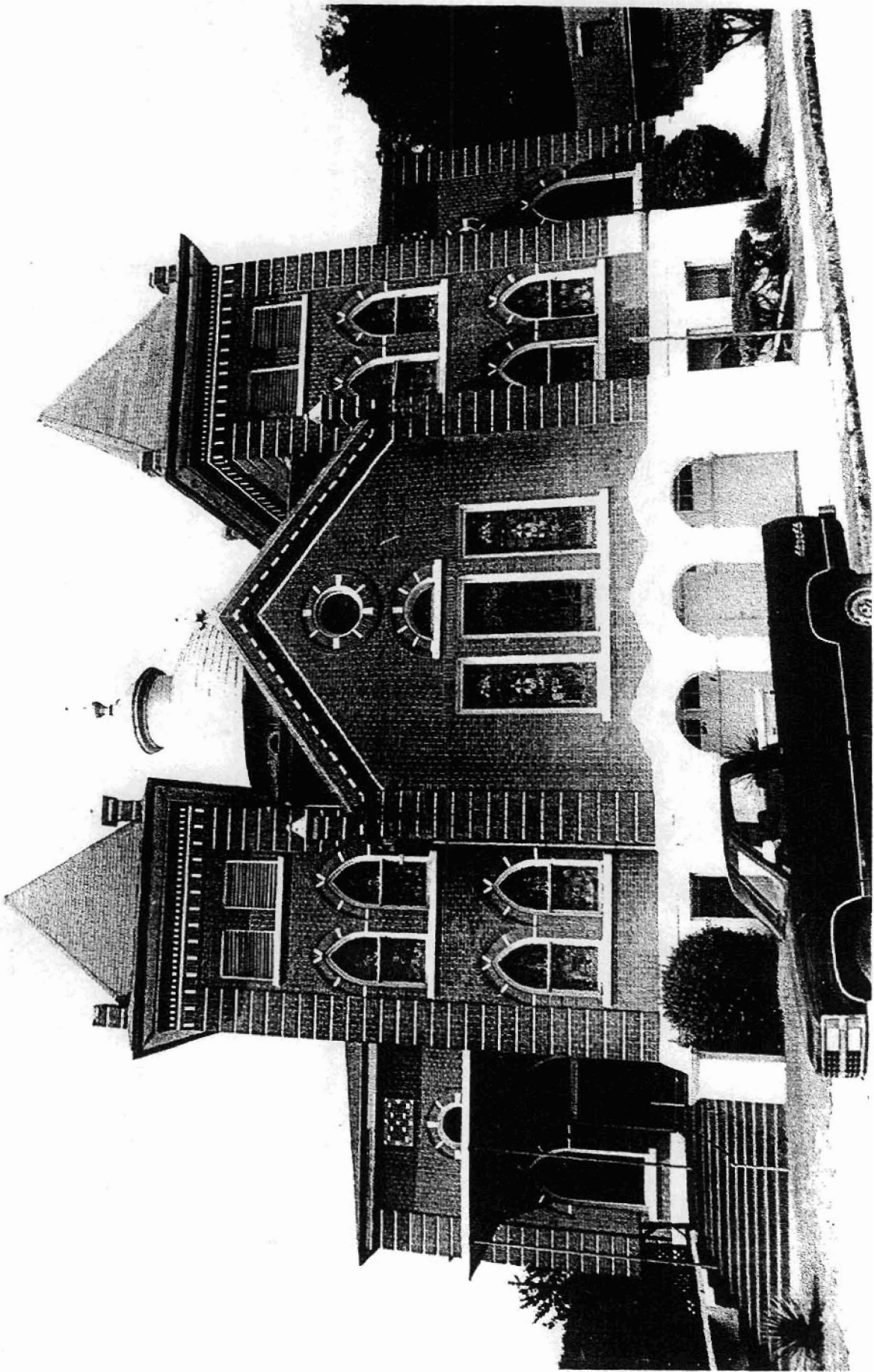


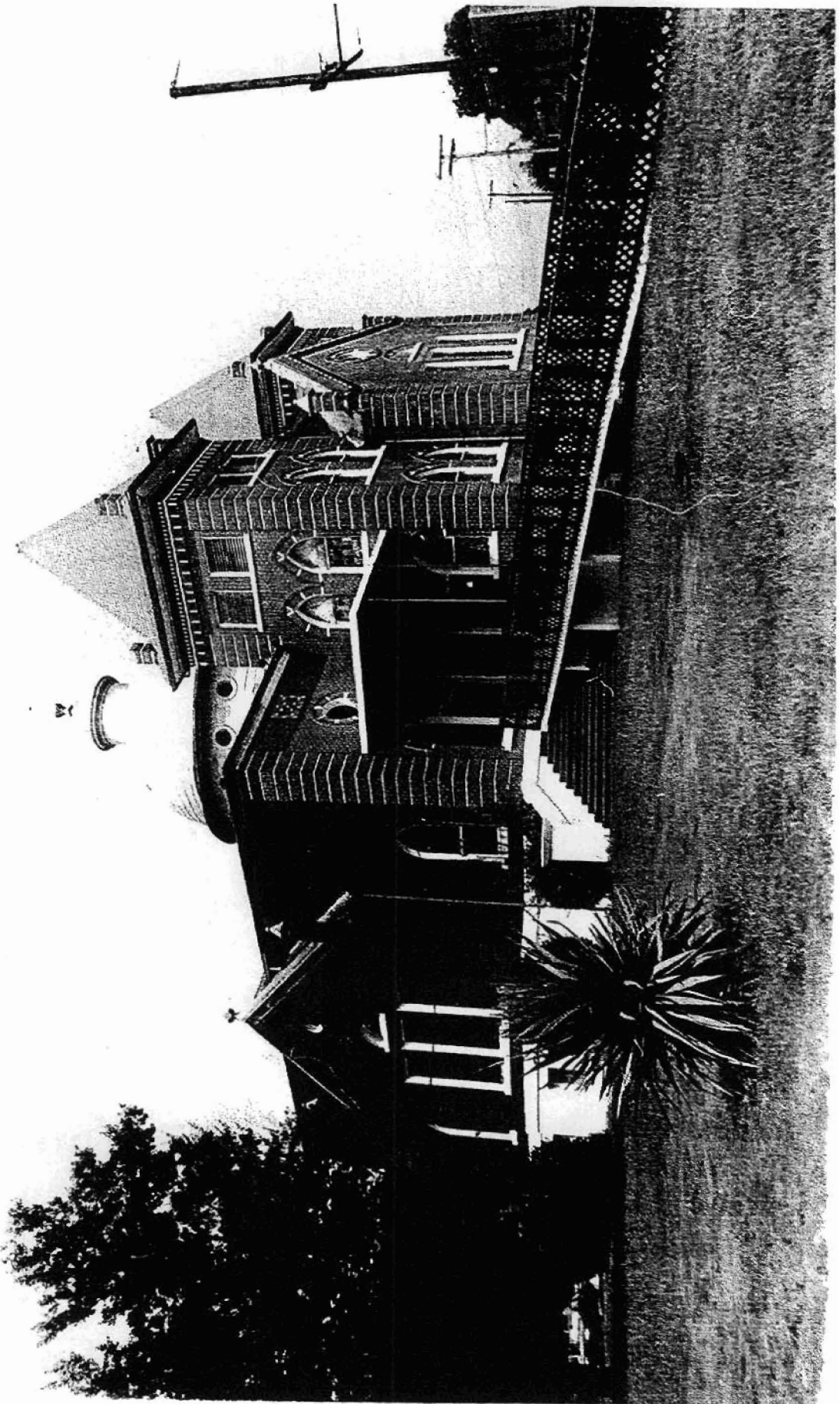
WORLD CHAPEL  
METHODIST CHURCH  
REV. JAMES B. BIRD  
PRESIDENT  
REV. J. W. B. BIRD  
REV. J. W. B. BIRD

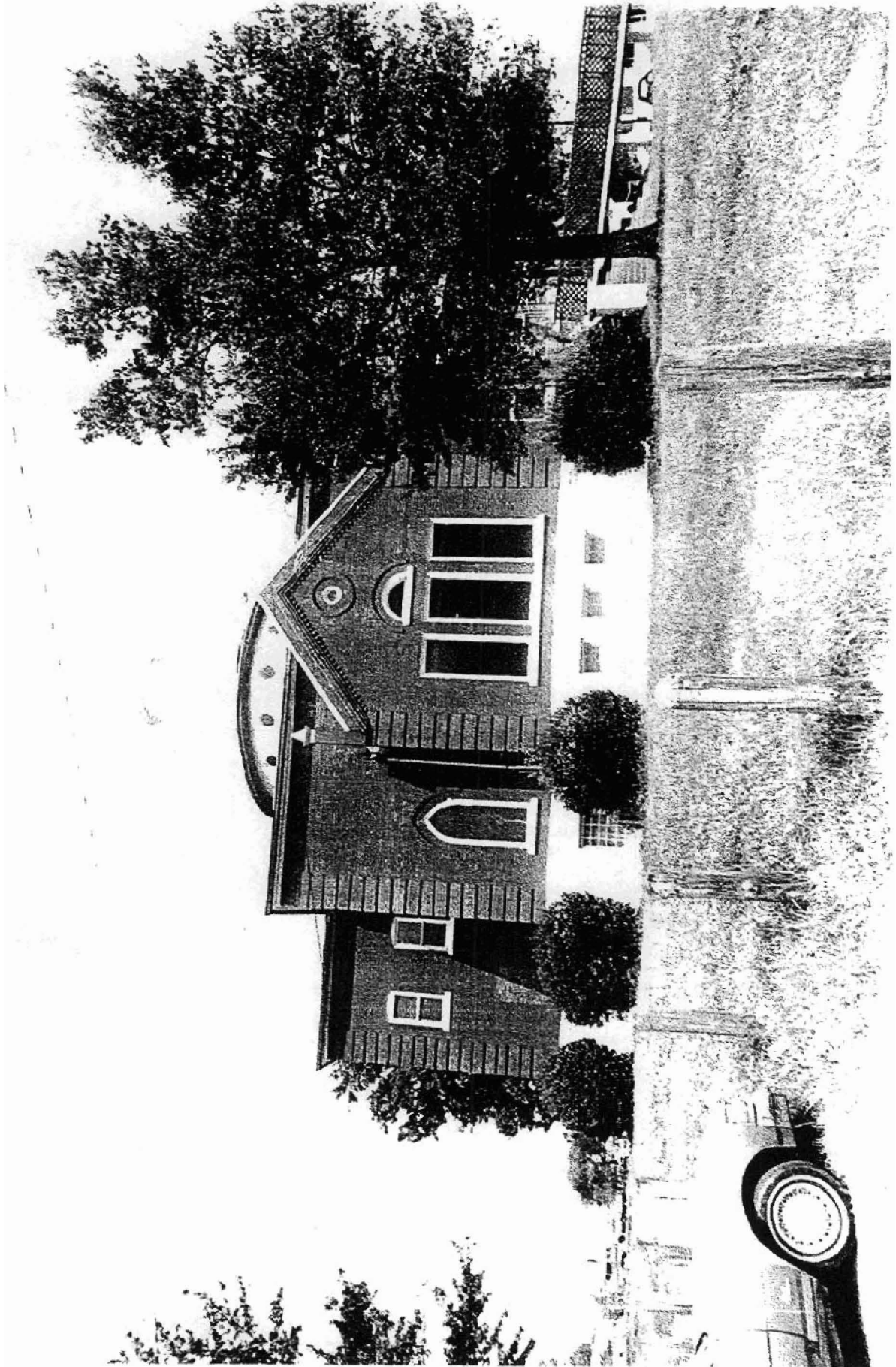




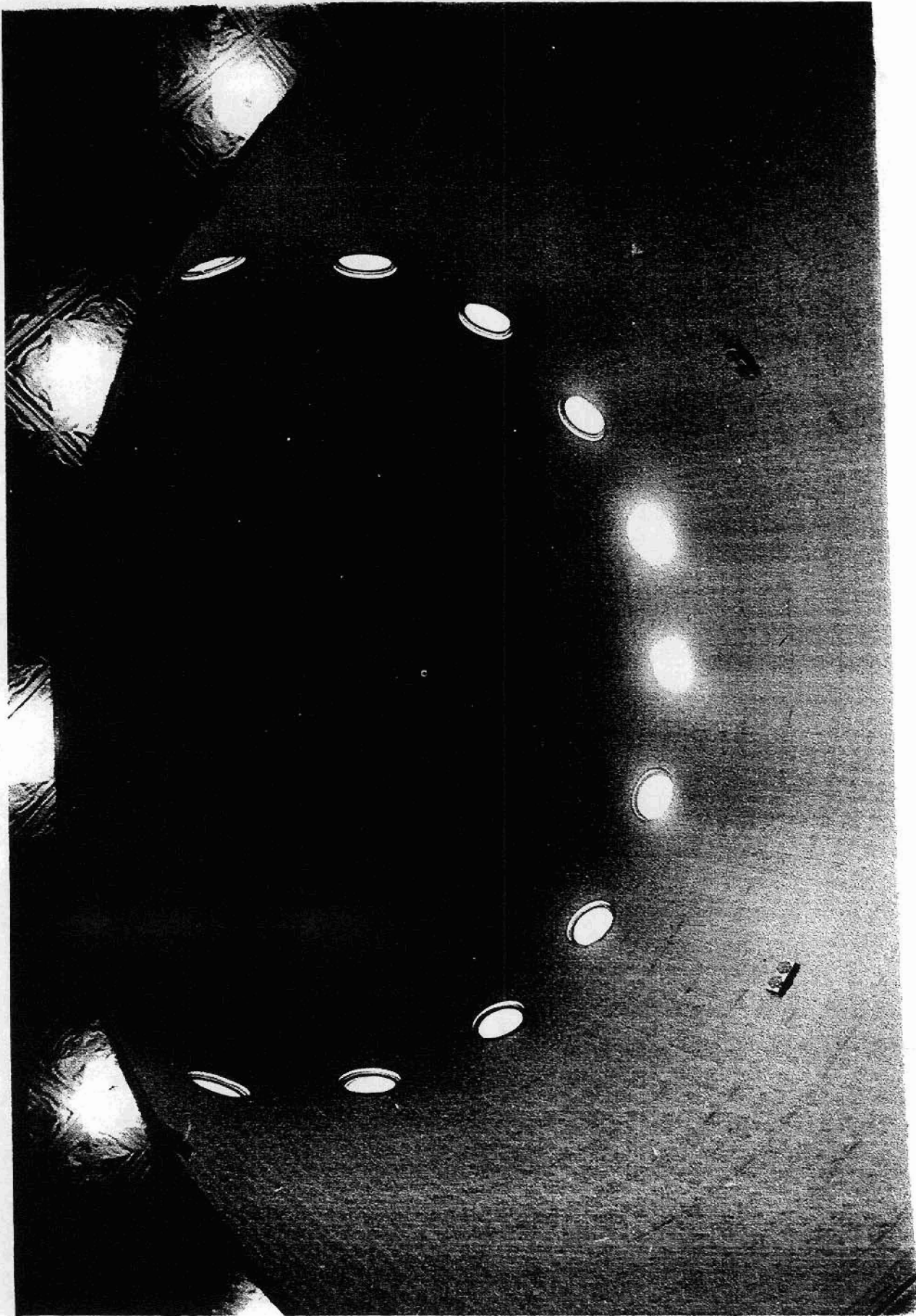


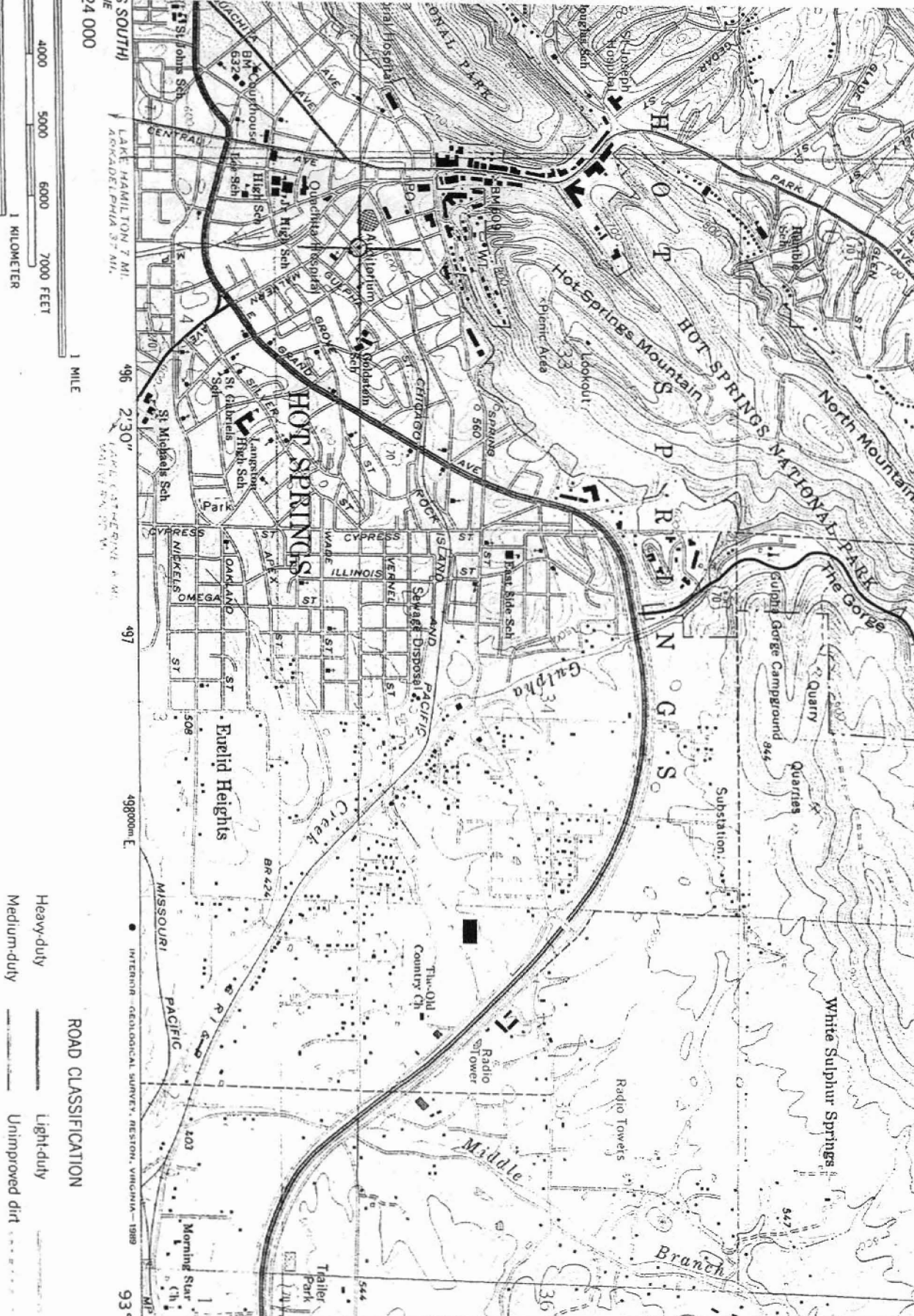




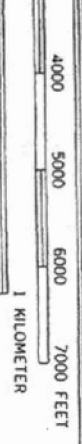








VISITORS' CHAPEL  
 A. M. E.  
 HOT SPRINGS,  
 ARKANSAS  
 15/495380/  
 3818360



VAL 20 FEET  
 TICAL DATUM OF 1929



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

**ROAD CLASSIFICATION**  
 Heavy-duty ————— Light-duty  
 Medium-duty ———— Unimproved dirt  
 U. S. Route ————— State Route

**HOT SPRINGS NORTH, ARK.**

34093-E1-TF-024

ALL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
 ON, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72204  
 NB SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

1966  
 PHOTOREVISED 1976  
 DMA 7553 II SE-SERIES V884

LAKE CATHERINE  
 7452 N NW