

NR 10-16-86

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received _____
date entered _____

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

and/or common AME CHURCH

2. Location

street & number 895 Oak Street _____ not for publication

city, town Batesville N/A vicinity of

state Arkansas code 05 county Independence code 063

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Trustees, Bethel AME Church - c/o Montgomery

street & number 1407 Case Street

city, town Batesville N/A vicinity of state Arkansas 72501

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Independence County Courthouse

street & number 193 Main Street

city, town Batesville state Arkansas 72501

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? _____ yes _____ no

date _____ federal _____ state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records

city, town _____ state _____

7. Description

Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

Check one

unaltered

altered

Check one

original site

moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY

A single story, gable roofed, sandstone building dominated by a hip roofed, two story, truncated tower, the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was constructed in 1882. Although the tower and the simple lines of the building are typical of most small town and rural churches, growth of the congregation rather than formal considerations of style governed expansion of the building. The tan sandstone, quarried locally and roughly shaped by workers and masons drawn from the church membership, is the most consistent feature of the 1881 and 1910 portions of the structure.

ELABORATION

The square two story tower, or stumped steeple, which serves as the church entrance characterizes the facade, or south elevation. Centered in the facade, the stone tower barely rises above the ridge of the original church and protrudes from the original facade, the depth of attachment equal only to the width of the tower's eighteen-inch walls. Double wooden doors surmounted by an arched transom provide entry into the tower. On the east and west sides of the tower, single, 1/1 double-hung arched windows are symmetrically placed. The upper edge of the stone arches over the double doors and lower story windows are cut in an unusual wedge-shaped or stepped pattern to conform with the straight stone course of the tower walls. On the second story of each of three exposed elevations of the tower, single windows identical to those on the lower story are set and embellished by a more typical fan-shaped arch. In 1973 the original belfry which capped the tower was destroyed by a tornado and replaced with an undistinguished, hip-roofed substitute with metal louvers.

Identical arched windows, which flank the tower, comprise the remaining features in the facade. Single stone lintels repeat the arch of the windows and are slightly flared. The window on the eastern side of the facade retains its 1/1 double-hung sash, while the window on the western side has been converted to an access for ventilation ducts.

The only features on the fifty foot length of the east elevation which comprised the 1881 church are two windows, symmetrically placed and identical to the windows on the facade which flank the tower.

In 1956, a vesting room and pastor's office were added to the rear, or north, elevation. The gable and shed roof is offset from the ridge line and lower than the original 1881 roof. The frame addition is covered with an irregular stone veneer which does not conform to the 1881 and 1910 straight stone courses. On the east side of the 1956 addition, a door placed near the original building is balanced by a pair of 6/6 double-hung windows. Three pairs of identical windows, symmetrically spaced, distinguish the north elevation of the addition, with the pair on the western end of this elevation, below its shed roof, placed lower than the other two pairs. A recessed, centrally located door bounded by two narrow casement windows are the only features on the west elevation of the 1956 addition.

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The construction and design of the 1910 wing, which bisected the west elevation of the 1881 building, are almost identical to those of the original church. However, the walls of the 1910 addition are only one foot thick, while those of the 1881 structure are two feet thick. A shed addition later filled the north side of the wing to the rear edge of the original building. Sided with pressed or particle board, the north elevation contains three irregularly-arranged metal windows. The only other feature of the shed addition is a door on its west elevation, set close to the 1910 wing. Three evenly arrayed double-hung windows with single stone, slightly flared arched lintels, identical to those on the 1881 building, mark the west elevation of the wing. The window on the northern edge of the elevation, however, is concealed by ventilation ducts.

Two more 1/1 double-hung windows flank a slightly off-center door on the wing's south elevation, but only the window on the west side of the door is defined by a flared arch. The window nearest the 1881 structure is capped by a straight, single-stone lintel. The remaining small exposure of the west elevation of the original church is featureless stone.

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		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
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title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below					
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	Black History	

Specific dates 1882 & 1910 Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

SUMMARY

The oldest church building in Batesville, the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church also houses the first black congregation in that city. Bethel AME Church represents the struggle for autonomy and survival by the freedmen during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era which followed. The organization of the church reflected their desire for independence and pursuit of cultural determinism. Architecturally, its modest form and truncated, tower-like steeple are typical of black churches throughout the rural areas of Arkansas.

ELABORATION

Although the AME Church began in 1816 in Philadelphia as a defiant response to discrimination against blacks, the first Arkansas AME church was not organized until after the Civil War in Little Rock. The withdrawal of black Arkansas from the state's churches represented their desire for independent authority and leadership. By 1871, the Batesville Bethel congregation purchased the site of the present church building. The selection of the site reflected, in part, an enforced isolation of the minority population of freedmen in Batesville. This segregation eventually resulted in the abandonment or expulsion of black institutions from much of the town and their relocation to a triangular ghetto bounded by Vine, Harrison, and St. Louis Streets.

The original leaders of the Bethel congregation included many leaders of black Batesville, such as Charles Finley and two veterans of the 113th Colored Infantry, Samuel Greer and Sandy Willis. In 1875, M.F.A. Easton assumed the post of pastor, as well as teacher at the Freedman's School, later closed by the irate white citizenry. Fund raising for a church building was headed by Easton's successor, Reuben Johnson. In the December 8, 1880, Batesville Guard, Johnson thanked subscribers for their donations to the building fund, but warned recalcitrant businessmen their trade might suffer if they failed to contribute. A frame structure was completed the same month and on Christmas Day, burned as the result of a faulty stovepipe.

Resolved to erect a more resilient building, the congregation borrowed money "for building a church edifice" from Simon Adler, a Jewish merchant and private banker. Stone for the church was quarried locally, and, of the six black Batesville quarry workers listed in the 1880 Census, four were members of the Bethel AME Church. In 1881-1882, the new church building was completed.

As the course and form of Jim Crow Arkansas solidified, the Bethel AME Church became the center of a realigned black Batesville. After 1900, the black school and the Lafferty Memorial Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church joined black residences, businesses, and other religious and social institutions in their strictly defined and enforced segregation.

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In 1910 a substantial wing was extended from the western elevation and the interior of the church was altered to accommodate its enlargement. Although the exact date of construction was not recorded, prior to 1914 an abbreviated tower-like steeple was added to the church entrance.

In 1920, a devastating fire completed the expulsion begun by white social, economic, and political pressures, and local newspaper rejoiced in the removal of a number of "undesirable rent houses" occupied primarily by blacks. By the 1920's, the Bethel AME Church offered a tenuous refuge in an uneasy society, and several of the elevations as well as the entrance tower, conveyed the restrained ideal of the rural, black Arkansas church.

A number of obtrusive additions later marred some secondary elevations of the church. In 1956 a stone-veneered gable and shed vesting room and office was joined to the north elevation of the original building. At a later date, a small shed was also attached to the north elevation of the 1910 wing. In 1973, the original belfry which surmounted the entrance tower was destroyed by a tornado and replaced with a less elaborate substitute.

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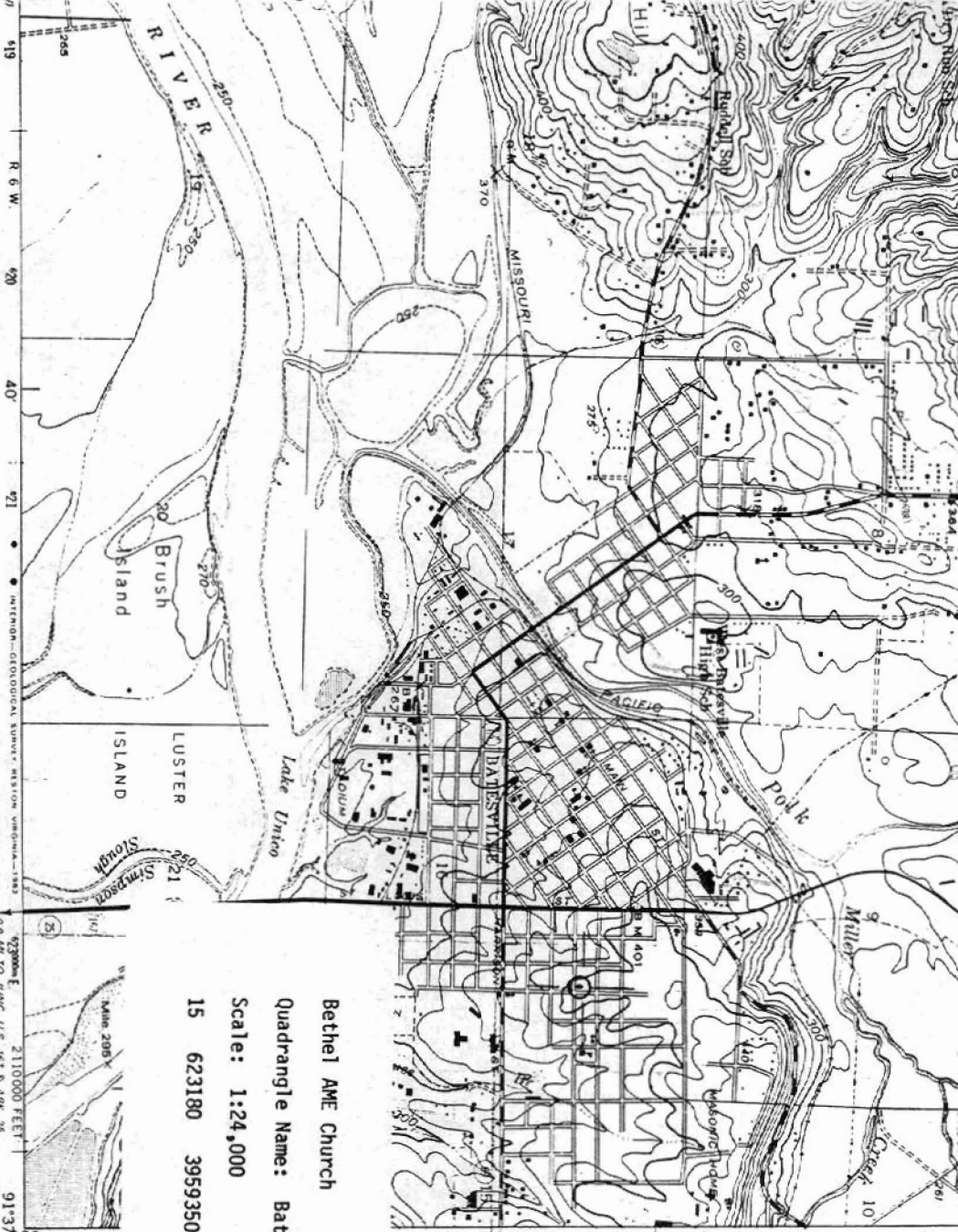
Page 1

Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Savoy Montgomery & Arthur Montgomery, May 15, 1985

Britton, Nancy, "Building of Bethel AME Church". Unpublished paper, 1985.

Fagg, Jane B. "Relocation of the Black School, 1905". Unpublished paper.

John William Graves, "The Arkansas Separate Coach law of 1891," in
Arkansas in the Gilded Age, 1874-1900, Waddy William Moore ed.
Little Rock, Ark.: Rose Publishing Company, 1976.



Bethel AME Church

Quadrangle Name: Batesville

Scale: 1:24,000

15 623180 3959350



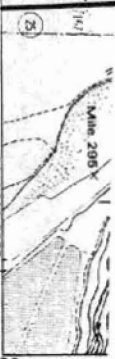
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 LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72204
 SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



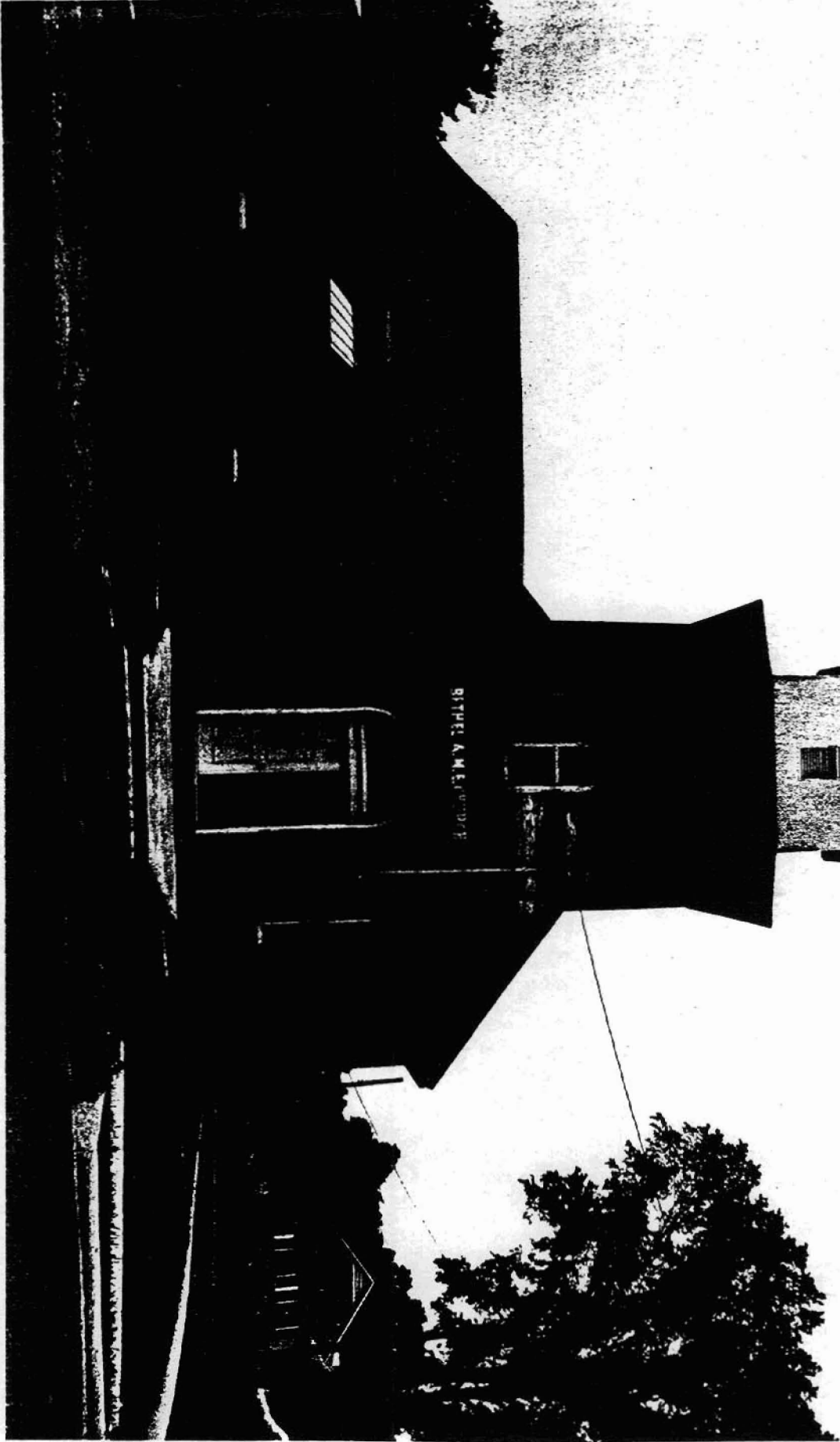
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- Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface
- Light-duty road, all weather, improved surface
- Unimproved road, fair or dry weather
- Interstate Route
- U. S. Route
- State Route

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

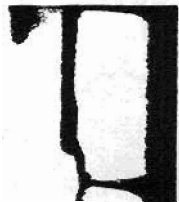
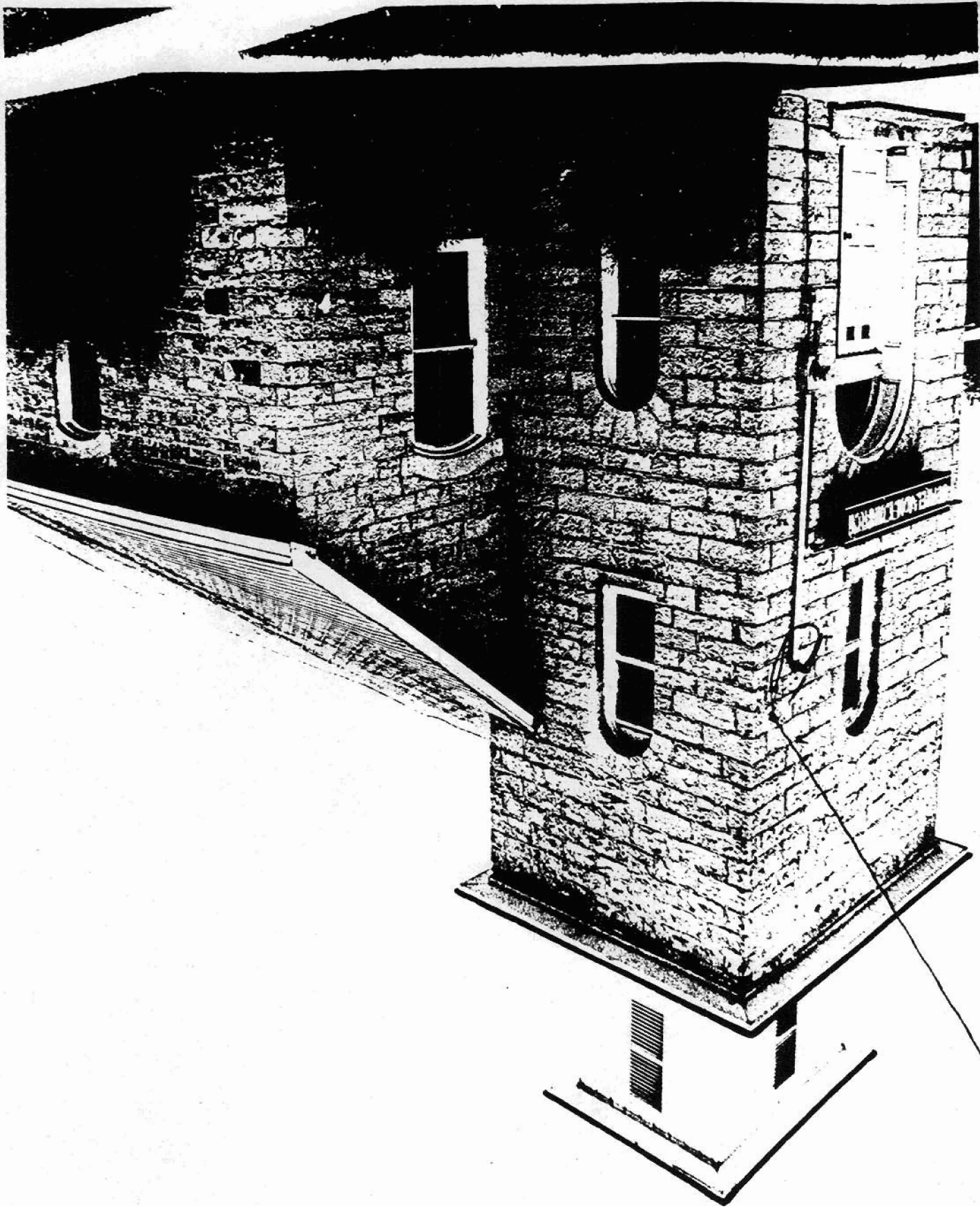
2110000 FEET
 0.9 MET TO CLINC U.S. 167 & ARK. 25



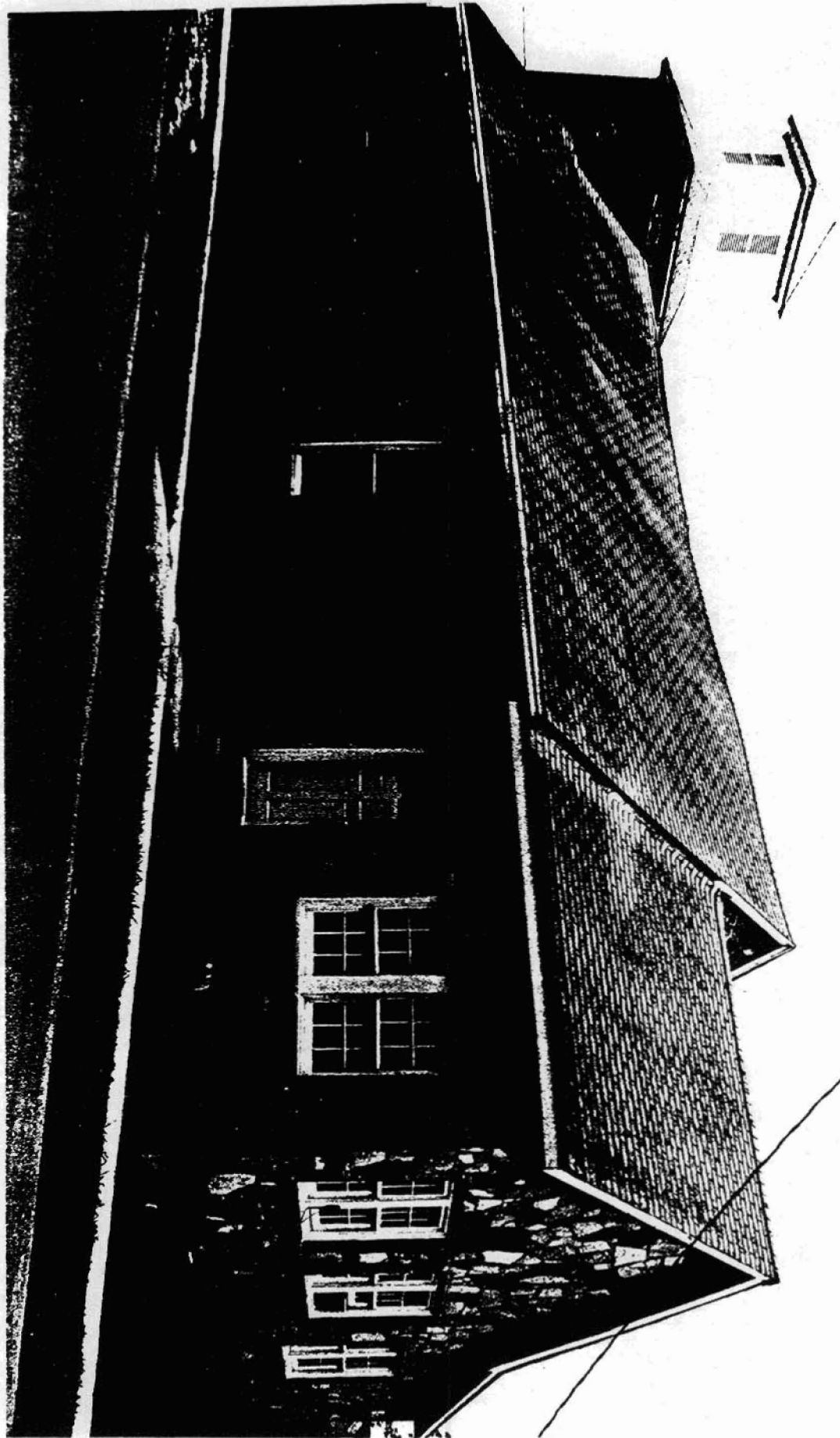
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 N3545—W9137.5/7.5



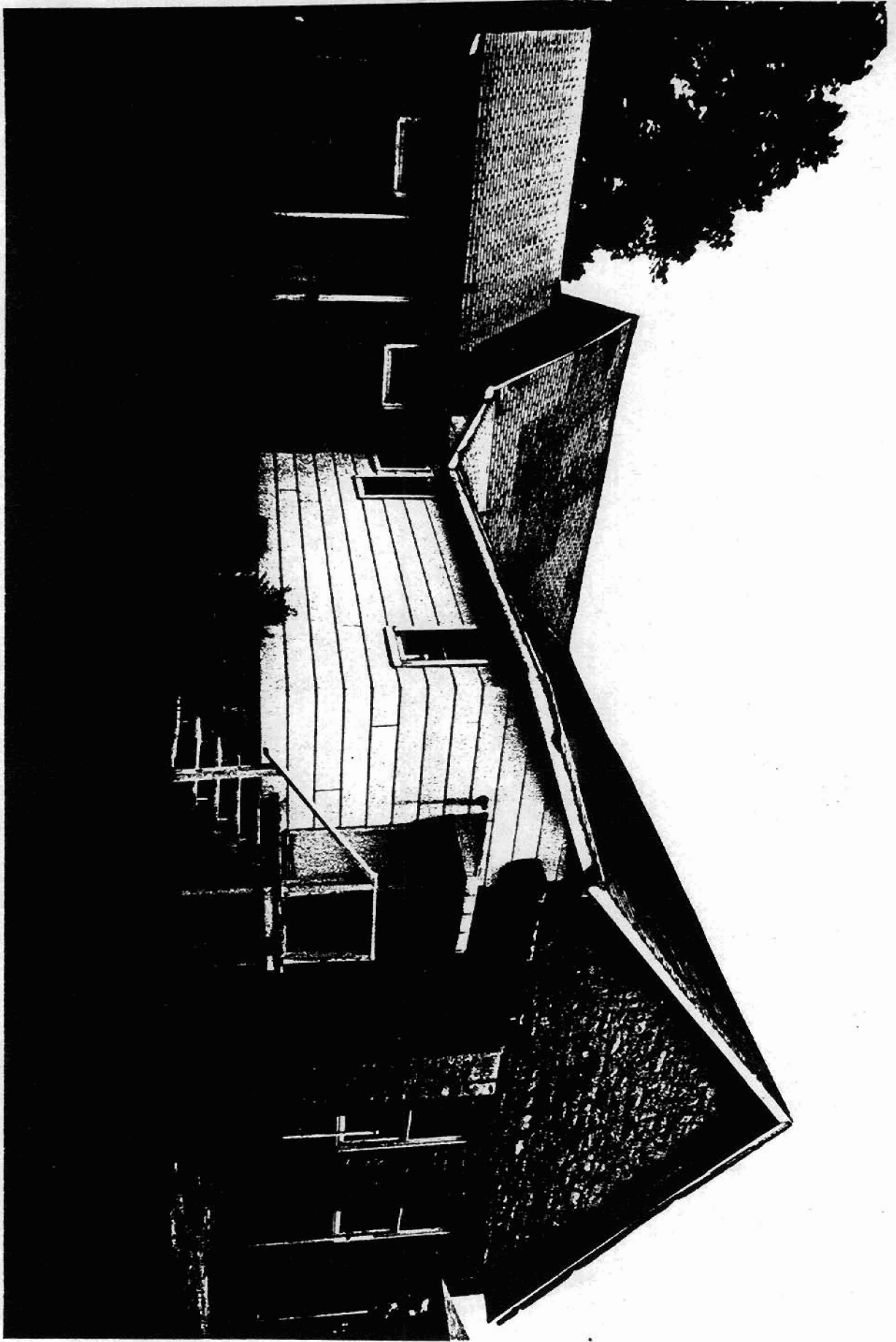
Bethel AME Church
Batesville, Independence County
Photographed by A. Jones
May 1985
Negatives on file at AHPP
Viewed from south



Bethel AME Church
Batesville Independence County
Photographed by A. Jones
May 1985
Negatives on file at AHPP
Viewed from southeast

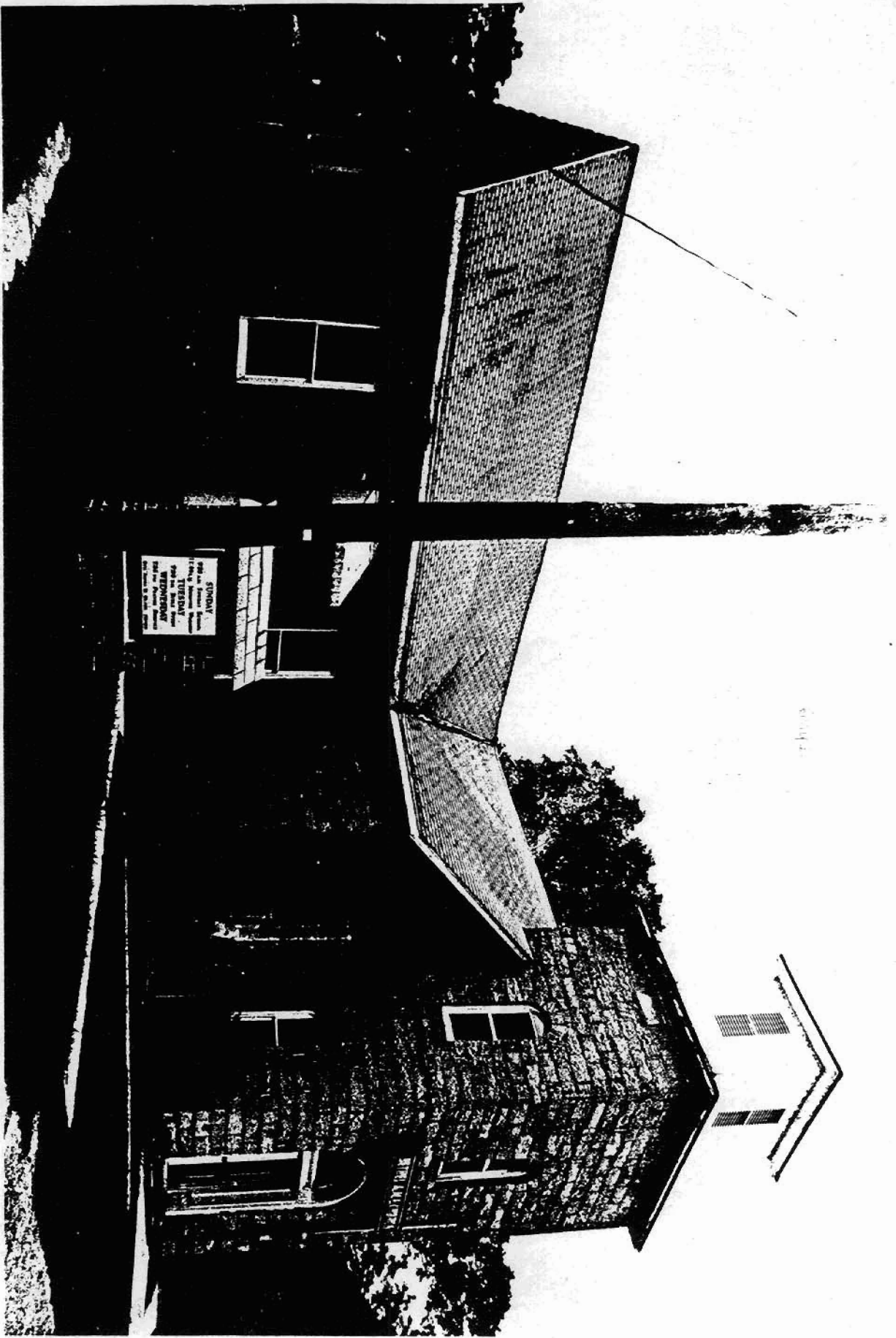


Bethel AME Church
Batesville, Independence County
Photographed by A. Jones
May 1985
Negatives on file at AHPP
Viewed from northeast



2

Bethel AME Church
Batesville, Independence County
Photographed by A. Jones
May 1985
Negatives on file at AHPP
Viewed from northwest



Bethel AME Church
Batesville, Independence County
Photographed by A. Jones
May 1985
Negatives on file at AHPP
Viewed from southwest