

NR listed 10/8/92

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: Keiser School

other name/site number: N/A

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2. Location

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street & number: Southeast corner of Main and School Streets

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Keiser

vicinity: N/A

state: AR county: Mississippi code: AR 093 zip code: 72351

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Public-local

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>2</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. Bryant
Signature of certifying official

9-1-92
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

=====
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: EDUCATION

Sub: School

Current: EDUCATION

Sub: School

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Summary

The Keiser School, constructed in 1929, is a two-story, brick masonry and concrete school building designed in a restrained interpretation of the Collegiate Gothic style. The pointed arch that frames the central front entrance and the castellated raised parapet are the signature elements of this style that ornament the otherwise symmetrical elevations and floor plan.

Elaboration

The Keiser School is a two-story, brick masonry and concrete construction school building designed in a restrained, simplified interpretation of the Collegiate Gothic style. The roughly "T"-shaped plan reflects the classroom section to the north (the crossing of the "T") and the gymnasium/auditorium section to the south (the bottom of the "T"). A single brick chimney rises above the flat roof at the corner of the southeast crossing. The flat, built/up tar roof with its raised brick parapet rests upon brick walls and a continuous cast concrete foundation.

The northern or front elevation is symmetrical, with the central, projecting entrance bay separating two flanking window bays and the two blank wall bays that finish the elevation. The entrance bay consists of a concrete pointed arch that frames a double-leaf entrance on the first floor, and three single vertical windows on the second floor, each trimmed with concrete quoins. The raised parapet above is ornamented with a central panel, trimmed with decorative quoins, that contains a shield bearing the words "Consolidated School District No. 31." The crenellated parapet that finishes this bay continues across the facade to either side. The window bays to either side of the entrance are each fenestrated with two triple windows on each floor. The wall bays at either end of the facade are each blank, though they feature a decorative brick panel of substantial size. The rectangular panel features decorative concrete squares placed at each of the four corners, each set of which is composed of a larger square at the outside of the corner and two more smaller squares placed toward the center of the panel, corner to corner. The panel's border is composed of a row of bricks laid as stretchers, and two more rows within laid as headers. The field within is laid in a diaper pattern that is created through the use of polychromatic brick (red and blue-gray). A concrete panel containing a blank scroll is placed in the center of the top border of each panel.

The eastern and western elevations are virtually identical, with four triple windows on each of the two principal floors flanking a central stairwell window and double-leaf entrance below. The wall of the gymnasium/auditorium to the south originally featured three windows on the western

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elevation; however, these have since been filled with brick. The eastern wall features a central entrance. The southern elevation was originally fenestrated with four large windows; these have also been filled recently with brick. The rear walls of the northern classroom section are blank.

Significant exterior details are limited to the crenellated parapet, the relatively elaborate brick panel detailing on the end wall bays of the front elevation, the concrete shields on the front, and the Gothic script above the entrance that reads "Keiser School," with its surrounding tracery and quatrefoils.

The interior, though never ornate, remains largely intact. The original skylights remain on the top floor, as do the wood beams and cabinetry in many of the classrooms, the arched entrances from the hallways into the various classroom and stairwell areas, and the elaborately molded proscenium arch of the gymnasium/auditorium.

Alterations include the replacement of the original windows and doors on the exterior of the structure with aluminum windows and doors, and the filling of several original windows, particularly in the gymnasium/auditorium.

Also included in the nomination is a small, single story, agricultural education building constructed c. 1942. It is constructed of brick and designed in the simple, gable-on-hip roof style typical of school building construction in the previous decade.

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Summary

Criterion C, local significance

The Keiser School is eligible under Criterion C as the best example of the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture in the community of Keiser. Though of a restrained interpretation, the pointed arch entrance, the shield placed directly above and the castellated parapet that surrounds the building are all typical of this style.

Elaboration

The Mississippi County community now known as Keiser was originally a small crossroads called Savage Crossing that grew little, if at all, until 1912. In that year the Arkansas State Legislature, in conjunction with the government of the state of Missouri, began construction on a vast system of flood control and drainage canals that were to transform this heretofore swampy county into one of the richest agricultural areas in the world. The completion in that same year of a railroad line between the company logging town of Wilson to the south and the existing east-west line of the Jonesboro, Lake City and Eastern Railroad (J.L.C. & E. R.R.) to the north also extended railroad passenger and freight service to the community.

Keiser began as a sawmill village occupied by those who harvested the cypress and other hardwood trees of the surrounding bottomland. However, after the timber was cut, local land speculators made a tidy profit through selling land to farmers who homesteaded or bought land that had formerly been flooded and forested. With the economic focus of the community turning from timber harvesting to agriculture, Keiser became one of the county's most productive agricultural communities, boasting record yields of such crops as cotton, corn and alfalfa. The population of the farming community increased proportionately over the next several years as Keiser continued to attract farming families.

It was the Lee Wilson Company, originally one of the larger local logging concerns that became an enormous and remarkably successful plantation, that in 1929 donated the land on which the Keiser School was built. Constructed just prior to the onset of the Great Depression, the Keiser School reflected both the prosperity enjoyed by this community during the halcyon days of the 1920's and its aspirations regarding its future as an important agricultural center in central Mississippi County. Designed by the architect Uzzell Branson of nearby Blytheville, Arkansas, and built by the contractor S.W. Bliven and Son of Dyersburg, Tennessee, this imposing, Collegiate Gothic structure occupied a central lot within the principal residential section of the community, adjacent to the main commercial section to the west. It contained offices,

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classrooms, and a combination gymnasium/auditorium room placed at the rear of the building.

The Keiser School, as did so many schools in relatively small communities around the state, served this small town as a community and social center. The building housed all twelve grades during the Depression, when money was tight and local consolidation became the norm. The large auditorium was the site of both local basketball games and various musical and theatrical performances. In addition to the traditional dances, piano and dance recitals, and band concerts, this stage also hosted a number of traveling shows (e.g., magic shows, children's theatre) that passed through the community.

The Keiser School building stands as the finest example of its particular architectural style in the community, and one of the best such examples in the entire county. Though it is a restrained interpretation of the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture that was especially popular during the early twentieth century for ecclesiastical and educational buildings around the country, it nevertheless features such signature features as the pointed arch entrance surmounted by its Gothic script and tracery, and the crenellated parapet that continues around the entire roof. As such, it remains the finest example of its particular style in the community of Keiser. Its associated Agricultural Education Building, constructed in 1942 and designed in the simplified school building style made popular for school construction in the 1930's by the Works Progress Administration (though the authorship of this particular building is unknown) is also architecturally significant. Its design includes such typical features as the combination gable-on-hip roof, the banks of tall, double-hung wood sash windows, and the restrained Colonial Revival vocabulary. It is a surprisingly intact building, and as such remains the best example of its particular style locally.

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

Collegiate Gothic

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation Concrete roof Asphalt
walls Brick other Concrete shields and signage panels

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): N/A

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1929-1942

Significant Dates: 1929

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Branson, Uzzell
Bliven, S. W. and Son

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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X 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:

- 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: Approximately two

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>762930</u>	<u>3951490</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ___ See continuation sheet.

Beginning at a point formed by the intersection of a line running parallel with the southern elevation of the building and located approximately 25 feet to the south thereof with a perpendicular line running parallel to the building's western elevation and located approximately 25 feet to the west thereof, proceed northerly along said line for a distance of approximately 300 feet to its intersection with a perpendicular line running along the southern edge of Main Street; thence proceed westerly along said line for a distance of approximately 300 feet to its intersection with a line running parallel with the eastern elevation of the associated agricultural building; thence proceed southerly along said line for a distance of approximately 300 feet to its intersection with a perpendicular line running parallel with the school building's southern elevation; thence proceed westerly along said line for a distance of approximately 300 feet to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification: ___ See continuation sheet.

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

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Kenneth Story, Architectural Historian

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: August 31, 1992

Street & Number: 225 E. Markham, Suite 300 Telephone: (501) 324-9346

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

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Bibliography

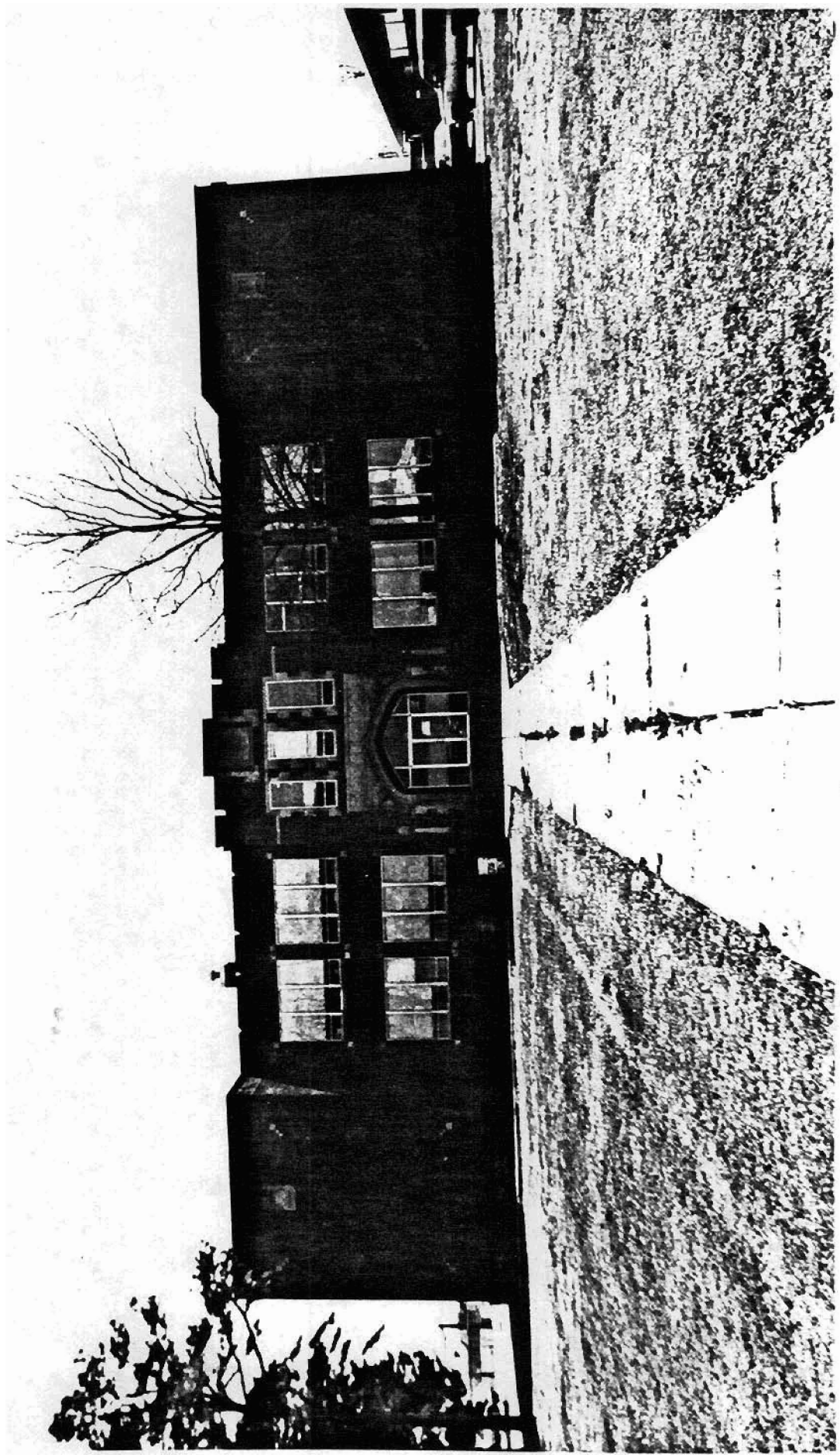
Dew, Lee A., "The J.L.C. & E.R.R. and the Opening of the 'Sunk Lands' in Northeast Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXVII, Spring, 1968, No. 1, pp. 22-39.

Interview with Frances Little; September, 1991.

Interview with Debra Little Cissel; November, 1991.

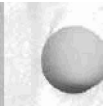
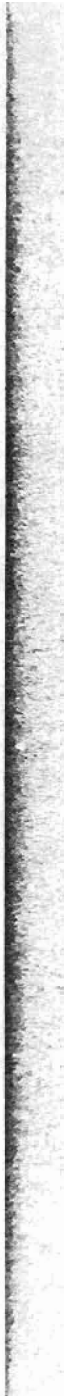
Interview with Ruth Taylor Fortenberry; October, 1991.

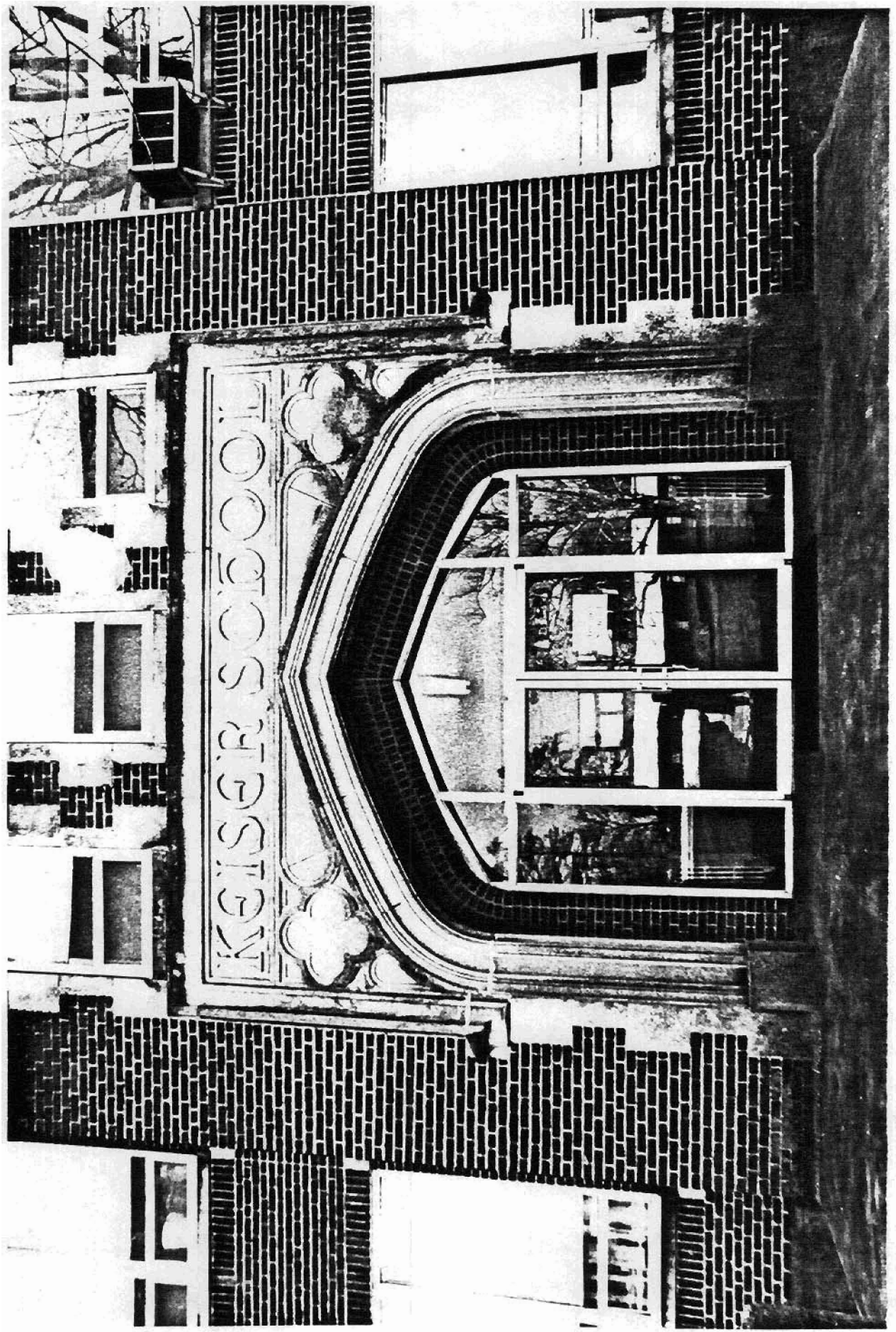
Keiser School History and Directory of 1982.

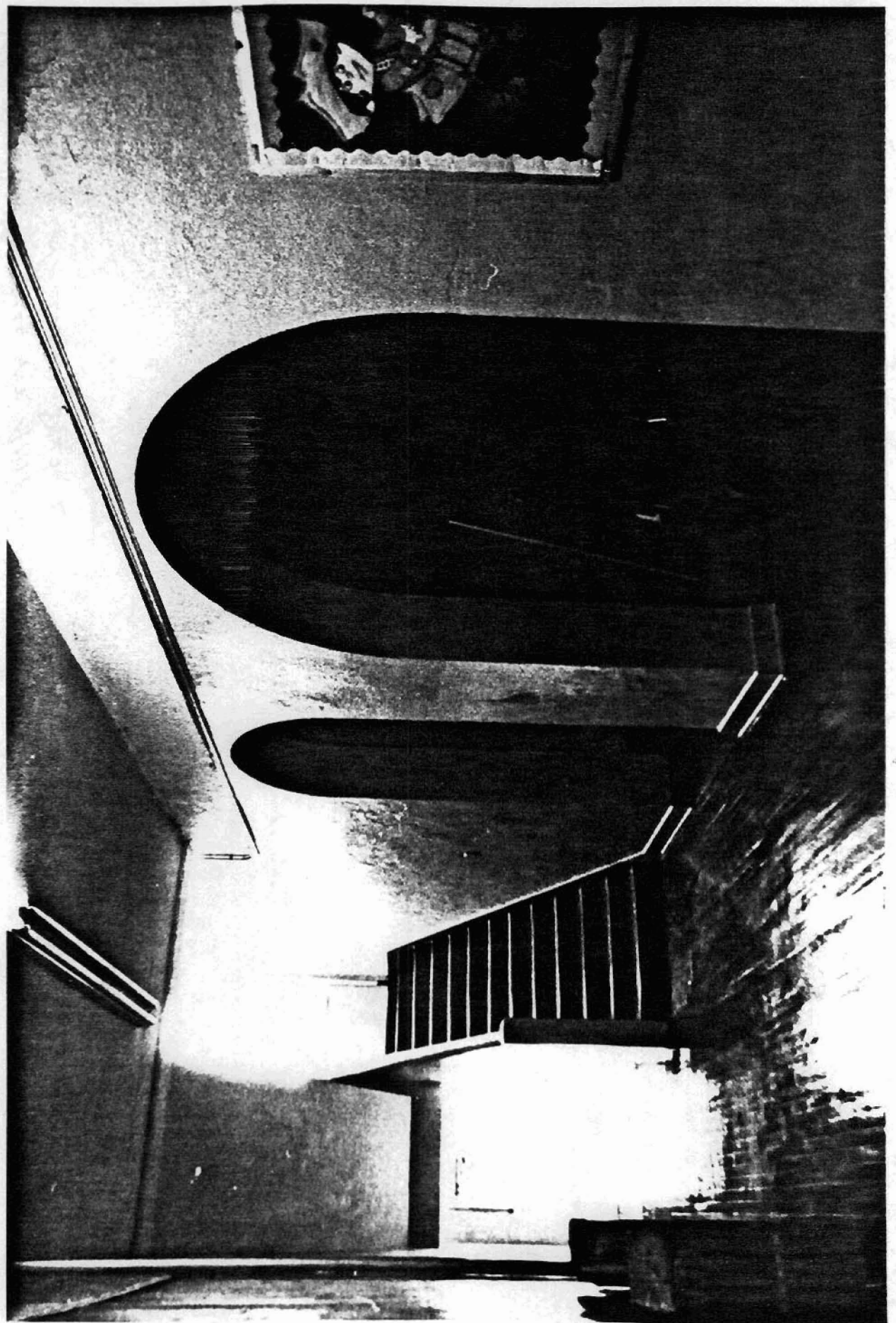




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