

NR 3-27-87

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 Mount Zion Baptist Church

and/or common _____

2. Location

street & number 900 Cross Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Little Rock _____ vicinity of _____

state Arkansas code 05 county Pulaski code 119

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
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mount Zion Baptist Church

street & number 900 Cross Street

city, town Little Rock _____ vicinity of _____ state AR

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pulaski County Courthouse

street & number Markham and Spring Street

city, town Little Rock _____ state AR 72201

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		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY

Exhibiting a subtle Prairie School influence on the exterior, the Mount Zion Baptist Church is sited at 900 Cross street and is exceptional for the elaborate interior where its members have worshipped since the building's completion in 1926. Although the exterior is handsomely defined by a tripartite composition and an exaggerated cornice, the interior surpasses expectation with a large sanctuary embellished with a U-shaped balcony and a pressed metal ceiling which is centered with an ornate copper-clad fixture suspended from an elliptically-shaped skylight of multi-paned frosted glass. Rhythmic patterns of arched, stained glass windows have not been interrupted on both side elevations by sensitively-constructed additions and visually the building maintains its original character.

ELABORATION

Mount Zion Baptist Church, located at 900 Cross Street in Little Rock, was built by contractor P. S. Jones and is a handsome buff brick structure whose massing and detailing is loosely reminiscent of Prairie styling.

The exterior masonry walls are load bearing and are topped with a flat roof surrounded by a parapet wall and an exaggerated cornice. The principal facade is a tripartite composition with a slightly recessed central bay defined by three arched openings adorned with decorative brickwork and surmounted by five arched stained glass windows. A flight of carpeted concrete steps, adjusted to the slope of the site, rises to the arched doorways and extends across the width of the middle bay. The staircase is anchored by iron fixtures with splayed bases and frosted globes typical of the 1920's.

The flanking bays are accentuated by stepped corners on both sides. The second story of these side bays has a pair of Art Glass windows, one mounted atop the other with a wood panel between the two. Previously, the first level of both end bays also had Art Glass windows, but the window on the south bay has been replaced by an aluminum awning and door which provides access to an elevator added ten years ago. Concrete defines the basement level of the structure while an exaggerated wooden overhang accents the base of the parapet wall which acts as the building's cornice. Three crosses, of a slightly darker brick than the walls but laid flush with the wall's surface, adorn the cornice.

The south and north elevations are similarly ordered, each with five bays. The former has a center bay which extends beyond the essentially rectangular body of the structure.

The north elevation has access to the basement through a door in the bay of the east end at grade and another entry below grade with a short stair on the opposite end. The window placement along these elevations provides a pleasing rhythmic pattern of a group of three windows, a pair of windows then single window. Varied window shapes include rectangular, square, arched and oculus. Pilasters for structural strength appear along both side elevations.

The present vestibule was formerly a protected but unenclosed entrance porch with three arched openings. The present exterior doors, three pairs of oak framed single-pane, are still in place in the lobby. The lobby was remodeled further in the mid

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1970's to provide for the installation of an elevator in the southeast corner.

The church's raised first story houses a large sanctuary with a U-shaped balcony. Symmetrical in plan, the interior is defined by an aisle down the center of the gently sloping floor flanked by two side aisles. The former is emphasized further by the placement of three chandeliers down this central axis. Two of these fixtures are recent additions in 1965; the middle chandelier, however, is an ornate copper-clad fixture suspended from an elliptically shaped skylight of multi-paned frosted glass. Organ pipes placed on both sides of the baptistry niche and mounted on a trellice-like grill adorned with decorative bosses also accentuate the structure's symmetry.

The visual terminus of the entrance axis, the center aisle, is the baptistry niche with a colorful mural. The pulpit and choir seating is located in front of the baptistry. The panelling along the curved wall at the rear of the choir seating as well as the panelled handrail behind the pulpit were added in 1950. The choir seats, like those in the balcony, have molded plywood seatbacks, hardwood arm rests, and upholstered seats and are original to the structure. Similar seats were removed from the sanctuary about twenty years ago because they were heavily worn and were replaced by wooden pews.

The baptistry was raised to its present height thirty-six years ago in order to allow the congregation an improved view of the baptismal ceremony. A cast metal spiral stair located in the northeast corner of the church provides access to the raised baptistry and the adjacent dressing rooms.

Large stained glass windows dominate the interior of the sanctuary. Along the north and south elevations, these handsome, rectilinear compositions of gold with accents of blue, brown, and purple are executed in the rhythmic pattern.

The balcony, supported by steel columns, is accessible by two staircase within the sanctuary and one larger staircase adjacent to the vestibule in the northeast corner of the building. The detailing of the larger staircase, particularly the newel posts, is simple yet suggestive of Prairie styling. Raised edge panels decorate the side of the stairs, while beaded boarding is used on the underside of the treads.

As noted earlier, the balcony seating dates to the church's construction. A brass railing follows the interior contours of the balcony. The ceiling of the sanctuary is an ornate composition of pressed-metal decoration installed between a network of structural beams. Less ornate, yet still decorative metal ceilings are used in the vestibule, the baptistry and the basement. The decorative treatment of the metal cornice is classically derived and includes a dentil course and egg and dart motif.

The basement, like the sanctuary, is essentially one large room punctuated with steel support columns noted previously. Adjacent to this large meeting hall is a kitchen added in 1976 and a utility room.

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Later additions to the Mount Zion Baptist Church's facilities include an aforementioned L-shaped Education Building constructed in 1951. This is also buff brick. A new fellowship hall is under construction on the south side of the original church.

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 checked="" 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 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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1926 Builder/Architect P.S. Jones, contractor; architect unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

SUMMARY

Built in 1926, Mount Zion Baptist Church in Little Rock is an architecturally significant structure with exterior references to Prairie styling and impressive interior detailing. It was a very modern church at the time of its construction, breaking from the more traditional style of black ecclesiastical architecture.

ELABORATION

The Mount Zion congregation was formed in 1877 in an effort to provide an institution for blacks which would facilitate not only religious but educational and economic adjustment to their status as freedmen. The early years of the congregation saw increasing involvement in the black community of Little Rock on the part of its members. Arkansas Baptist College, which was to become a leading institution of higher learning for blacks in the state, was organized at the church in 1884 and its first classes were held there. In 1919 the People's Ice and Fuel Company was incorporated at Mount Zion. A frame building served the membership from 1880 until the present brick edifice was completed in 1926.

Mount Zion Baptist Church is loosely reminiscent of Prairie styling. Prairie Style architecture is not at all common in Little Rock. Although the church is by no means a pure example of the Prairie Style, its influences on the exterior can not be denied. These are best seen in the over-all massing of the structure as well as the horizontal emphasis which is produced by the coping around the parapet and the exaggerated cornice. This horizontality is continued on the interior. The curvilinear U-shaped balcony creates a continuous band around three sides of the of the sanctuary. The ceiling is pressed metal and is decorated with an elliptically-shaped skylight, rather than being vaulted. Both the balcony and the ceiling are supported by steel columns, a reminder of the modern design of the church. Mount Zion Baptist Church was the first substantial black church in Little Rock built in a modern style, breaking from the traditional two-towered Gothic Revival Style structure .

Since the erection of the present church building, Mount Zion has maintained a place of leadership with Little Rock's blacks. The congregation has included many educators, business, and professional people. Ministers who have pastored other churches throughout the city and state (such as Marine W. Williams, O. J. Wilson, Lloyd Meyers, and Tennyson Barnes) and nation (such as Dr. Earl Moore, who is now in New York) were ordained at Mount Zion. The late Dr. Fred T. Guy, installed as pastor in 1931, was instrumental in the growth of Mount Zion's heightened community responsibility. He was a member and ardent supporter of the NAACP, which met at Mount Zion during his tenure. Dr. Guy was particularly known for the calm guidance that he gave to the black community during the Central High School intergration crisis of 1957.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Floyd, Gwendolyn. History of Mount Zion Baptist Church, 1961.

Souvenir Program, Mount Zion Baptist Church, April 19, 1926.

Souvenir Program, Mount Zion Baptist Church, September 20, 1942.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Little Rock, Arkansas

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	5	5	6	5	4	2	1	0	3	1	8	4	1	4	4	2	1	0
Zone			Easting						Northing									

B

Zone			Easting						Northing									

C

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D

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 9, 10, and 11, Block 308, Original City. The SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 3, Township 1 North, Range 12 West.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mrs. Gwendolyn M. Floyd/Thomas Baskins, Edited by AHPP staff

organization

date July 16, 1986

street & number 3717 West 16th Street

telephone (501) 663-3974 / (501) 378-5463

city or town Little Rock, AR

state 72204

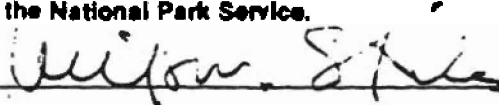
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 2-4-87

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

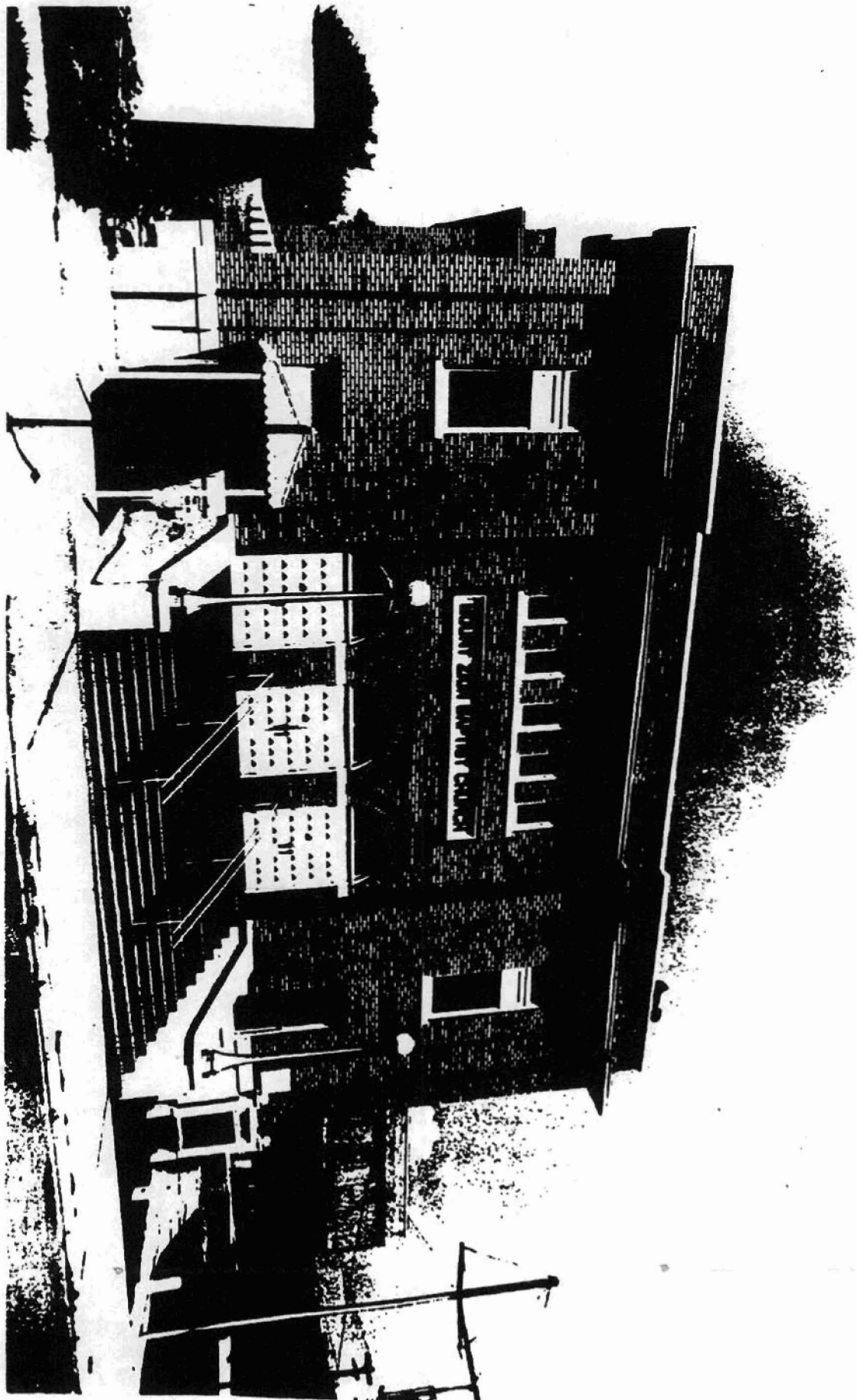
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

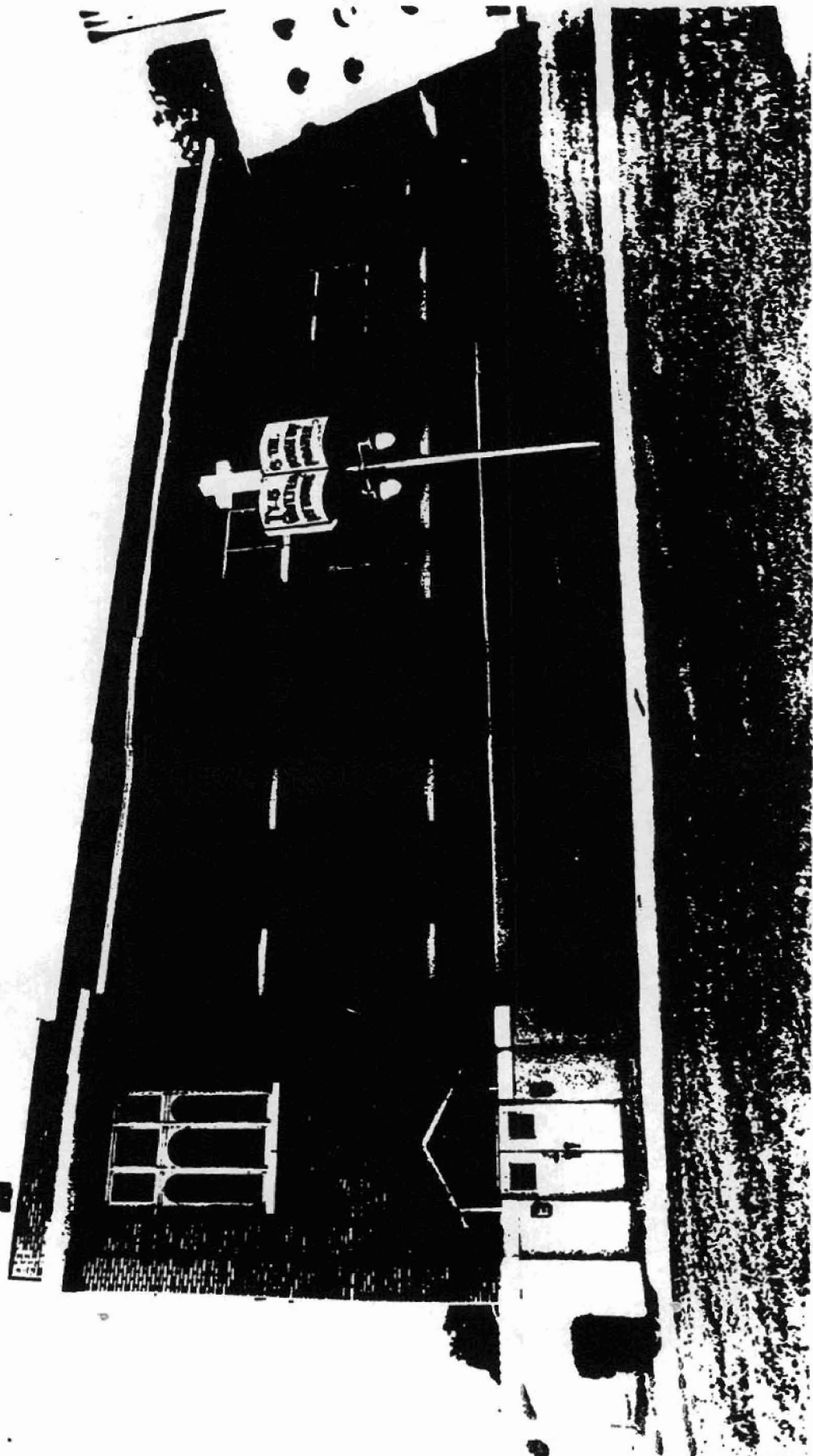
date

Chief of Registration



Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Little Rock, Pulaski Co.
East front elevation
Photographed by Mike Swanda
August 1986

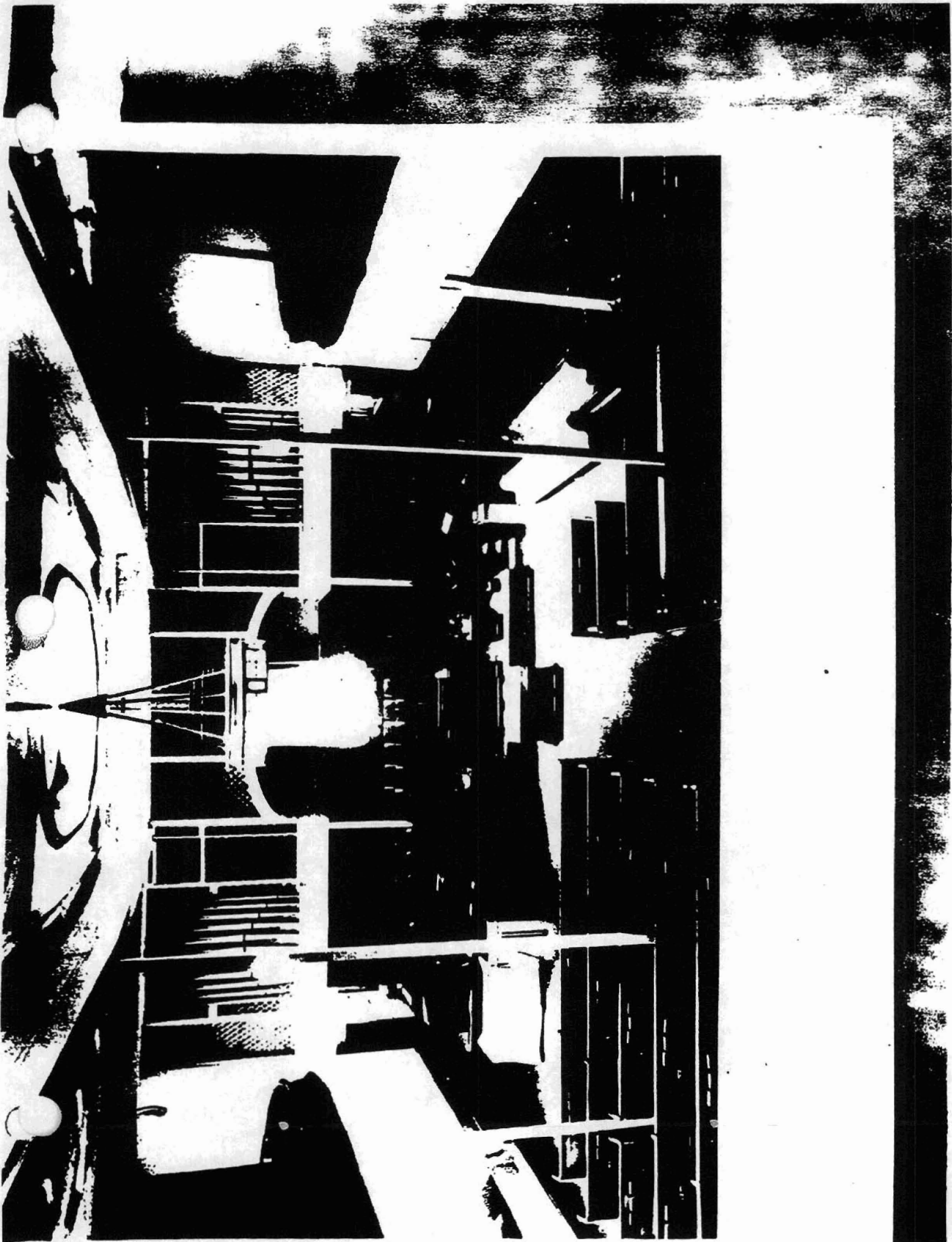
10/1/86



Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Little Rock, Pulaski Co.
North side elevation
Photographed by Robert Gunnel's
August 1986

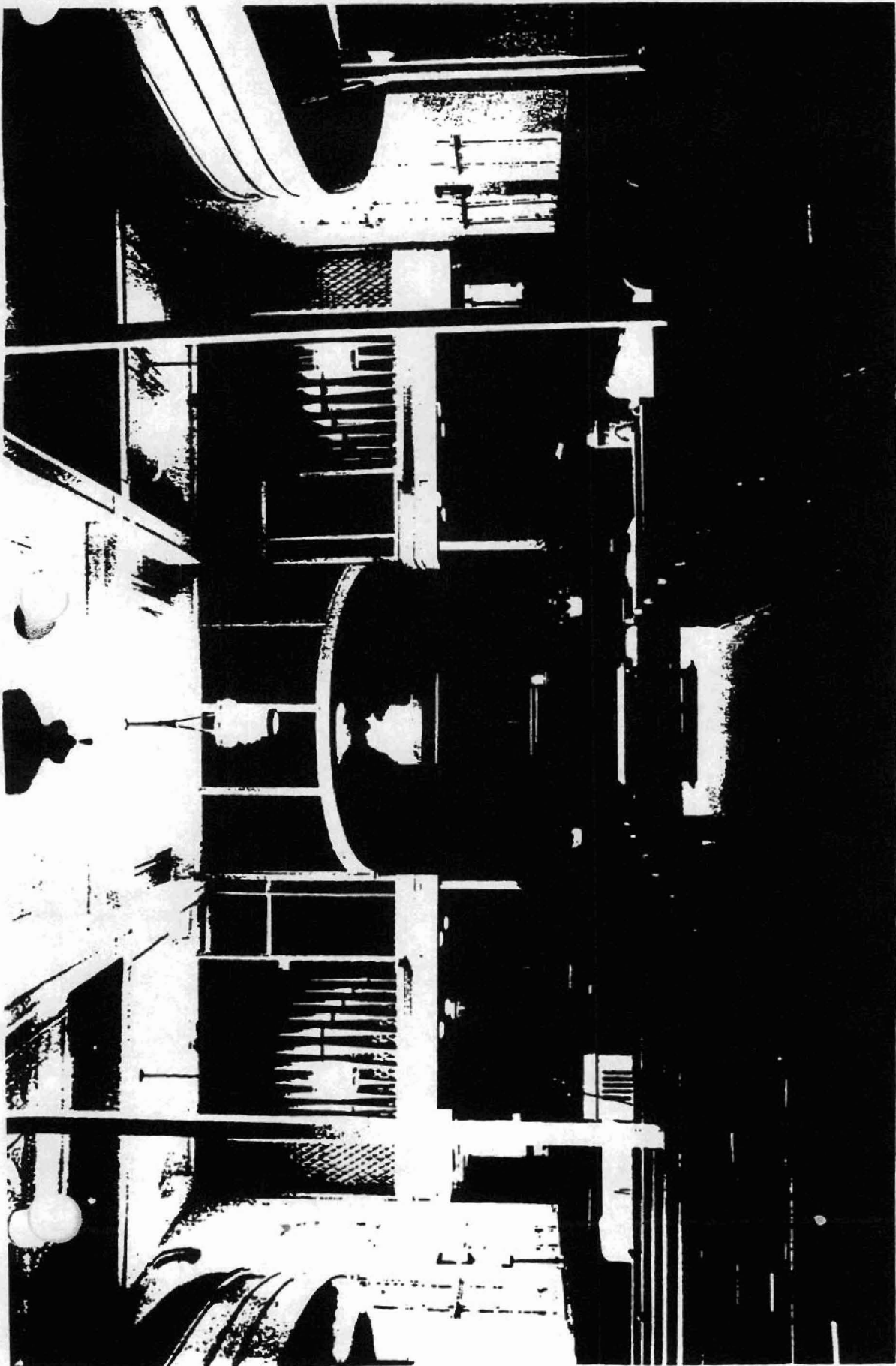


Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Little Rock, Pulaski Co.
Interior of sanctuary
Photographed by Mike Swanda
August 1986



Mount Zion Baptist Church
Little Rock, Pulaski County
Photographed by Mike Swanda
August 1986

1986



Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Little Rock, Pulaski Co.
Interior of sanctuary
Photographed by Mike Swanda
August 1986

10/10/86

Mount Zion Baptist Church

LITTLE ROCK QUADRANGLE.
ARKANSAS
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

7553 (SW
IMC ALMONT)



Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Little Rock, Pulaski Co.
UTM Reference:
15 565420 3844420
Little Rock, Arkansas Quadrangle
Scale: 1:24000

