

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR 6-12-09

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 Rector Commercial Historic District

other names/site number Site #CY0085

2. Location

street & number Roughly Bounded by St. Louis & Southwestern Railroad tracks on the east ☐ not for publication
and south, S. Dodd on the west, 3rd Street on the north;

city or town Rector ☐ vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Clay code 021 zip code 72461

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.)

Wade J. Matthews
Signature of certifying official/Title

4/17/09
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

Rector Commercial Historic District

Name of Property

Clay County, Arkansas

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☒ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

29

23

1 (Park)

1 (Gazebo)

31

23

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE- Specialty Store; Financial
Institution; Department Store; Professional; Restaurant

SOCIAL- Meeting Hall

LANDSCAPE- Park; Gazebo

GOVERNMENT- Post Office; City Hall

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION-
Manufacturing Facility

RELIGION- Religious Facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE- Specialty Store; Financial Institution;
Professional

SOCIAL- Meeting Hall

LANDSCAPE- Park; Gazebo

GOVERNMENT- City Hall

RELIGION- Religious Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th AND EARLY 20th CENTURY REVIVALS-
Classical Revival

OTHER- Late 19th Century Vernacular Commercial;
20th Century Vernacular Commercial

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick; Concrete

walls Brick; Stucco; Cast Concrete; Metal; Synthetics

roof Asphalt; Metal

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Rector Commercial Historic District

Name of Property

Clay County, Arkansas

County and State

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)

Architecture

Community Planning & Development

Commerce

Period of Significance

1892-1959

Significant Dates

1915- Date of construction of First United Methodist Church

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

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: _____

Rector Commercial Historic District

Name of Property

Clay County, Arkansas

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 11.41 Acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 Zone Easting Northing
2

3 Zone Easting Northing
4

☒ 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 Sandra Taylor Smith, Historic Preservation Consultant
organization Prepared For: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date April 1, 2009
street & number 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street telephone (501)324-9880
city or town Little Rock state Arkansas 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 Multiple Property Owners- Public and Private
street & number telephone
city or town state zip code

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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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SUMMARY

Located in the northeastern corner of Arkansas in Rector, Clay County, the Rector Commercial Historic District contains the original commercial district of the town as laid out in 1882 on the St. Louis and Texas Railroad line. The district runs along three blocks of the city's S. Main Street and a block on either side. There are 53 buildings and one park within the district of which 31 (57.4%) contribute to the district's historic significance. Although the period of significance spans from 1892 to 1959, over half (55%) of the buildings in the district were constructed before 1920. The earliest extant buildings were constructed in the 1890s and reflect Rector's booming economy after the establishment of the railroad and the town. Some of the oldest extant buildings in the district feature cast iron storefronts, several of which have been documented as having components of Mesker Brothers Company Front Builders of St. Louis. The majority of the buildings in the district are brick, late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century commercial design, some of which display architectural elements of styles such as Italianate, and Classical Revival. Other resources in the district include a church, a single-family dwelling, and a public park. All of the contributing buildings retain their overall massing and setback and remain true to the historic character of the district. This collection of resources substantiates the history and development of Rector as a commercial center along the railroad line in Northeast Arkansas.

ELABORATION

Clay County, Arkansas, is located in the northeast corner of Arkansas, within the Mississippi River Alluvial Plain. The county is unequally divided by Crowley's Ridge, an anomaly that exhibits terrain, soil, and vegetation completely different from what is found in the lowlands on either side. Soils range from sandy to clay and gravel with lignite deposits on Crowley's Ridge. Four rivers, the St. Francis, Cache, Black, and Current Rivers run through Clay County. Approximately 80% of the land in Clay County is bottomland, a factor that greatly contributed to the settlement and development patterns in the county. It is a predominantly rural county with small cities and towns. Light

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industry supplements an agriculture-based economy. Hunting, fishing and boating are the main recreational activities in the area.

Situated at 290 feet above sea level, Rector is located on the eastern edge of the uppermost part of Crowley's Ridge. The Missouri state line is ten miles to the east of Rector and sixteen miles to the north. The area was once covered by virgin timber, providing a source of building materials and abundant wildlife for early settlers. Two small communities developed randomly in an area northwest of present-day Rector. The area was sparsely settled until construction of a railroad in 1882 spurred development of towns along the line. A company associated with the railroad, the Southwest Improvement Company, bought eighty acres of land and laid out the Town of Rector along the railroad line in June 1882. The City of Rector was incorporated in 1887 and experienced rapid growth. Most of the first commercial buildings were wooden structures hastily erected. Fire was a constant threat and as the wood buildings burned, they were replaced with substantial brick buildings. Most of the bricks used in the early buildings in Rector were made on-site. By 1900 a brick and tile company was located in Rector to meet the demand for new construction.

The Rector Commercial Historic District is located four blocks north of U.S. 49 and its eastern boundary runs diagonally along the railroad track from E. 5th Street northeast to E. 4th. The northern portion of the district includes the First United Methodist Church on the northeast corner of W. 3rd and S. Dodd Streets. The district runs south along the 300, 300 and 500 blocks of S. Main Street to the railroad tracks and one block east and west on either side. It contains 51 resources, 48 commercial buildings, one church, one residence, and one park. Over half (55%) of the buildings in the district were constructed before 1920 and 87% were built before 1950.

Mesker Building Components

During the late 1880s through the early 1900s manufactured buildings and pre-manufactured building parts became popular across the United States in growing small and large towns alike. Buyers selected the prefabricated building elements from catalogues and then received them by train. The prefabricated building components found particular popularity in small towns where the services of an architect could be

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costly and/or difficult to obtain. Expanding railway systems in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century allowed for widespread distribution of the structures.

Among a number of notable companies in the Midwest manufacturing cast iron building components, the two largest manufacturers of ornamental metal products for buildings were Mesker Brothers Iron Works of St. Louis and the George L. Mesker Company of Evansville, Indiana. Brothers owned the companies and they competed against each other and other businesses. Buildings identified as "Mesker" feature components manufactured by a Mesker company on their fronts. Mesker building parts consist of storefront columns, cornices, storefront lintels, window hoods or caps. Each company had particular motifs. George Mesker used a morning glory motif while the Mesker Brothers Co. in St. Louis utilized the fleur-de-lis. Many of the Mesker components have a nameplate at the base of a storefront column. Mesker Brothers Co. began using steel, replacing iron by 1894. The George Mesker Co. sold only cast-iron columns, claiming that they were superior to those made of steel or sheet iron.

Five buildings in the Rector Commercial Historic District have been identified as having Mesker components through a project by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency identifying Mesker Buildings throughout the country. Listed as "Mesker Buildings" in Rector, Arkansas, are:

113 E. Front- Iron storefront
117 E. Front- Iron storefront; pressed metal cornice
306 S. Main- Iron storefront
308 S. Main Iron storefront
416 S. Main- Iron storefront

Perhaps not Meskers, but made by companies that were Mesker contemporaries, an additional eleven buildings in the Rector Commercial Historic District have visible iron fronts or portions of. While the metal components of these buildings in Rector have not been verified, they resemble products from the Mesker catalogs. These buildings are:

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300 S. Main- Round iron columns on either side of entry
304 S. Main- Unornamented iron storefront
314 S. Main- Iron beam visible on upper storefront
320 S. Main- Iron
410 S. Main- Round iron columns
412 S. Main- Round iron columns
301 S. Main- Round iron column at beveled corner entrance
105 E. Front- Iron storefront
111 E. 4th- Iron Storefront
112 W. 4th- **Unornamented** iron storefront
109 W. 5th Round iron columns visible

1890s

As a result of development patterns, fires, and contemporary demolition, the 12 earliest extant commercial buildings in downtown Rector are scattered throughout the district. The buildings constructed in this era in Rector's history represent the development and establishment of the town. These buildings were built in the first wave of construction of substantial brick buildings, replacing wooden buildings and solidifying the town and its place as a center of commerce in northeast Arkansas. Buildings constructed in this early period of development can be described as plain late nineteenth-century commercial architecture with modest Italianate style details. These early brick buildings vary between one and two stories in height and feature rectangular plans.

The largest concentration of contiguous buildings from this period is located in the 100 block of E. Front Street, facing the Rector Downtown Central Park. The oldest extant building in downtown Rector is the Harper Building at 117 E. Front Street, constructed c.1892. This one-story brick building with cast iron front and pressed metal cornice has been identified as having a Mesker Company front. Also identified as a Mesker front is the building at 113 E. Front where the cast iron storefront is still in place in its original configuration. This buildings does not feature the decorative pressed metal cornice seen on the Harper Building at 117 E. Front, but the upper brick wall contains brick detailing forming a visually elaborate cornice. It is likely that cast iron fronts remain on the buildings at 111 E. Front and 115 E. Front, but have been hidden under brick veneer on

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remodeled front walls. A cast iron storefront on the two-story building at 105 E. Front remains visible and with the exception of the boarding of the transom windows, the storefront on this building remains unaltered. Both of the two-story brick buildings at 111 and 115 E. Front feature decorative brick patterns in their upper walls forming an elaborate cornice. Both buildings have brick arched-top windows on the second story.

Two buildings on the west side of the 300 block of S. Main have been identified as having Mesker fronts. The Clay County Democrat Building at 306 S. Main Street features a virtually unaltered cast iron storefront, as does the adjacent one story brick building at 308 S. Main Street. The front walls of both of these one-story brick commercial buildings feature decorative brick pattern lines forming a cornice.

Five buildings located on the west side of the 400 block of S. Main Street were constructed in the late 1890s. Buildings located at 410, 412, 416, 418-20 and 422 S. Main are all one-story rectangular brick structures. The storefront of the building at 416 S. Main is Mesker with the nameplate on the iron column on the north end of the front reading "Mesker Bros. Front Builders St. Louis, Missouri Patent Oct 4 '87". It is likely that the two-storefront building next door at 418-420 has iron storefronts similar to the visible one at 416 S. Main but have been covered through alterations. The two-story buildings at 410 and 412 S. Main employ the use of a lighter color brick as decorative detail and a line of brick corbelling forms a distinctive cornice across both buildings. Round cast iron columns are visible on the storefront of the building at 412 S. Main and historic photographs indicate both 410 and 412 S. Main had similar iron storefronts.

1900-1909

Five buildings in the Rector Commercial Historic District were constructed in the first decade of the twentieth century. A metal beam with floral designs runs across the top of the storefront on the one-story building with cast concrete upper wall at 314 S. Main Street. The building at 316 S. Main is a similar one-story structure with a brick pattern forming a cornice. The two-story building at 320 S. Main features a detailed brick cornice and brick arched-top window openings on the second story. Constructed c. 1905, the Downtown Drugstore Building at 403 S. Main is one-story of brick construction, and features a band of brick "dentiling" in its cornice. The bakery building 111 E. 4th,

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constructed c.1909, is a one-story brick structure with brick-pattern cornice and a cast iron storefront.

1910-1919

Eleven buildings in the district were constructed between 1910 and 1919. The Dannelly Lodge Building at 300 S. Main was built c.1910. It is a two-story brick building with Italianate style influence in its design as seen in arched-top second story windows and arched-top small stationary windows along the north elevation facing W. 3rd Street. Round iron columns flank the recessed center entry on the front of the building. A plain metal storefront frame is located on the c.1910 building next door at 304 S. Main.

White glazed brick on the front (west) walls of the buildings at 405, 407 and 409 S. Main were the result of a fire at the original Bank of Rector Building at 409 S. Main. Reconstruction of the bank building in 1915 resulted in the construction of two one-story commercial buildings to its north, employing the use of similar white glazed brick. Although constructed in the 1910s, the exteriors of the buildings at 331 S. Main, and 401 S. Main have been covered with artificial wall materials and bear no resemblance to their original appearance. However, the recessed, beveled corner entrance of 401 S. Main Street, supported by a round metal column, is an indication of the building's original character.

The one-story brick Rector Auction Building at 112 W. 4th Street remains virtually unaltered. The building features an unadorned metal storefront with plate glass windows, wood paneled kickplate, transom windows and original wood and glass double doors in a recessed center entry. The upper wall of the front (south) of the building features a band of soldier brick and brick pattern forming scallops. Two small rectangular vent openings are located in the wall above the storefront. Adjacent buildings to the west of the Rector Auction Building, at 114 and 116 W. 4th were also constructed c.1910. Their storefronts have been considerably altered, but a similar brick pattern to that on the upper wall of the Rector Auction Building remains visible on the small building at 116 W. 4th Street.

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First United Methodist Church

The First United Methodist Church on the northwest corner of W. 3rd and S. Dodd Streets at 115 W. 3rd Street was constructed in 1915. An onion-shaped dome projecting from the center of its cross-gabled roof distinguishes this imposing one and one-half story brick building with basement. Classical Revival style elements are displayed in the rounded window tops with cast-concrete keystone. The main entry to the church on W. 3rd Street is in a recessed center bay with solid wood double doors flanked by Craftsman style pane arrangement in wood and glass sidelights. A band of nine-pane wood casement windows is located in the upper portion of the recessed entry wall. A fanlight window with a three multiple-pane windows denotes the front projecting gable end of this entry bay. The fanlight window is surrounded by cast concrete with keystone. Large rectangular pilasters on either end of the entry bay have cast concrete bases and are topped by curved returns of the gable ends. A cast concrete beltcourse runs around the building above the windows. The rounded chancel bay on the rear (north) of the church is topped by a gable roof featuring a cornice with returns. Two one-story modern buildings to the east of the 1915 church have been erected and are covered in similar color red brick and blend well with the historic church building.

Rector Downtown Central Park

In 1913 the Rector Women's City Club spearheaded the transformation of a triangular-shaped piece of land on S. Main Street between E. Front Street and the railroad depot from a muddy triangular lot for wagons and horses to a public park. The park features a hipped roof gazebo with Craftsman style extended rafter tails supported by large square brick columns on a cast concrete base. A small one-story brick restroom building is situated in the northeast edge of the park. A recent memorial sidewalk of brick pavers leads from the S. Main Street entrance to the gazebo.

1920s

Twelve buildings in downtown Rector dating from the 1920s reflect the stability and prosperity of the town during that period. Businesses represented on Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in 1928 display multiple stores carrying dry goods, jewelry, hardware, drugstores, and specialty markets. The buildings from this period are scattered through

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the downtown. Most of the buildings remaining from the 1920s in downtown Rector reflect standard twentieth century commercial design and are one-story brick buildings with varying minimal detail in brick pattern in upper front walls. The building at 319 S. Main Street is basically unaltered, and features no decorative details, yet is typical of the type of functional and sturdy buildings constructed in Rector during the 1920s. The Wholesale Grocery Building at 309 S. Main is slightly more decorative in its upper walls with panels of light colored brick surrounded by soldier brick and highlighted by square cast-concrete insets the corners contrasting with the dark brick walls of the building. One of the two Classical Revival styles buildings in the district is the National Bank Building at 400 S. Main. The two-story brick building features Classical Revival style elements on its front seen in pairs of columns supporting a cast concrete pediment.

Constructed c.1926, the Rector Creamery Building at 109 W. 5th features round metal columns on its storefront. The one-story brick building at 501 S. Main backs up to the railroad tracks. It was constructed as a filling station in the late 1920s and located at a prominent position in downtown Rector at the intersection of Main Street and the railroad line. The one-story building features a projecting service bay. The building's corner is stylishly rounded on its northeast end.

The East Arkansas Lumber Company Building at 105 W. 5th was constructed in the mid 1920s. This large building, which backs up to the railroad line, is the oldest industrial type of building remaining in downtown Rector.

The only single-family residence in the boundaries of the historic district is located at 120 W. 4th Street. Constructed c.1925, the house has been altered and covered in synthetic wall materials, but features a hipped roof with dormers at its peak.

1940s

Four buildings constructed in the 1940s are located in the boundaries of the district. Small, concrete block buildings at 310 S. Main and 408 S. Main were constructed as retail infill during the late 1940s. The building at 118 W. 4th was constructed c.1948 as an office and is faced with lighter color brick than the early twentieth-century buildings

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in its block. A small frame warehouse at 113 W. 4th Street remains intact, but has been covered with a non-original material.

1950s

A large industrial equipment sales building at 201 E. 4th was constructed in the late 1950s. The brick building features plate glass windows and single entry door on its front (south) and western elevations. The Phillips 66 Station at 204 E. 4th was constructed c.1951 at the busy corner of S. Stewart and E. 4th Street. The rail lines run parallel to the rear of the building. The concrete block gas station has a garage-bay addition on its south side.

1960-Present

Five of the buildings in the district were constructed after 1960 and are scattered in the blocks off of S. Main Street. The Rector Public Library was constructed at 121 W. 4th in the mid 1960s. It is a large, one-story metal building with low-pitched gable roof and recessed front corner entry.

The Irby Funeral Home at 301 S. Main is a one-story brick building constructed in the 1970s. Although much newer than the other buildings on S. Main Street, its setback from the street and brick wall material blend with the streetscape.

Rector City Hall was constructed in 1972 at 409 S. Stewart and is a brick one-story building set back from S. Stewart Street with parking in the front and spanning the width of the entire block between E. Front and E. 4th streets. The city hall building is in the location of a former two-story hotel.

The two most recently erected buildings in the district are metal industrial-use building at 116 E. 4th Street and a metal building at 415 S. Dodd Street housing the city's fire truck and equipment.

INTEGRITY

With 57.4% of resources contributing, the integrity of the Rector Commercial Historic District has a strong visual connection to its early period of significance. While

Rector Commercial Historic District

Name of Property

Clay County, Arkansas

County and State

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aluminum or other slipcover materials have covered many of the buildings, some completely obliterating the buildings' historic character, their placement and form are an important part of Rector's historic downtown. These buildings comprise most of the non-contributing properties within the district, although many of these are thought to be intact under their current wall covers. The Rector Commercial Historic District is a cohesive grouping of resources that possesses the integrity needed to convey their architectural significance as well as their historic significance. The resources possess integrity of location and setting as they retain their original setbacks and configurations. The buildings that contribute to the district's significance display their original design and materials and convey the attention to detail of the workmanship when built. The resources continue to maintain their integrity of association as they have continuously been used as places of commerce, as well as social gatherings. The Rector Commercial Historic District serves as a reminder of how Rector evolved as a railroad town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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PROPERTY LIST

Rector Commercial Historic District

<u>Property</u>	<u>Construction Date</u>	<u>Contributing/Non-Contributing</u>
300 S. Main	c.1910	Contributing
304 S. Main	c.1910	Contributing
306 S. Main	c.1895	Contributing
308 S. Main	c.1895	Contributing
310 S. Main	c.1949	Contributing
314 S. Main	c.1905	Non-Contributing
316 S. Main	c.1905	Non-Contributing
320 S. Main	c.1902	Contributing
324 S. Main	c.1925	Non-Contributing
301 S. Main	c.1979	Non-Contributing
309 S. Main	c.1927	Non-Contributing
317 S. Main	c.1927	Non-Contributing
319 S. Main	c.1927	Contributing
331 S. Main	c.1914	Non-Contributing
400 S. Main	c.1927	Contributing
408 S. Main	c.1949	Contributing
410 S. Main	c.1897	Contributing
412 S. Main	c.1897	Contributing
416 S. Main	c.1895	Non-Contributing
418-420 S. Main	c.1895	Non-Contributing
422 S. Main	c.1895	Non-Contributing
401 S. Main	c.1910	Non-Contributing
403 S. Main	c.1905	Contributing
405 S. Main	c.1915	Contributing
407 S. Main	c.1915	Non-Contributing
409 S. Main	1915	Contributing
501 S. Main	c.1929	Contributing
Downtown Rector Park 1913		Contributing
gazebo - Park	c.1929	Contributing
Ancillary Bldg- Park	c.1929	Contributing
105 E. Front	c.1897	Contributing
111 E. Front	c.1897	Contributing
113 E. Front	c.1895	Contributing

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<u>Property</u>	<u>Construction Date</u>	<u>Contributing/Non-Contributing</u>
115 E. Front	c.1895	Contributing
117 E. Front	c.1892	Contributing
409 S. Stewart	1972	Non-Contributing
115 W.3 rd	1915	Contributing
115 W.3 rd blg.2	c.2000	Non-Contributing
116 E. 4 th	c.1980	Non-Contributing
11 E. 4 th	c.1909	Contributing
113 E. 4 th	c.1946	Non-Contributing
201 E. 4 th	c.1959	Non-Contributing
204 E. 4 th	c.1951	Non-Contributing
107 W.4 th	c.1925	Non-Contributing
121 W.4 th	c.1969	Non-Contributing
110 W.4 th	c.1910	Contributing
114 W.4 th	c.1910	Contributing
116 W.4 th	c.1910	Contributing
118 W.4 th	c.1948	Contributing
120 W.4 th	c.1925	Non-Contributing
105 W.5 th	c. 1925	Non-Contributing
109a W.5 th	c.1929	Contributing
109 W.5 th	c.1926	Contributing
415 S. Dodd	c.2006	Non-Contributing

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SUMMARY

The Rector Commercial Historic District in Clay County, Arkansas is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** for its associations with local commerce and community development in northeast Arkansas. The district is also being nominated under **Criterion C** for the representation of late nineteenth and early twentieth century architectural styles of the commercial buildings within its boundaries. There are a total of 54 resources in the district of which 57% contribute to its historic significance.

ELABORATION

Rector, Arkansas, lies in the southeast corner of Clay County, which occupies the northeast corner of the State of Arkansas. Situated in the hook of the Missouri boot heel, Rector is ten miles from the Missouri State Line to the east and sixteen miles to the north. Clay County is divided northeast to southwest by Crowley's Ridge, which runs roughly parallel to the St. Francis River, forming the county's eastern boundary and the Arkansas border. This seemingly flat, level stretch of fertile land is filled with bayous, swamps, lakes, basins, prairies, and ridges.

The county was originally established by the Arkansas General Assembly as Clayton County on March 24, 1873, named in honor of state senator John M. Clayton. Within the new county deep resentment existed against a name connected to the then Republican Governor Powell Clayton. After the next statewide election the new General Assembly voted in 1875 to shorten the name to Clay County, in honor of Secretary of State Henry Clay.

Untold numbers of Native American artifacts: arrow heads, spear points, awls, celts and pottery that have been and are still being unearthed all across Clay County attest to existence of wide spread pre-Columbian settlements. The Osage Tribe claimed northeast Arkansas as their traditional hunting grounds, but lost their land in an 1808 treaty. Shortly after, French trappers and hunters drawn by the same the abundance of fish, fowl, and game that the Osage had prized, began to settle in the region. Pierre LeMieux, one of the earliest pioneers, called his settlement on the Black River, *Petit Baril*, known as Peach

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Orchard today. Around 1810, the small settlement of St. Francis grew up around the intersection of the St. Francis River and a crude wilderness trail running north to St. Louis. By 1816, this frontier town was receiving weekly mail deliveries from Helena, Arkansas, over a newly commissioned one hundred and twenty-mile post road.

Interest in settling in the area declined after December 16, 1811, when a long series of earthquakes began to shake northeast Arkansas along the New Madrid fault line. More than 200 quakes were recorded over the next three months, altering the landscape, uprooting trees, creating new low lands and swamps, and changing the course of the Mississippi River. The federal government, to increase the size of the army for the War of 1812, issued certificates for plots of land west of the Mississippi River in exchange for military service. But due to the earthquakes and the resulting increased flooding few veterans took the offered land in northeast Arkansas. In the 1830s travel on the Black and St. Francis rivers increased using keelboats and flatboats to bring goods and new settlers. Steamboats offered a more comfortable and faster means of transporting supplies and people. In 1836 the steamboat, *Gladitor*, docked in St. Francis after completing a six-day trip from New Orleans.

Among the first in the new wave of pioneers was John J. Griffin who settled on the Black River western part of the county in 1832. Settling to the east along Crowley's Ridge in the early 1830s was William and Elihu Davis, followed by the Payne and the Hollis families. In the 1840s and 50s the number of new settlers steadily grew, with most arriving from Tennessee. In 1850 the federal government enacted the Swamp Land Act. Under this provision sixty-four million acres of wetlands were given to the states involved, to encourage local development of drainage districts and increased use. Each state handled the land grant differently; Arkansas chose to sell the land, for the most part in large chunks, to businessmen and speculators. With this incentive in place, the population surged until the outbreak of the Civil War. Clay County never had many slaves and was not sympathetic to the move in the rest of the state to secede from the United States. Clay County soon found itself on the border between two great warring forces. Military action was minimal in the county, but several citizens were reported to have been taken from their home by raiding parties. A small skirmish took place in 1863, two miles northeast of Rector, when a force of Federal cavalry under the command of

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Captain G. D. Byers confronted the Home Guard, a local company consisting of old men. The cavalry quickly took control of the fight, dispersing the Home Guard and killing one.

After the war, speculators bought large tracts of dense timber land under the Swamp Land Act, and began to harvest the thick stands of walnut, cypress, ash, maple, poplar, beech, and several varieties of red, white, and black oak, hickory and gum. There were no reliable roads in the county, timber was hauled one log at a time to a nearby creek or river, then floated to one of the many sawmills, popping up all over the region. They used large heavy-duty wagons but could only transport part of one tree at a time. The average size of the trees harvested from the old growth forest was five to six feet in diameter.

The same year that Clay County was organized in 1873, the town of Corning in the upper western half of the county was established along side the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad line. The county seat was assigned to Corning and the first court was held in a newly constructed frame courthouse on June 16, 1873. During the 1870s several towns formed throughout the county such as Knobel, Moark, and Boydsville. With the exception of Boydsville, the other towns grew up around the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railroad and all lay in the western half of the county. Boydsville was situated near the center of the county on Crowley's Ridge. Shortly after its formation the leaders of Boydsville began legal procedures to have the county seat moved to their town. An election on June 30, 1874, went in favor of Boydsville, but because of strong resistance the county court was not removed from Corning for another three years. The results of a second election on May 22, 1877, again declared Boydsville to be the county seat. Clay County Court was officially moved to Boydsville on October 1, 1877.

The people of Corning, disappointed about losing the county seat and finding it often difficult to traverse the wide swampy stretch of Black River, began pushing to have the county divided. The state legislature settled the issue in 1888, by dividing Clay County into an eastern judicial district and western judicial district. The eastern district county seat was later moved to Piggott.

While the rest of the county wrestled over the county seat, little happened east of

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Crowley's Ridge. Other than the community of St. Francis, the settlement of mention was Scatterville, possibly owing its name to the scattered homesteads that made up the loose community. The slow pace of development changed early in the 1880s. A new rail route was being planned from St. Louis to Texas through the northeast corner of Clay County. The first leg would cross the St. Francis River close to the original town of St. Francis, run south for seventeen miles into timberland to a non-existent town. In 1882, the Southwest Improvement Company acquired the southern half of Section 23, Township 19, Range 7, south of Scatterville. In June 1882 they platted out the town of Rector to be the end of the line for the first section of tracks from St. Louis. The town was named after Henry Massey Rector, who served as Governor of Arkansas from 1860 to 1862 and oversaw the secession of Arkansas from the Union.

The Southwestern Improvement Company, after platting Rector in June of 1882, moved back up the St. Louis and Texas Railroad tracks to plat out the town of Piggott in November 1882, a new town site for St. Francis in January 1883, and the town of Greenway in February 1883.

Rector was the destination of the St. Louis and Texas Railroad that first year of business. The railroad brought jobs, new settlers, and supplies and gave the area for the first time a way to move large quantities of timber to an ever-expanding market. Rector sprouted from nothing to a bustling town with a population of 700 in just eight years. By 1890 the town contained seven general stores, three drug stores, one grocery, one hardware and grocery store, two saloons, one photograph gallery and one harness and saddlery shop. The industries that drove the growth of Rector were a stave factory, two cotton gins, two gristmills and two saw mills. These mills processed thousands of feet of timber and ginned hundreds of bales of cotton. A weekly newspaper, the *Clay County Record* began publication in January of 1889.

The town of Rector grew up centered around the railroad depot. The first businesses were built along Front Street that ran at a 45-degree angle from the tracks. Across from Front Street stood a two-story hotel and an open field where the wagons gathered while waiting to unload or take on new supplies. The wagon yard became the Rector City Park in 1913.

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The hotel is long gone as are the early wood-frame buildings of Front Street. Fire brought down most of Rector's first buildings and when they were replaced, brick was the building material of choice. The land east of Crowley's Ridge processes almost no rocks and certainly nothing large enough to build with, but Clay County does have a lot of underlining clay deposits. Rector soon had a brick company. Brick construction was not the only influence on the look of the developing downtown. Businessmen of Rector also turned to St. Louis for their storefronts. Custom pre-built and sometimes ornate storefront arrived by train from the Mesker Brothers Company of St. Louis.

Frank and Bernard Mesker established Mesker Brothers an iron works company to design and manufacture storefronts beginning in 1879. The brothers were two of three sons of John B. Mesker, a trained craftsmen in tinplating who operated J.B. Mesker and Sons in Evansville, Indiana, in the 1880s. The third son, George, stayed on with his father to eventually take over the company and changed the name to George L. Mesker & Co. The two independent Mesker companies began to compete in the same market of manufactured storefronts, or as theirs were called "fronts." The Mesker Brothers had the advantage of being located in St. Louis, the major transportation hub for all things, people and supplies heading into the wildly expanding west. Five of the buildings in the Rector Commercial Historic District have been identified as having Mesker storefronts and a number of others have metal components that are likely Mesker.

Up to 1910, the timber industry fueled the growth of Rector, but as the forests were cleared other resources took on importance. The cleared land was sold off by the timber companies, who had no interest in farming, in forty-acre lots or larger tracts. Paul M. Pfeiffer, of St. Louis, purchased a 13,000-acre plot in 1909. Pfeiffer became the largest landholder in Clay County. His daughter married Ernest Hemingway who wrote portions of his novel *A Farewell to Arms* at the Pfeiffer home in Piggott (NR listed 06/10/1982).

Since the first fields were cleared in Clay County, its farmers had produced a variety of produce. The census of 1880 lists the export of wheat, oats, corn, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, tobacco, and, of course, cotton. In Rector the output of lumber products peaked around 1910 while the population had tripled in the first decade of the 20th century.

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Due to the shrinking supply of good trees to harvest, cotton soon claimed the position of not only the number one farm crop produced but also the leading export from Clay County. As old timberland was depleted and family farms spread out from around Rector, the need and demand for the goods and services a thriving downtown could offer grew.

In 1913, after farming had grown into the primary contributor to the regional economy, disaster came to Rector and most of the Arkansas Delta. The Mississippi River crested at forty-three feet above the flood stage, flooding lands to the west for over a hundred miles, resulting in an almost total loss of that year's crops. By the year's end, due to the shortage of cotton, prices increased significantly. Though the continuing decline of crops planted for food had caused some to go hungry during the aftermath of the flood, with steadily raising prices even more land was switched from food crops to cotton. In 1917 cotton prices reached the highest point in over fifty years.

The population boom of Rector and the solid business community it had developed held steady though the transition from timber to a growing reliance on cotton. That dependence was tested in the summer of 1921 with the first of many boll weevil infestations. Cotton prices dropped falling each year to a record low by 1926. Later that same year heavy rain fell throughout the Mississippi River Basin. Extensive flooding followed in the spring of 1927, washing away homes, crops, and the last hope for many struggling farm families. With hardly time to recover from the floods of 1927 the region was pulled into a national crises when the New York Stock exchange crashed on October 29, 1929. Cotton prices plummeted.

Severe drought came to the northeast Arkansas in 1930, and very little cotton was produced. The drought continued with 1931 being the worst on record for Arkansas. The administration of Herbert Hoover believed that the crisis was a state issue. The state of Arkansas had its own financial problems and had little to offer in assistance to farmers facing starvation. The American Red Cross, instead of food, handed out garden seeds to 123,000 families in Arkansas. However, the only vegetable to sprout in the cracked, parched soil was turnip.

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The election of President F. Roosevelt in 1932 brought hope for the suffering country from the inaction and ineffective policies of the Hoover administration. New and progressive relief programs began within weeks of Roosevelt's inauguration. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration or AAA evoked a major institutional change to the farming process. One aspect of the plan encouraged the planting of more food crops, and to reduce the planting of cotton. This was an approach that resulted in much hardship on the farmers of the Delta. The 1940s brought the tumultuous years of War World II. Farm and rural population experience an exodus in the 1950s to the large city seeking a better life and higher wages.

Although Clay County has reported a slow steady decline in population since a peak in 1940, Rector has not only maintained its population since the 1930s, but much of the integrity of its downtown business district.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Rector Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** and **Criterion C** with **local significance**. The early growth and development of the town is represented in the buildings in the district which also display the characteristics of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial architecture popular all across America.

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UTM REFERENCES

1	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743091E</u> Easting	<u>4016742N</u> Northing
2	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743206E</u> Easting	<u>4016752N</u> Northing
3	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743208E</u> Easting	<u>4016704N</u> Northing
4	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743269E</u> Easting	<u>4016704N</u> Northing
5	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743269E</u> Easting	<u>4016639N</u> Northing
6	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743414E</u> Easting	<u>4016646N</u> Northing
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11	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743100E</u> Easting	<u>4016648N</u> Northing
12	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743150E</u> Easting	<u>4016648N</u> Northing
13	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743150E</u> Easting	<u>4016703N</u> Northing
14	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>743091E</u> Easting	<u>4016703N</u> Northing

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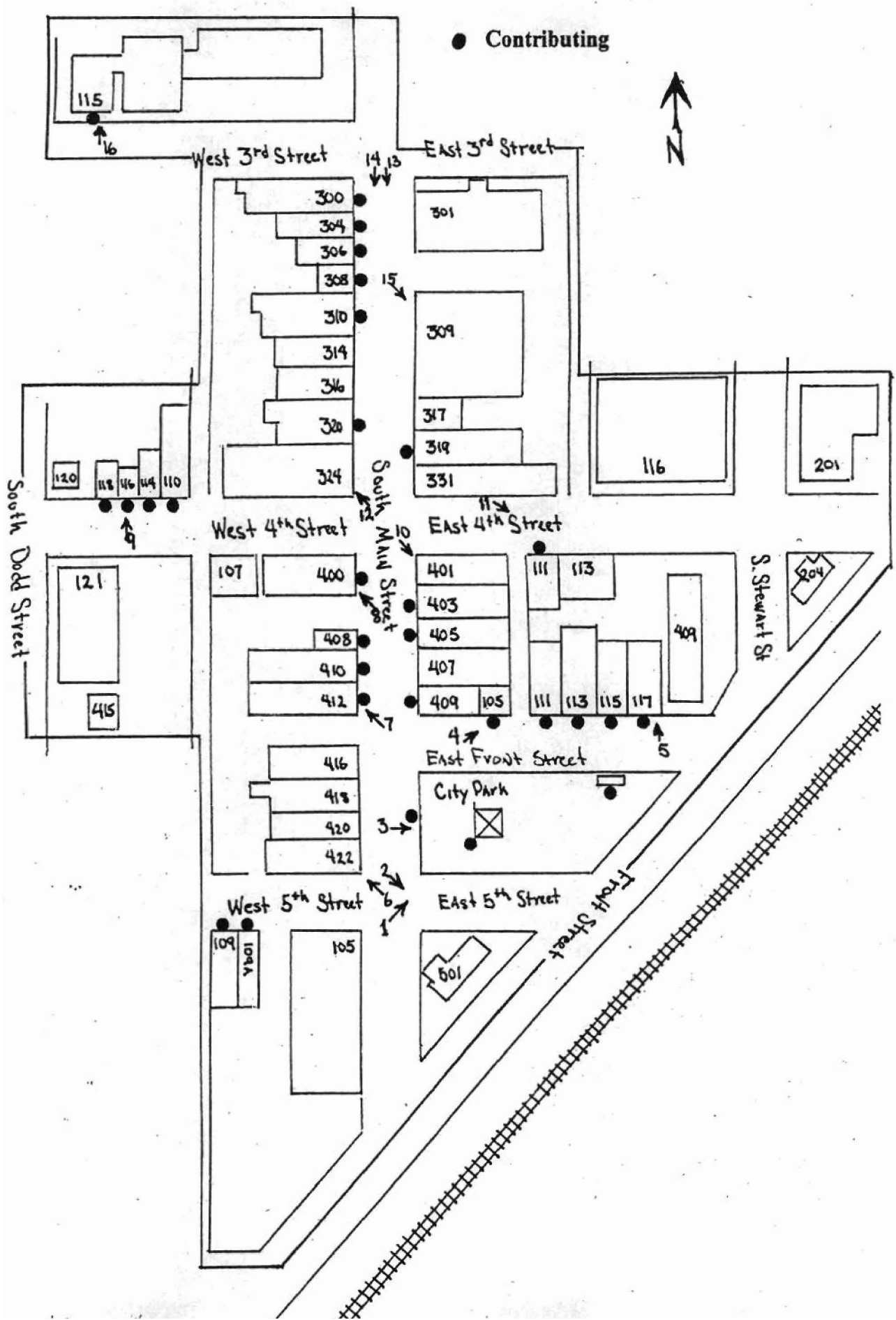
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

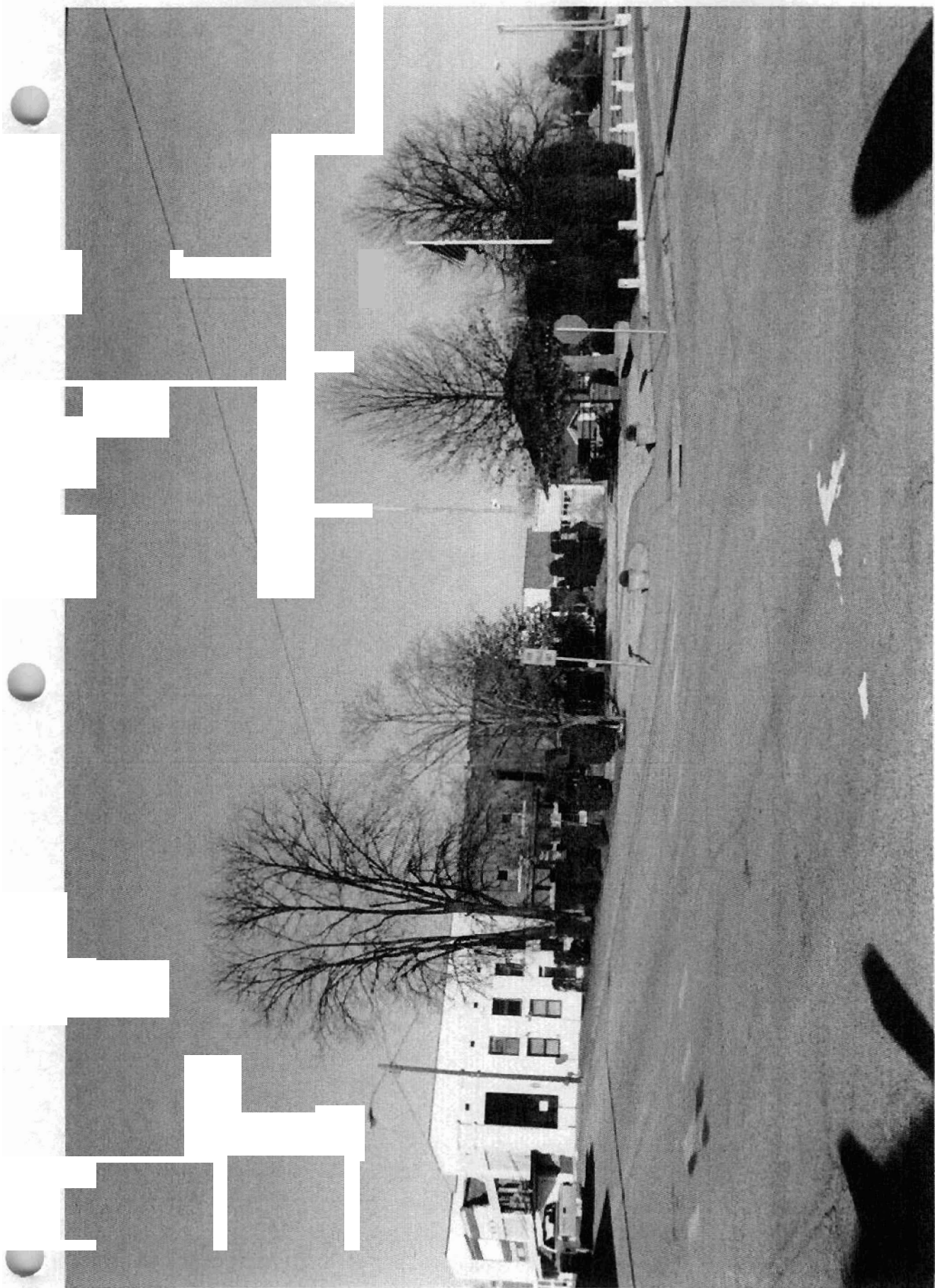
Beginning at a point at the intersection of the St. Louis & Southwestern Railroad tracks and S. Main Street, the boundary of the Rector Commercial Historic District runs northeast along the northwest side of the railroad tracks to the intersection with E. 4th Street, then turns and runs due north across E. 4th Street to the rear (north) property line of the building at 201 E. 4th Street. At this point, the boundary turns and runs west along the rear (north) property line of 201 E. 4th across S. Stewart Street and continues to run west along the rear property line of the building at 116 E. 4th Street to its intersection with the alley east of the 300 block of S. Main Street. At this juncture, the boundary turns and runs north along the alley behind buildings on the east side of the 300 S. Main Street block to E. 3rd Street where it turns and runs west along E. 3rd Street to its intersection with S. Main Street. At this juncture, the boundary turns and runs north to the rear (north) property line of the First United Methodist Church complex at 115 W. 3rd Street. At the juncture of the rear (north) property line of 115 W. 3rd and S. Dodd Street, the boundary runs south along S. Dodd Street to its intersection with the alley behind (west) of the west side of the 300 block of S. Main Street. The boundary then turns and runs south along this alley to the point where it intersects the rear property lines of buildings on the north side of the 100 block of W. 4th Street. At this point the boundary runs west along the rear property lines of buildings at 110 through 120 W. 4th Street to its intersection with S. Dodd Street. At S. Dodd Street the boundary turns to run due south along this street to the southern property line of the building at 415 S. Dodd where it turns and runs east to its intersection with the alley west of the west side of the 400 block of S. Main. The boundary then turns to run south along the alley, across W. 5th Street and to the intersection of the alley and the southwest corner of the property at 109 W. 5th Street where it turns and runs northeast along the rear (south) property lines of buildings at 109 W. 5th and 105 W. 5th to its intersection with the point of beginning at the St. Louis & Southwestern Railroad tracks and S. Main Street.

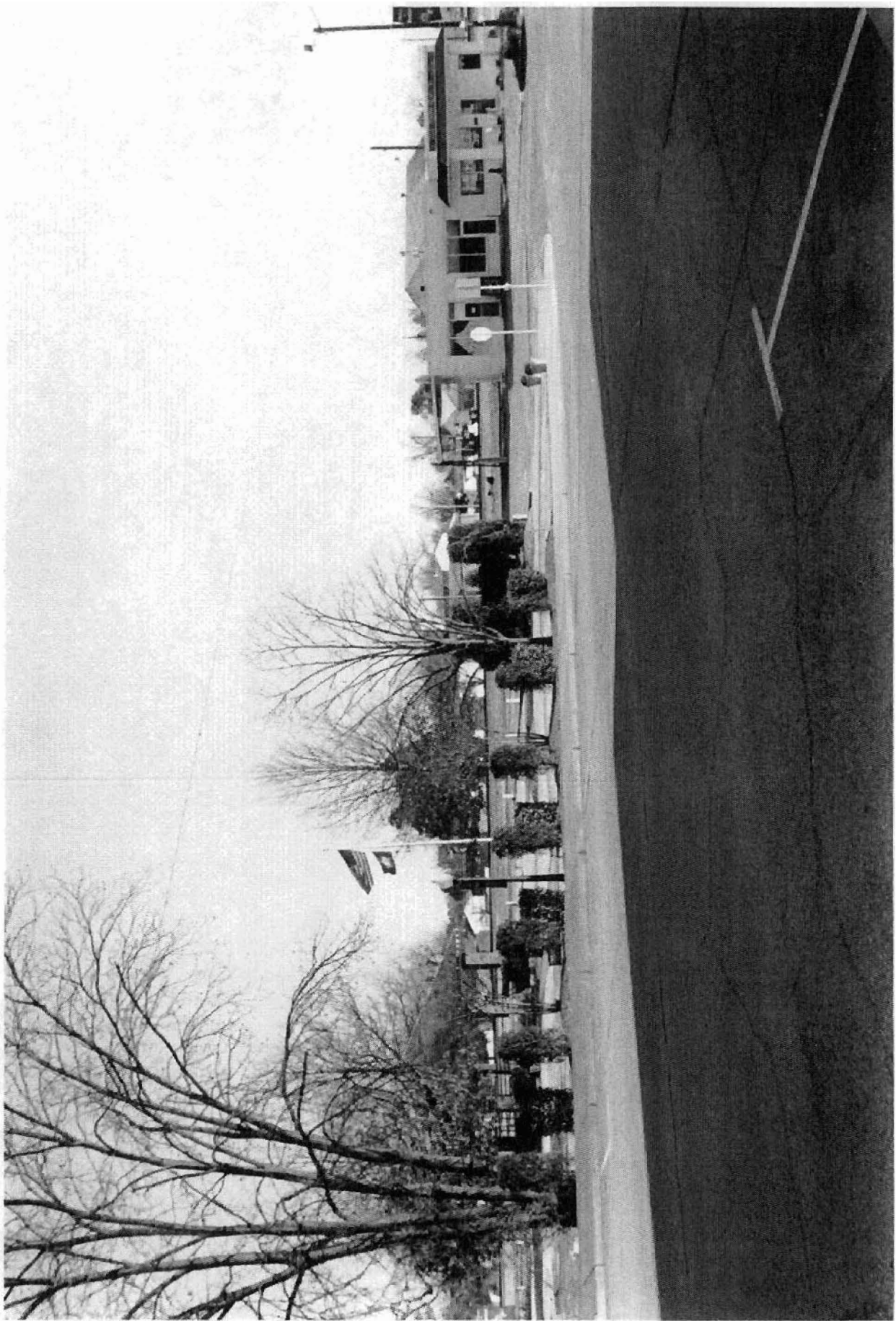
BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The Rector Commercial Historic District includes contiguous and intact historic resources at the center of Rector's commercial core whose original function was commercial in nature. The built environment included in the district documents Rector from 1892 through 1959. The boundary of the district encompasses the area that has always been Rector's commercial center and highlights those buildings that portray Rector's commercial development begun by the construction of the St. Louis and Southwestern Railroad through the area.

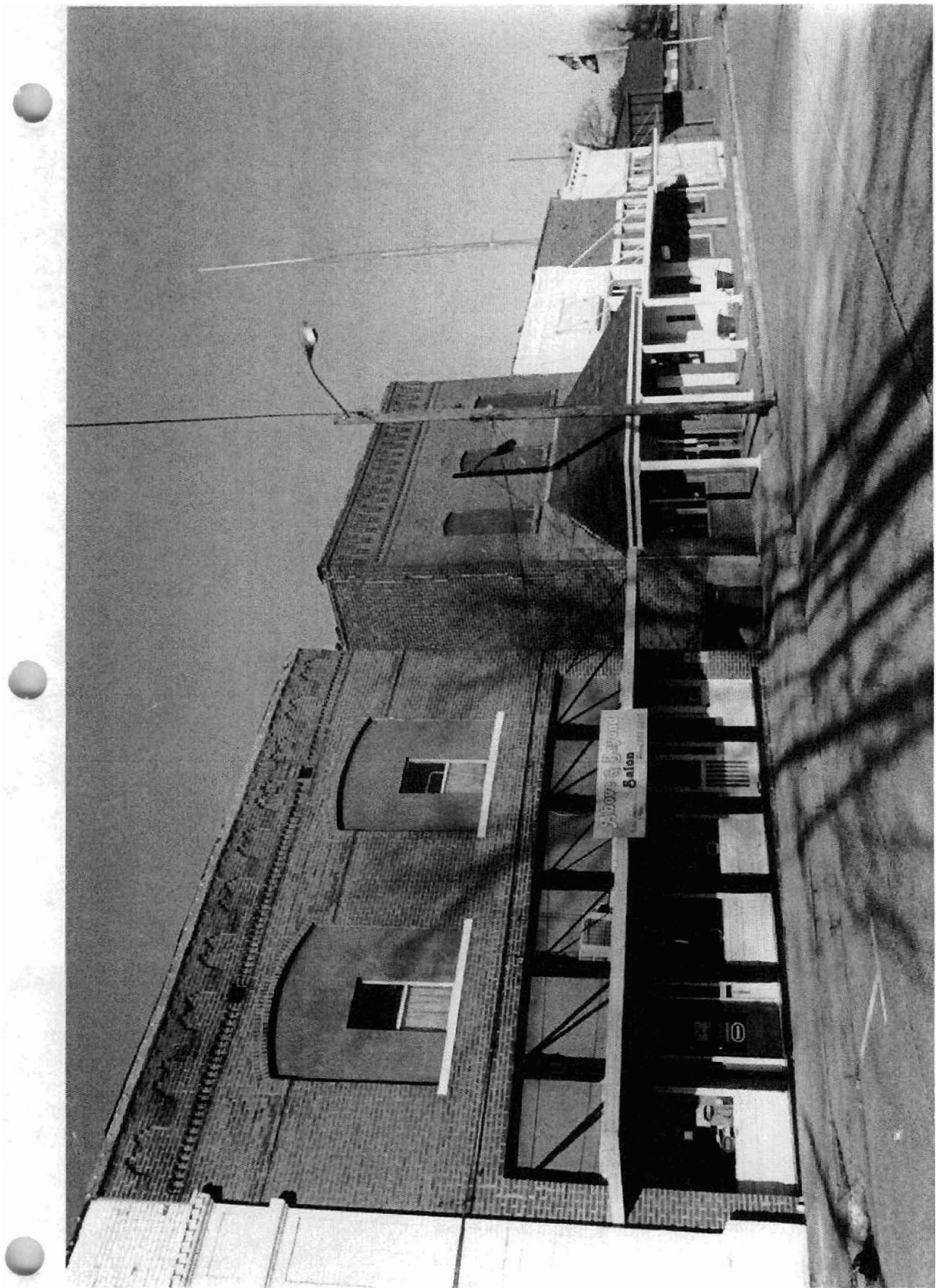
RECTOR COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT CLAY COUNTY, ARKANSAS

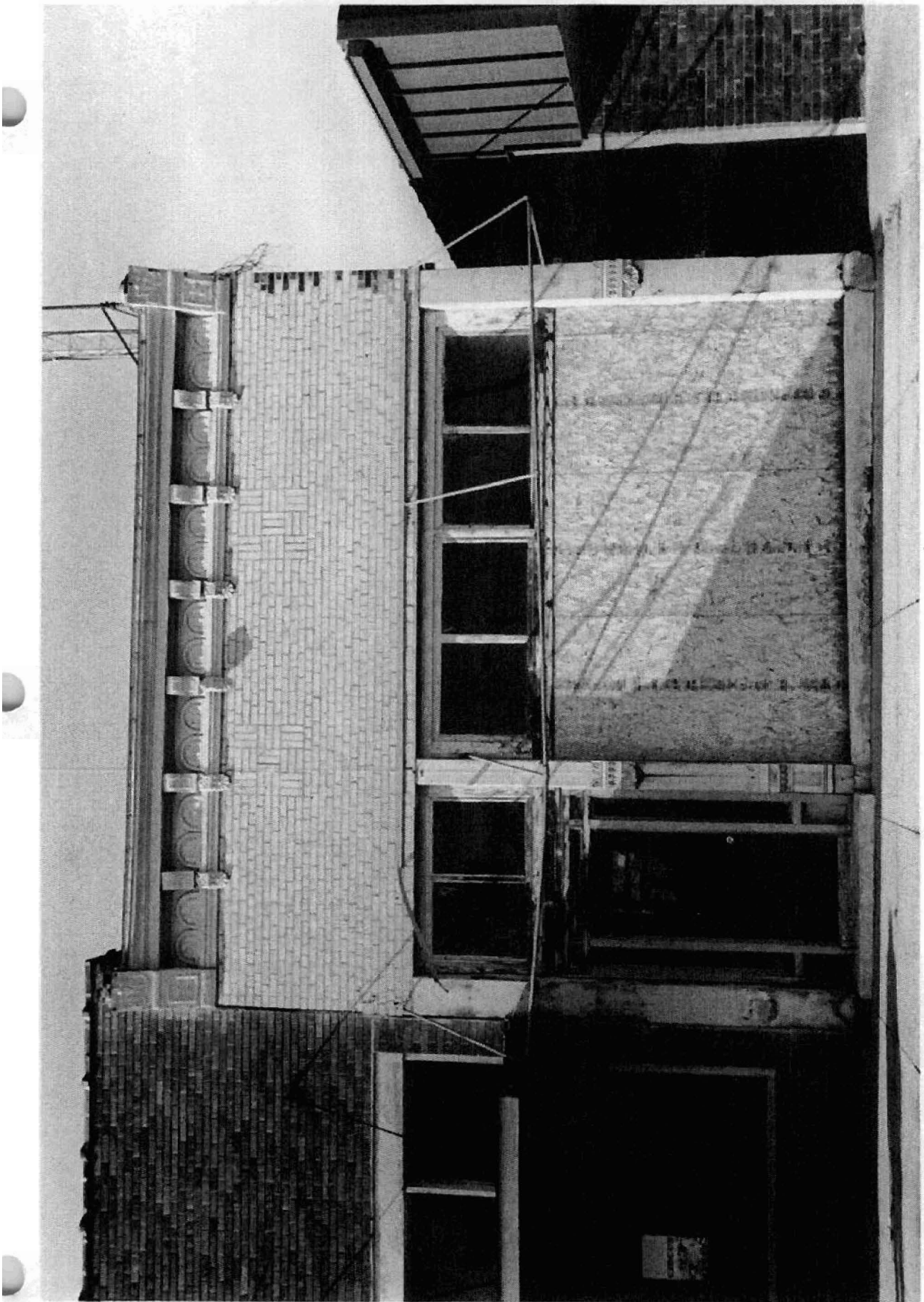






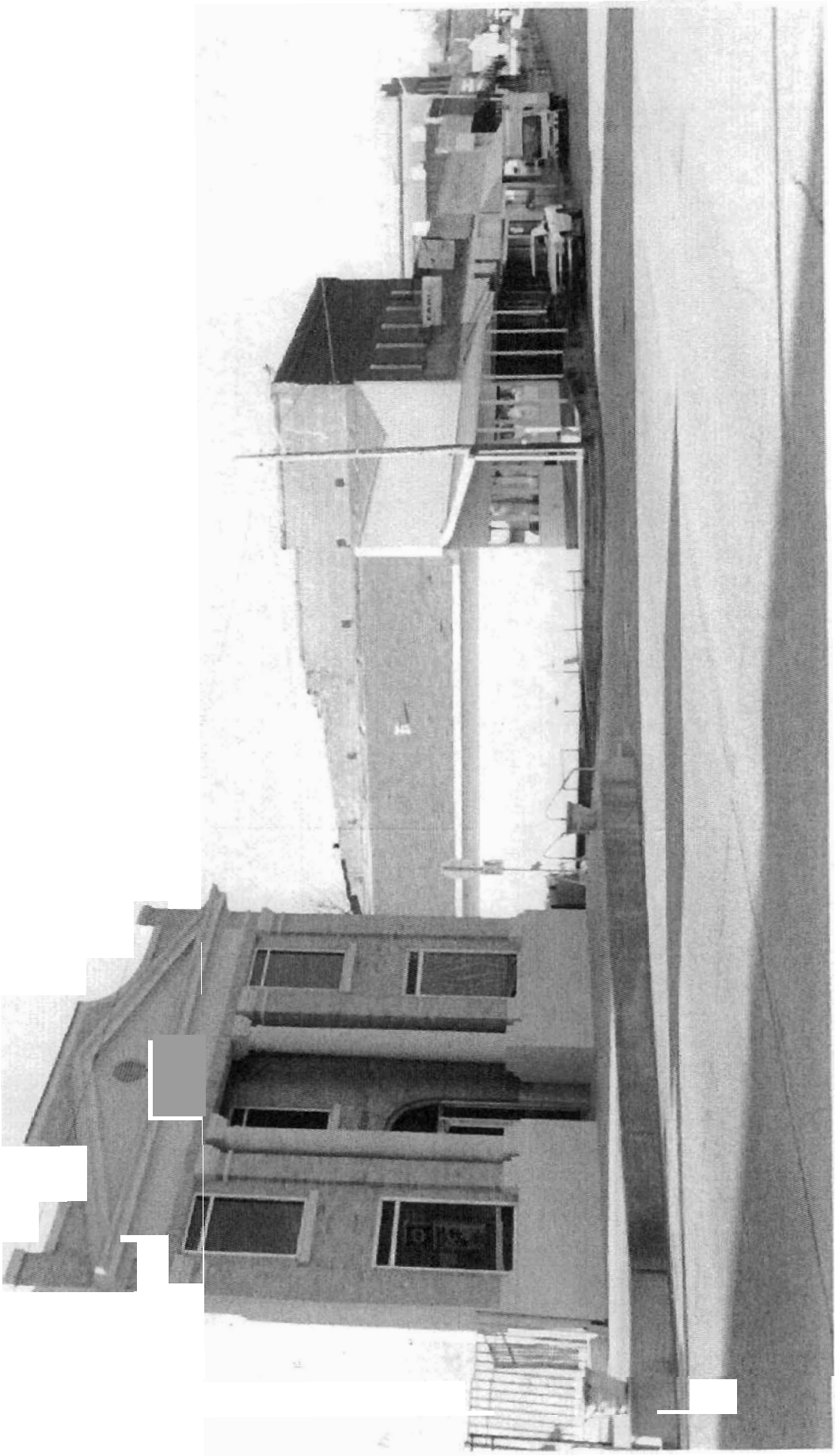


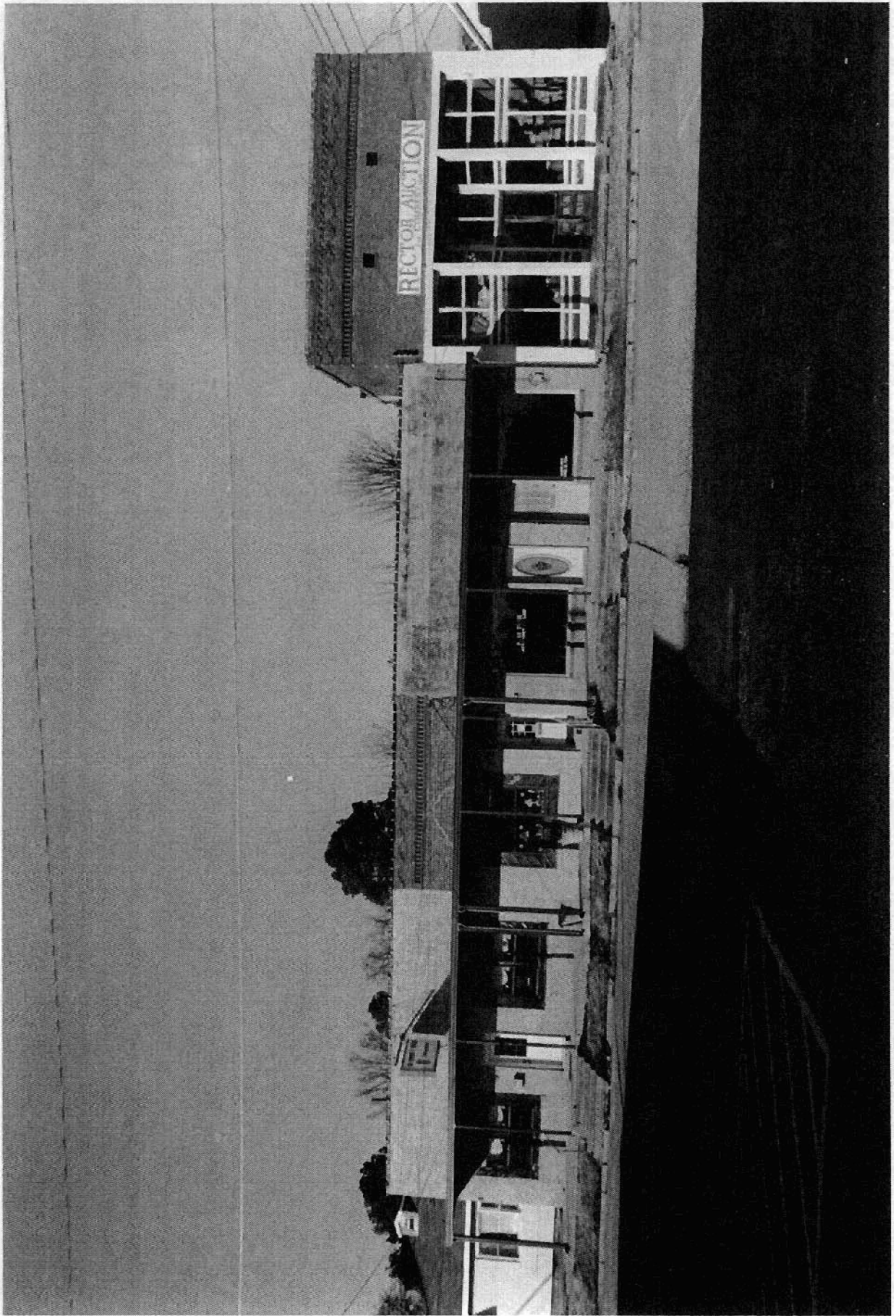


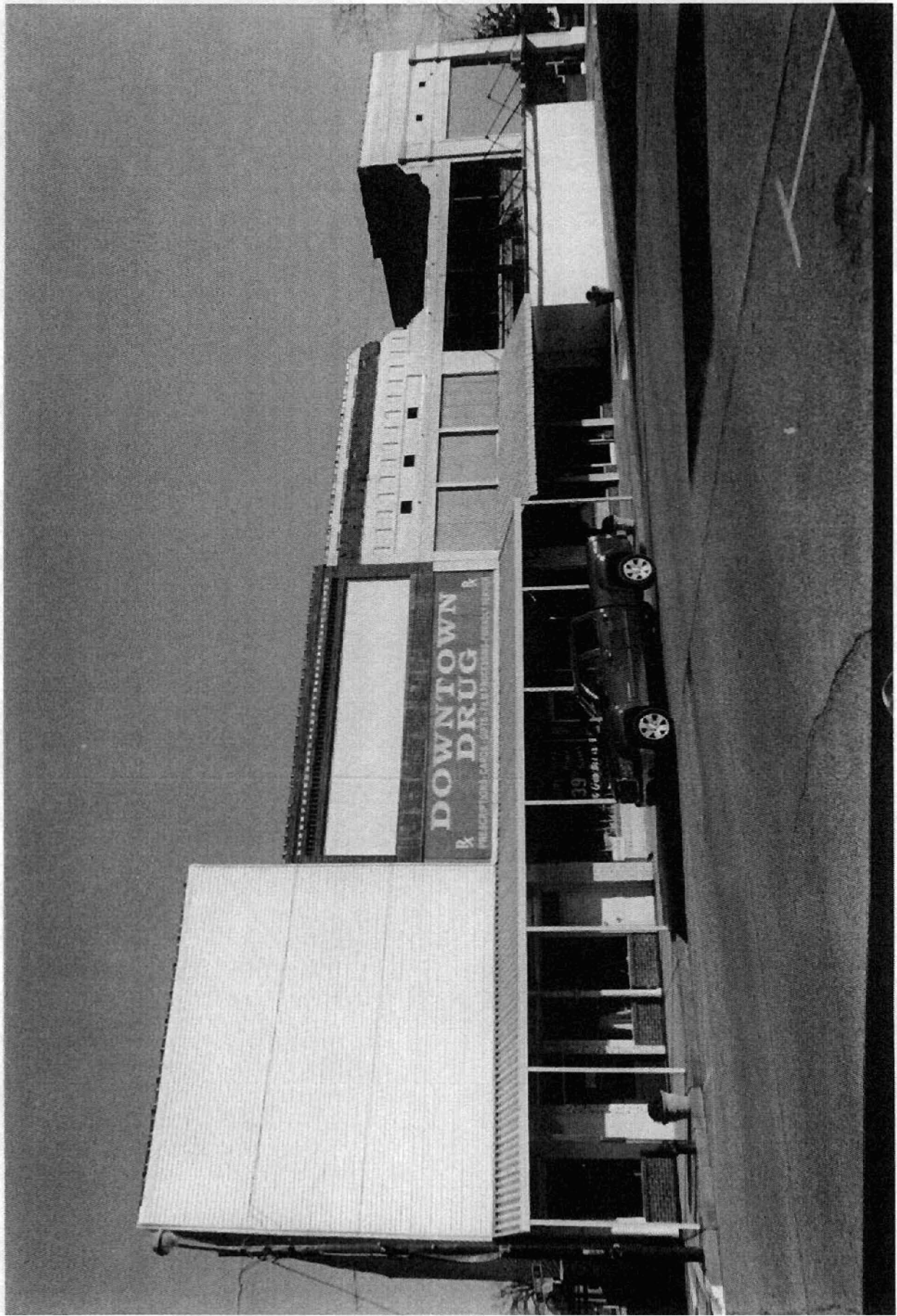


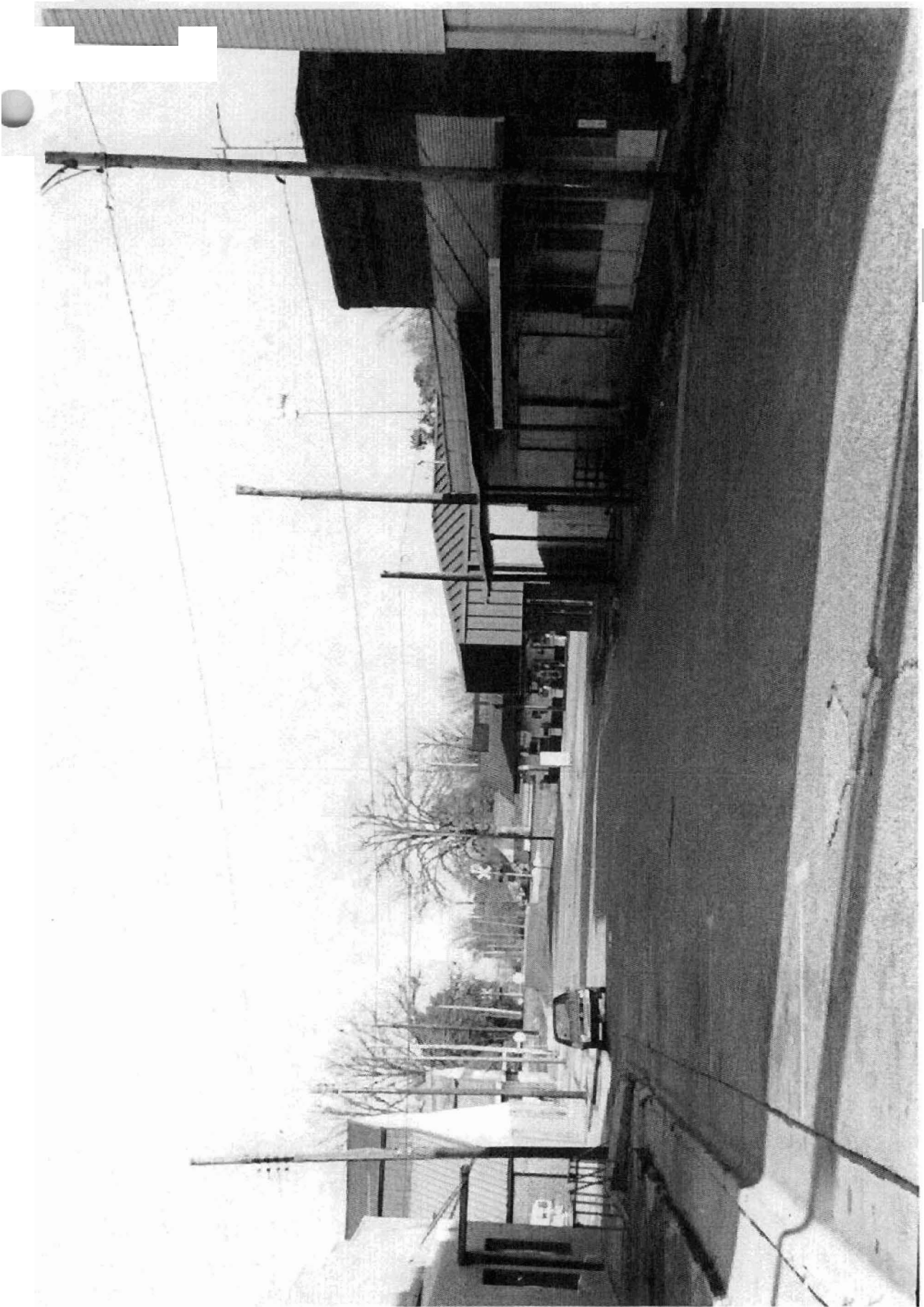


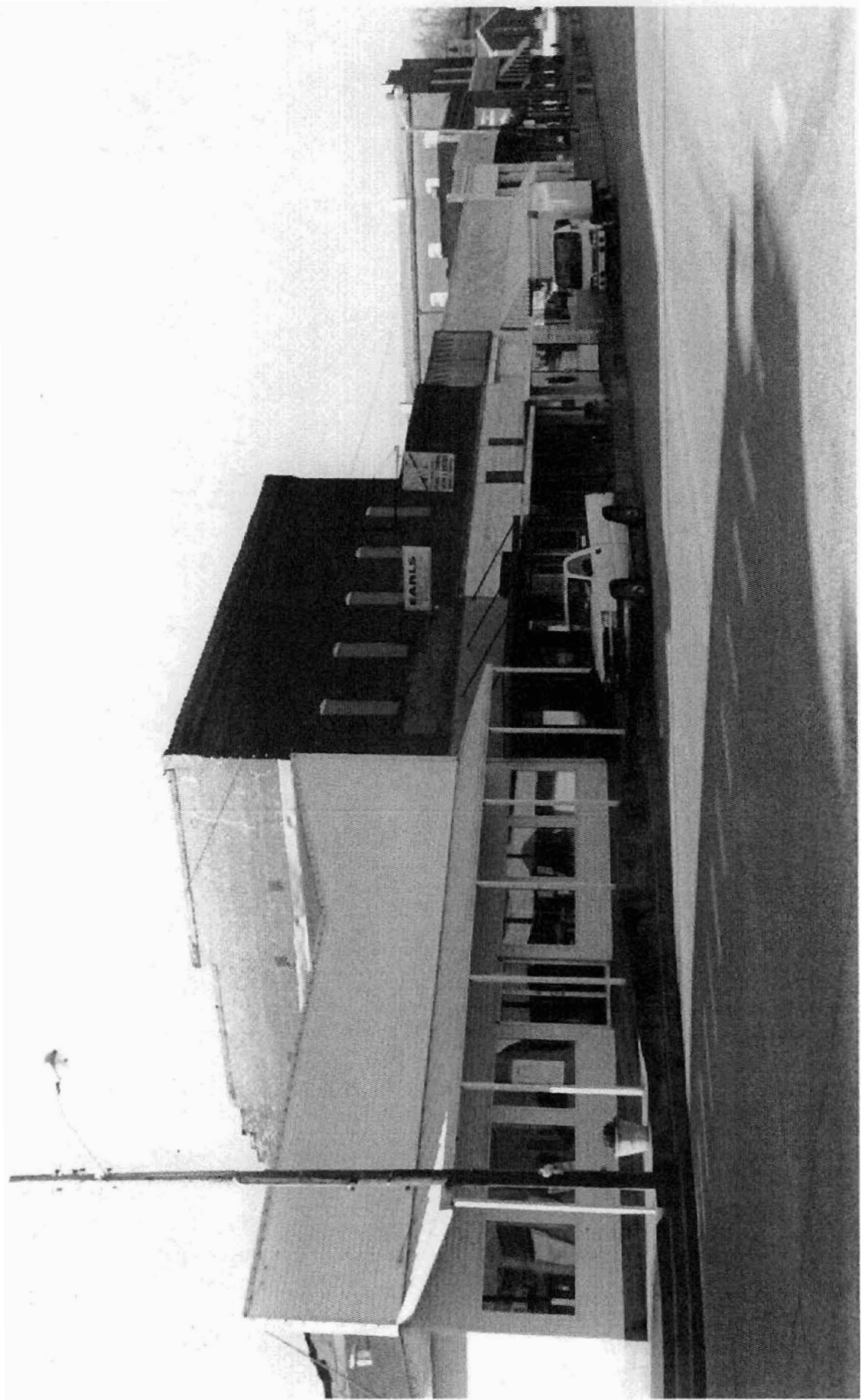






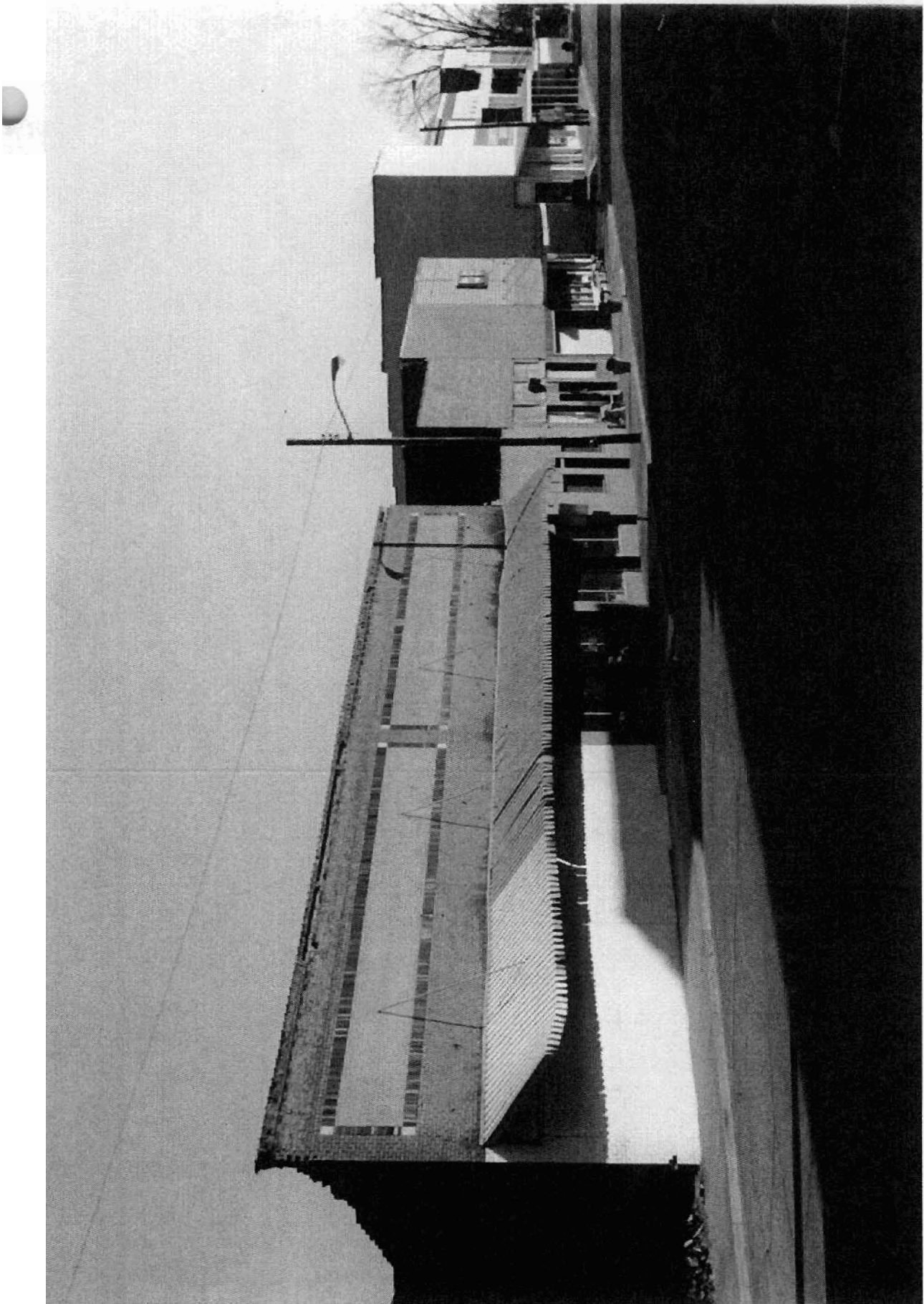


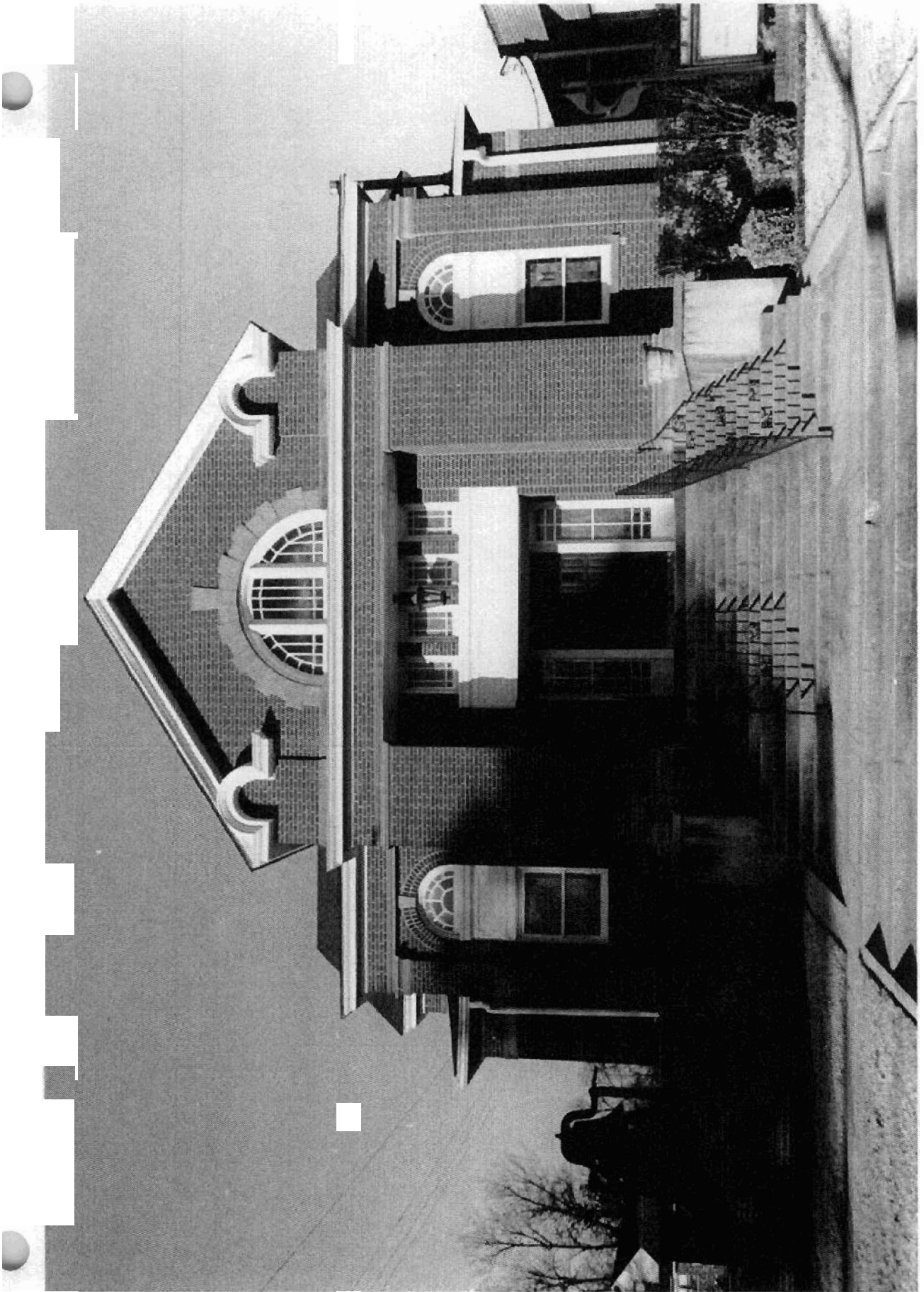


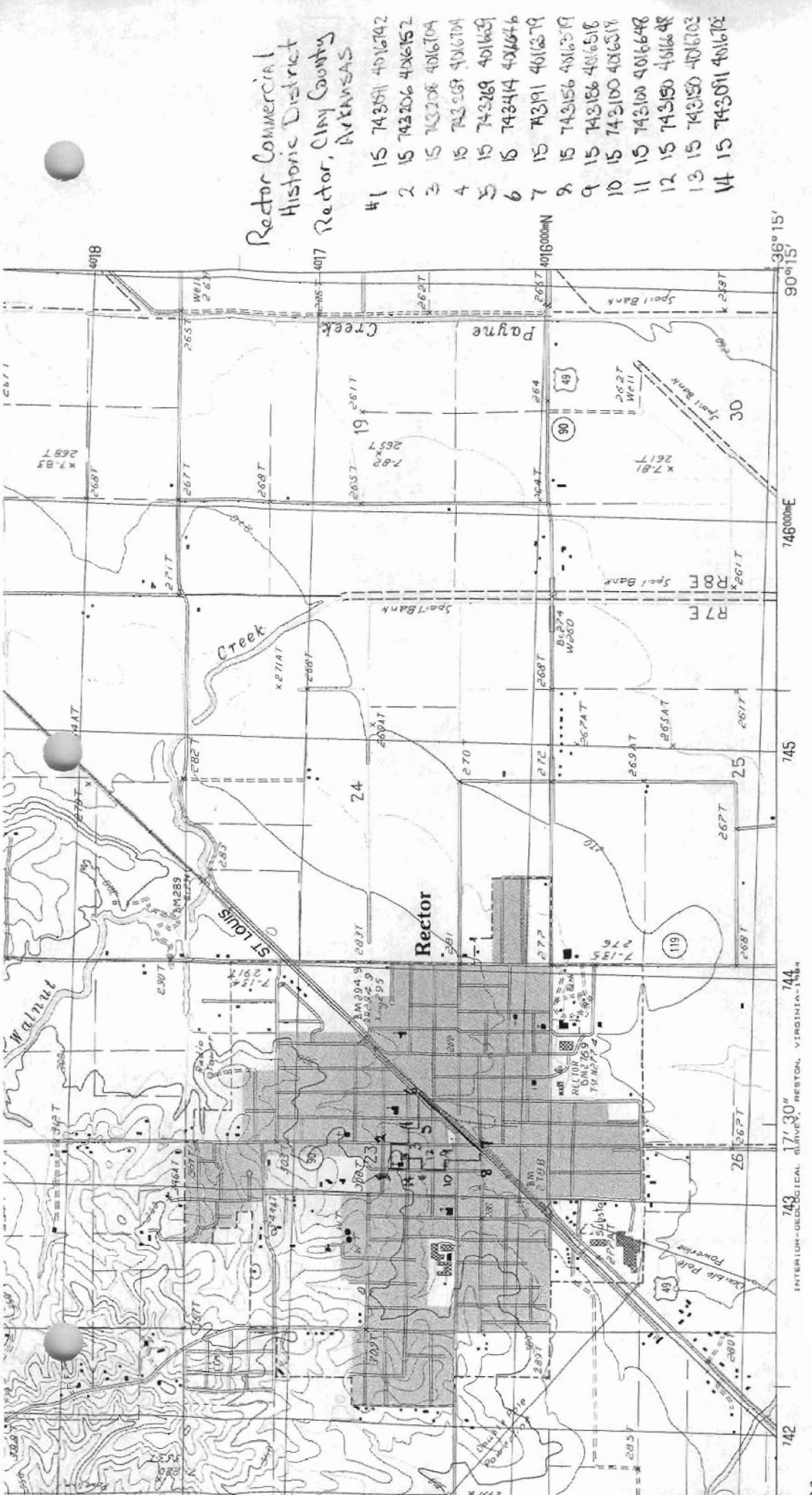










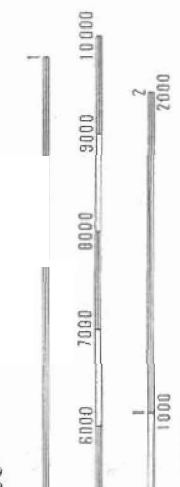


ROAD LEGEND

Improved Road
 Unimproved Road
 Trail
 Interstate Route U.S. Route State Route



1	2	3	1	McDougal
4		5	2	Pollard
6	7	8	3	Piggott
			4	Boydsville
			5	Greenway
			6	Marmaduke
			7	Mounds
			8	Senath



INTERVAL 5 FEET
 THE NEAREST 0.1 FOOT
 THE NEAREST FOOT
 Map by 3048
 Map by 32808

MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
 ORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
 N, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72204

ADJOINING 7.5' QUADRANGLE NAMES

RECTOR, ARKANSAS
PROVISIONAL EDITION 1984

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