

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Wheel Store
other names/site number Batesville Help and Hope

2. Location

street & number Corner of River and Broad Streets not for publication N/A
city, town Batesville vicinity N/A
state Arkansas code AR county Independence code AR 063 zip code 72501

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> objects
			<u> </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Cathryn L. Boyd
Signature of certifying official
Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

11-1-88
Date

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

5. National Park Service Certification

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 the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Social/Meeting Hall

Commerce/Organizational

Commerce/Department Store

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Department Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Other: Vernacular Commercial

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone/sandstone

walls stone/sandstone

roof asphalt

other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Summary

The Wheel Store is a simple, unornamented, two-story masonry structure of rectangular plan. Its bare simplicity belies its importance as a store and meeting place for one of the most socially and politically active agrarian reform societies in Arkansas in the late nineteenth century.

Elaboration

The Wheel Store is a rectangular, two-story ashlar-faced sandstone commercial structure, originally built to house the store and meeting hall of The Agricultural Wheel, an agrarian reform organization. It is built upon a sandstone foundation, and covered with a single plane asphalt shingle roof that slopes from west to east, ending in a boxed wooden cornice projecting over the eastern elevation. The northern or front facade has two wooden one-over-one double-hung sash windows placed symmetrically over the central, first story entrance. To either side of the entrance are two storefront window openings, now partially filled, each of which originally contained a single rectangular window above with a larger rectangular window below. The western elevation has three windows on the second floor, a two-over-one sash to the north, and two one-over-one sash windows irregularly-spaced to the south. The first story is relieved only by an entry, originally composed of a single-pane transom and doorway, and now altered into a transom and pair of short windows below. The chimney, set back slightly upon the roof, is also visible from this elevation. The southern elevation reveals the slanted roof, a single central attic vent, two evenly-spaced windows on the second story (one of two-over-two double hung sash, the other of one-over-one), and a first story with a freight door to the west, now filled and converted to an entry with a triple-pane transom above, and a grouped pair of small rectangular windows to the east. The eastern elevation features two entries on the second floor, now connected by a common fire escape but which originally provided external access to the second floor meeting room, with a single central one-over-one wood sash window. All original wall openings are constructed with smooth-faced stone sills and lintels, and the front parapet roof is finished with a thin course of stone coping. The entire building has been painted white.

Though the interior spaces have been altered and several of the windows replaced or filled, the exterior has not been altered significantly.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Social History
Agriculture
Economics
Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1887-1894

Significant Dates

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Independence County Wheel Cooperative Association

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet

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THE WHEEL STORE

Significance

The Wheel Store was built on land bought by the county cooperative arm of the Agricultural Wheel, a post-Civil War agrarian reform organization composed of farmers, sharecroppers and ordinary lower-class laborers from many trades. Built by this organization's local chapter, it originally housed a cooperative store on the first floor and a meeting hall above. It stands as a monument to the most active and significant farmer movement originating in Arkansas.

Elaboration

The Wheel Store's simple, unornamented aspect belies its original function as an important local gathering place, where it served as both a farmer's cooperative store and organizational center. However, even such an appreciation fails to consider fully the impact of the Agricultural Wheel on the history of agrarian reform in Arkansas.

The Agricultural Wheel--the name came from both Biblical references and French physiocratic philosophy that declared agriculture the great controlling wheel of the world economy--was one of several farmers' alliances that arose in response to a number of economic and political conditions particular to the post-Civil War South. Though the circumstances at the root of his condition were far more complex than he realized, the average farmer perceived himself as the victim of a number of predatory forces that sought to exploit his toil. He received prices for his crops that were, at best, variable and unpredictable and, at worst, below his costs. He required modern tools, equipment and farm supplies to compete in an economy made national by railroad expansion but was required to pay at rates that were excessive relative to his income. When he tried to borrow cash, there were few, if any, local banks to lend it to him, and when he attempted to trade with merchants on credit, he was either charged exorbitant interest or forced to grant the merchant a lien on the expected crop. In the meantime, he watched a national government openly aid various business monopolies--especially the railroads--in obtaining generous financing through the new national banks and cheap prices on vast tracts of government owned land--the same railroad monopolies that overcharged him for shipping his crops. On the local level, he saw no improvement in his condition after the end of Reconstruction, when the Democratic Party regained control from the Republicans in the South. Powerful politicians manipulated the system for the gain of a few, corruption was common and no one seemed to have the farmer's interests at heart. Various taxes were levied on crops, farm property was widely confiscated for non-payment of taxes, and no legislation offered any relief. Naturally, the Southern farmers' own ignorance of sound husbandry techniques and the wisdom of diversified crop production amidst fluctuating prices for cotton; their racism, which made them averse to performing work previously associated with slaves; and the ultimate fallacy, stubbornly embraced, that the raw materials they exported could ever command prices sufficient to pay for the finished products they imported for their life and work contributed heavily to their constant debt and despair. Yet they sought their solutions elsewhere.

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The first such farmers' organization was the Patrons of Husbandry, later known as the Grange. This group grew out of the interest of President Andrew Jackson, who in 1867 sent a clerk from the Agricultural Bureau, Oliver Hudson Kelley, to visit the South and return with suggestions on how to help its almost exclusively agrarian economy recover from the devastation of the Civil War. Kelley proposed the organization of an educational and social organization that would promote the sharing of efficient farming techniques and the brotherhood of shared purpose. The Grange was quite popular at first, built around a nationwide network of local chapters and boasting a large membership by the early 1870s. By the panic of 1873, however, its emphasis on non-political cooperation and the creation of a rural farmer's network for humanitarian and social purposes seemed timid and unrealistic to farmers who saw crop prices plummet amid continued industrial growth and who, therefore, demanded strong political activity to further their more ambitious goals. The Grange did become more politically involved but failed to win any significant victories on the state or local level and farmer involvement dwindled by 1875.

Yet the Grange had awakened the Southern farmer to the fact that economic legislation was of use to the common man, and not only "soulless" corporations. Between 1875 and 1882 other agrarian and labor reform groups such as the Greenbackers proposed various economic platforms and pursued political alternatives for relief. Most of these movements were ephemeral, however, and after only a few years either joined forces with another group of shared interests or faded out altogether.

By 1882 the conditions which had encouraged the growth of such organizations had not abated and had even worsened. Consequently, farmer dissatisfaction remained and a few farmers in eastern Arkansas responded by founding the Agricultural Wheel. Its humble beginnings occurred on the night of February 15, 1882, in a log schoolhouse eight miles southwest of Des Arc, Arkansas (Prairie County), and with but nine prospective members in attendance. Here they formed what they called the Wattensas Farmers Club, later to be renamed the Agricultural Wheel. But without any experience at organizing or administering such a group, these local farmers possessed not even an agenda nor any plans for how to go about solving their common problems. So they simply elected officers and agreed to meet again.

The fact that such men were able to expand the membership from seven to 500 in a single year attests to the degree to which their fellow Arkansas farmers shared their concerns. It was by this time that, of necessity, a more formal organization began to develop and a state-level administration was established, known as the State Wheel. This provided for an annual meeting of all the subordinate (local) chapters and for a slate of officers that provided statewide leadership. At the State Wheel meeting of the following year, there was developed a resolution to prohibit the organization of local Wheels within the limits of any incorporated town, a measure adopted in part from the lessons learned during the rise and fall of the Grange. The Grange had been indiscriminating in its membership policies, hence allowing many of contrary interests

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THE WHEEL STORE

to subvert its energy and goals. The Wheel leadership wanted to restrict membership to the lower-class rural farmer and laborer so as to continue to represent their interests. And until 1888, when they were assisted in assembling their own separate Wheel, blacks were also excluded from membership.

Among those that the Wheel membership sought to exclude were the editors of a press that was known to be strongly allied with the state's Democratic Party, the very party that was seen as at least partially responsible for the farmers' condition. The Wheelers instead established their own newspapers, such as the Clarksville Laborer's Herald and the Cabot Wheel, or endorsed existing papers that were sympathetic to their cause. This gave the local Wheel membership an unbiased community voice, a forum for exchanging news and opinions, and an opportunity to advertise their own rapidly growing enterprises.

The year of 1884 saw the first attempts by Wheelers to take control of their farming costs through the establishment of Wheel cooperative stores and direct purchasing agreements with manufacturers. Such enterprises also provided a means to secure greater control over the marketing of their own products. Early cooperative stores are known to have existed in both Van Buren and Corning, Arkansas. The Wheel Store in Batesville was established in 1887, and by 1888 these efforts had resulted in state business exchanges, cooperative stores, tobacco warehouses and various marketing associations.

One of the least well-known attempts on the part of the Wheel to take direct control of their economic circumstances occurred in 1889, when those members involved in tobacco production advocated the establishment of a tobacco "trust." This was to take the form of a central facility where all harvested tobacco would be stored, an arrangement which would allow the farmers to control storage conditions, quality and measurement and to collectively borrow money against the value of the stored tobacco. Furthermore, the tobacco farmers sought to control tobacco prices by encouraging all tobacco farmers to abstain from planting tobacco in 1889, an event which, had it occurred, would have greatly driven up the price on the tobacco stored in the trust. Toward this end, they attempted to organize all tobacco growing Wheel members throughout the region (the Wheel had expanded into several Southern states by this time). No record remains as to why this effort never materialized, but it indicates an ambitious if somewhat contradictory effort to turn a segment of the economy in their favor through the establishment of one of the very monopolies they detested.

In the meantime, the Wheel continued the practice started by the Grange of sponsoring a variety of recreational, social and educational programs for the purpose of raising the consciousness of the heretofore isolated and provincial farmer adding "moral" lectures and social events to the typical husbandry news and advice. Through such events the Wheel provided relief from the monotonous routine of toil and allowed its members to form friendships and to share experiences.

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THE WHEEL STORE

Between 1884 and 1885 the Wheel began the phenomenal growth that would continue until 1888. By 1885, the Wheel had grown to approximately 10,000 members, the largest portion of which coming from Arkansas, but now also including members who belonged to Wheels in Tennessee, Mississippi and Missouri. The membership would continue to grow in Arkansas and beyond, reaching a total membership of over 500,000 across the South and 75,000 in Arkansas by 1888. However, a particularly significant addition to the membership occurred in 1885, when another farmer's group, centered in northwestern Arkansas and called the Brothers of Freedom, joined with the Wheel, adding 40,000 members to its ranks. The Brothers of Freedom had formed at the same time as the Agricultural Wheel but had adopted a more activist platform, one less based upon a romantic dream of returning to a pure agrarian idyll than on coping successfully with the exigencies of an industrial economy. They had also realized early on that the logical extension of their philosophy of self-help was political participation, which meant vigilant monitoring of local and state Democratic candidates and the nomination of their own candidates if the Democrats were unsatisfactory. The political activism of the Brothers of Freedom infused the Wheel with a political consciousness and dedication to political solutions that it had not possessed previously.

This is not to say that the Arkansas Wheel membership had been completely oblivious to politics before 1885. In fact, a considerable furor arose before the elections of 1884 (which was also a presidential election year) due to the alarm felt by state Democrats when the Republicans attempted unsuccessfully to forge an alliance with the State Wheel during its annual summer meeting. The Republicans had approached the Wheel members in the first place, however, because they knew that the Wheelers were considering entering candidates of their own into several county elections around the state, which they did. The Democratic party and Democrat-influenced press railed against direct political involvement by any farmer's groups, alleging Republican subterfuge to impugn their sincerity, and rural ignorance to impugn their ability. After the election, when the Wheel candidates achieved only moderate success the Democrats quickly became more supportive. Yet, it was inevitable that this coalition with the Brothers of Freedom would reinforce and encourage this trend toward nominating their own candidates for public office rather than waiting for the Democratic party to address the farmers' concerns.

The Wheel's finest hour came during the election of 1888. Though the Union Labor Party was the official name of the political group that sought to challenge the Democrats in the local, state and national elections, several influential Wheelers were active in its leadership. The Union Labor Party nominated C.M. Norwood, a former Confederate soldier and state senator, for governor. The Republicans met next and agreed not to nominate a candidate of their own, endorsing Norwood instead. This decision lent 50,000 more votes to the Union Labor Party candidate. The Democrats nominated a planter from Lonoke, James P. Eagle, as their candidate for governor. The Democrats accused the Republicans of trying to use the dissatisfaction of the Wheelers, most of whom had traditionally been Democrats, to further their own political agenda. The Wheelers themselves were faced with the difficult choice of

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backing the Democrats, who they distrusted, or the Republican-endorsed Union Labor Party candidate, who the Democrats did their best to associate with Reconstruction and Republican blacks. Amidst allegations of rampant election fraud, the Democratic candidate won by approximately 15,000 votes, a small amount considering the tremendous voter turnout. Several Union Labor Party candidates were elected to the State legislature, however, and two were eventually seated in Congress (after investigations of election fraud reversed the original vote counts). Regardless of the results, the political clout of the Agricultural Wheel had been established, as evidenced by the attempts of the Democratic Party to court it, and never again would the Democrats ignore the farmers' grievances as long as they continued to voice them. The farmers who were elected to the state legislature made their own presence felt through such victories as the repeal of mortgage legislation that had vexed the farmers for years and for which they had long sought relief.

In 1888, the Wheel merged with another Southern reform organization, the National Farmers' Alliance and Cooperative Union, later on to become the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union (NFA&IU), and its membership continued to exert influence through that organization. The NFA&IU was absorbed by the national Populist Party in the 1890s. The Populists represented the most organized and effective incarnation of the various earlier reform movements until that time. They reached their zenith during the 1896 elections, where they gained several local, state and Congressional seats around the nation but lost a close presidential election that devastated an already factious party.

Despite its naivete and limited success, the Agricultural Wheel remains Arkansas' most significant contribution to the agrarian and labor reform movements that swept across the country during the last quarter of the 19th century.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Farmers' and Laborers' Union Journal, Batesville, Arkansas, August 1, 1890.

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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 15 622040 3958800
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 1 of block 10, Maxfield's Southern Addition, Batesville, Arkansas.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

This lot includes all property historically associated with this resource.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kenneth Story, Architectural Historian
 organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
 street & number 225 East Markham, Suite 200
 city or town Little Rock

date September 6, 1988
 telephone (501) 371-2763
 state AR zip code 72201

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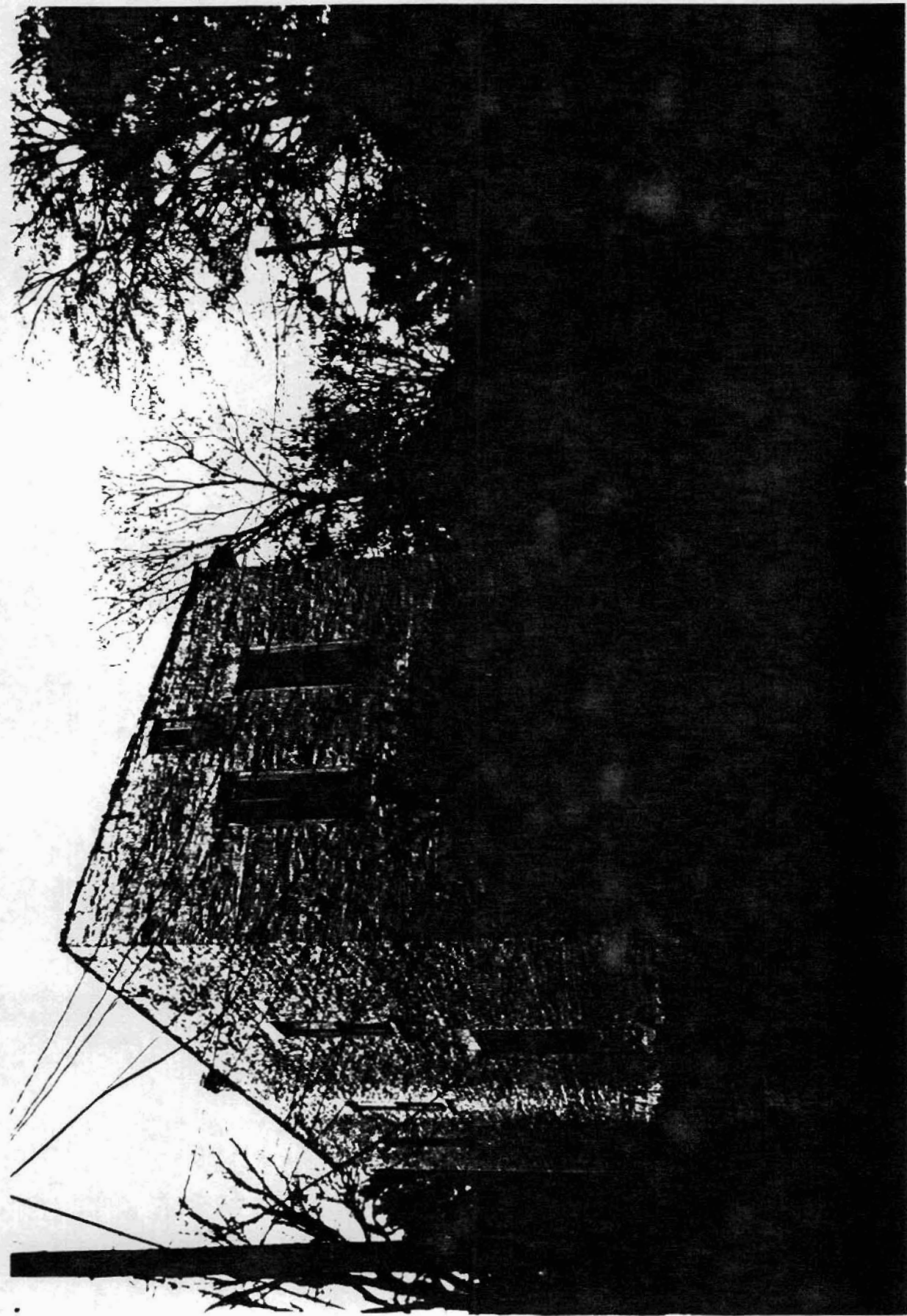
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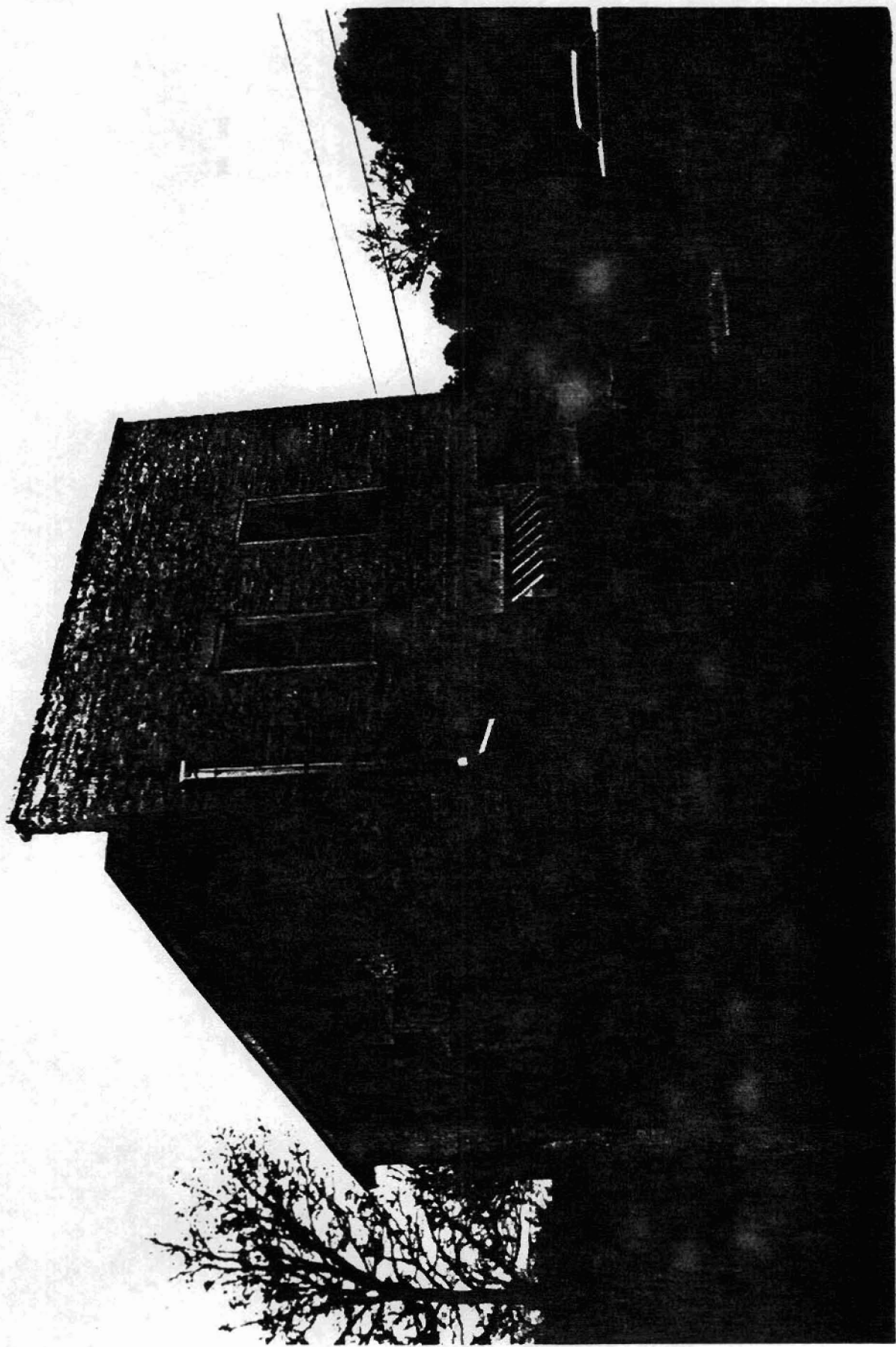
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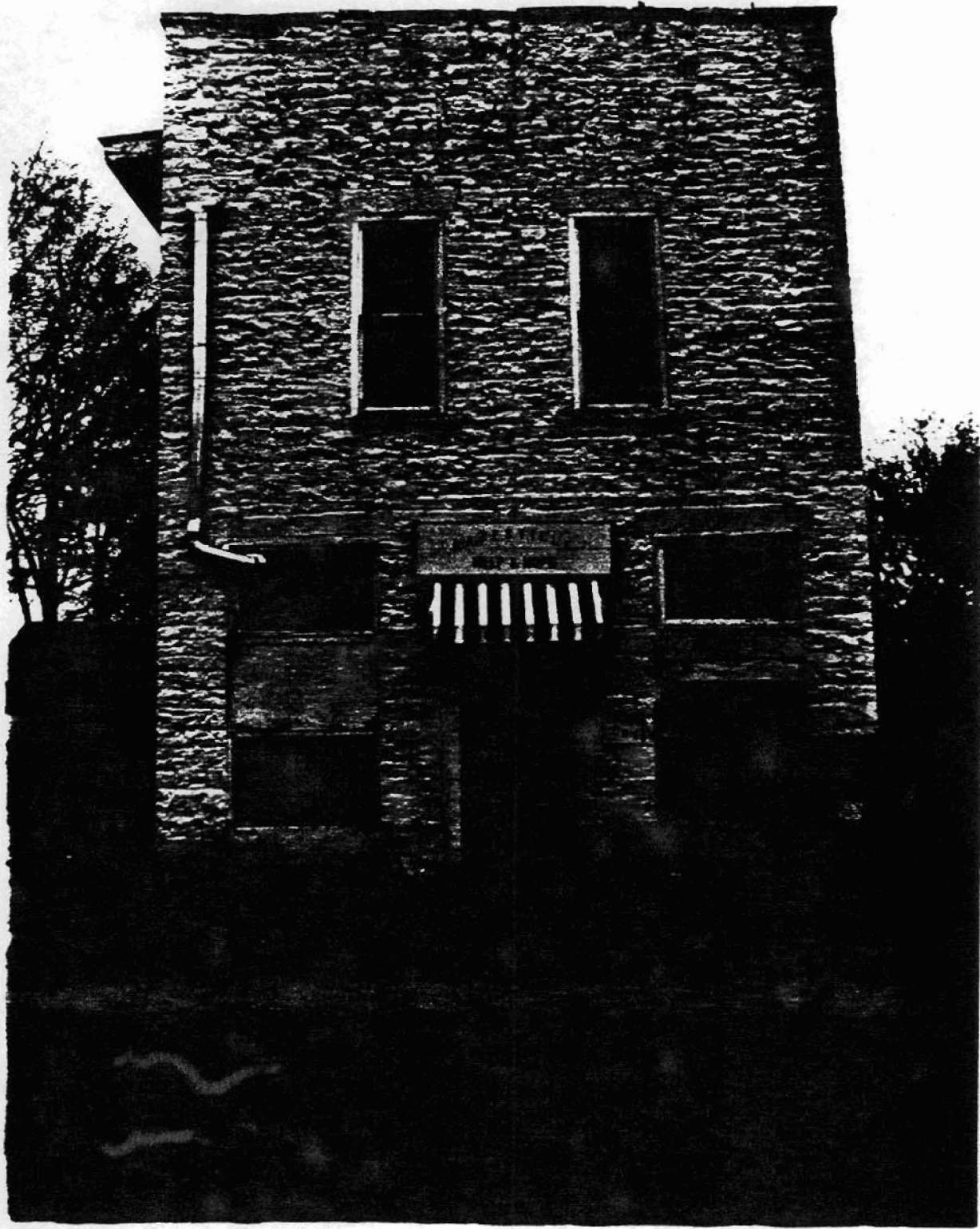
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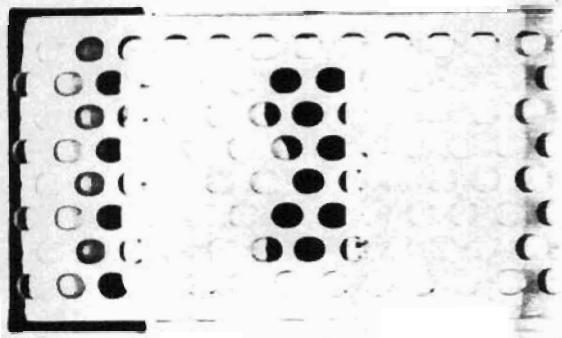
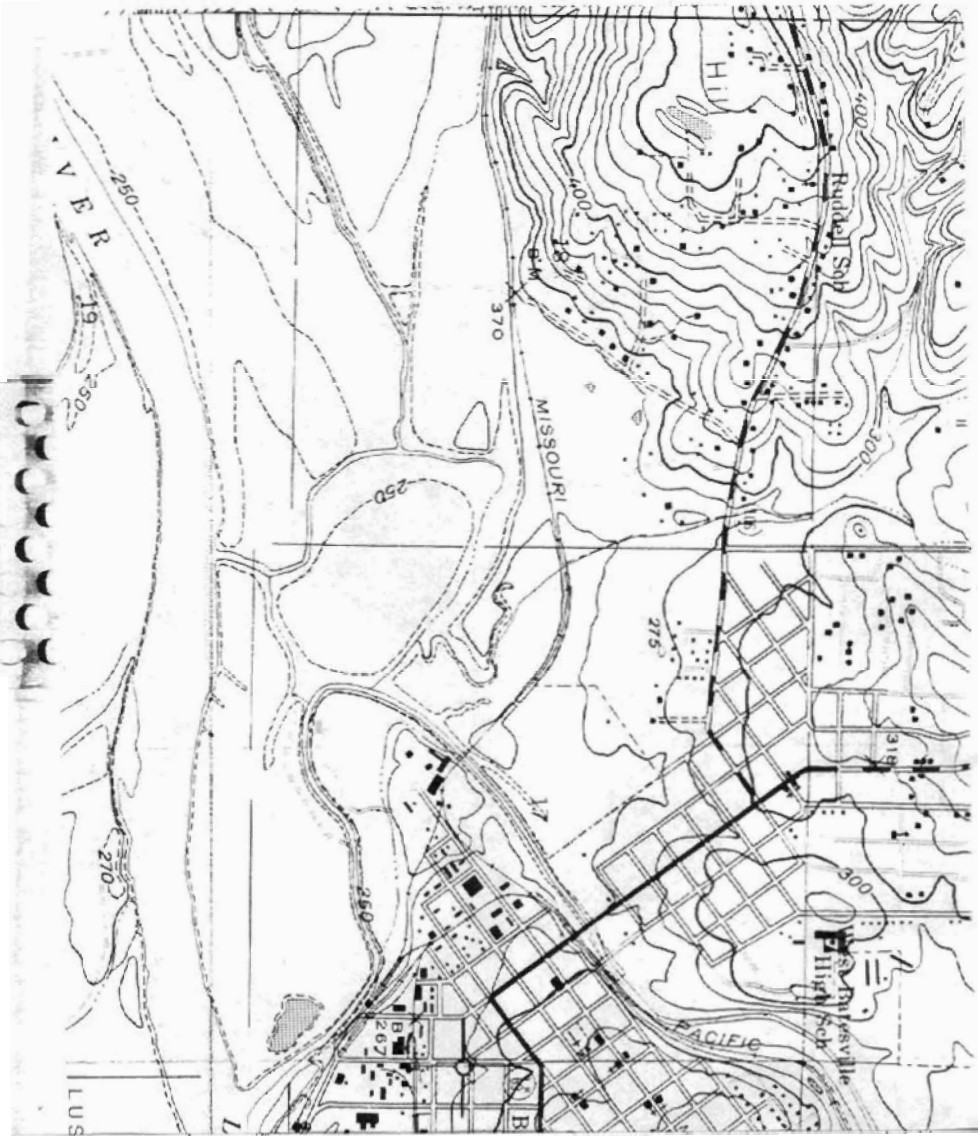
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