

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

RECEIVED

NR 1-1-76

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Dyess Colony Center

AND/OR COMMON

Dyess

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Arkansas Highway 297

CITY, TOWN

Dyess

STATE

Arkansas

VICINITY OF
CODE

05

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

COUNTY

Mississippi

CODE

093

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☒ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☒ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☒ COMMERCIAL☒ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☒ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Multiple Ownership

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

VICINITY OF

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Clerk's Office

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Mississippi County Courthouse

Osceola

STATE

Arkansas

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☐ GOOD
☒ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Dyess Colony was established in May, 1934, on Mississippi Delta land in northeast Arkansas. The federal government purchased over 16,000 acres of "sunken lands" in Mississippi County. After swamps and marshy areas were drained and most of the trees cleared, the land was suitable for farming.

Dyess Colony was a planned agricultural community with Dyess Center as the focal point of this experimental rural rehabilitation project. The Dyess farmlands were divided into tracts of twenty to forty acres, with each tract having a house of three to five rooms. Each tract also contained a barn and chicken house.

As the name indicates, Dyess Center was located at the center of the Dyess Colony. The community center area contained numerous facilities including the administration building, commissary, church, school, community building, park, swimming pool and residences. Several small industrial-type operations were also present: grist mill, gin, slaughter house, lumber yard, and garage. The entire colony was planned by architect Howard Eichenbaum of Little Rock.

The houses in Dyess Center were like those on each farm in the colony: one storey white frame with a gable roof and small open porch and containing three to five rooms (see attached floor plans). Except for woodwork trim on the porches, the cottage-like houses at Dyess were quite simple. Many of these original colony houses are still standing at Dyess and though some have been altered, many remain unchanged.

The community center, a one storey frame T-shape building, still stands at the north edge of Dyess Center. It is in fairly good condition and is now used as a church.

The administration building of Dyess Colony still stands in the center of the community. The building is of two storey brick construction with one storey wings extending at the north and south elevations. This Greek Revival style building features a classic two storey portico supported by four square wood columns. The Palladian-style entry is flanked by windows with heads of radiating voussoirs with keystones. The building, now used for apartments, has been painted white and is in fair condition.

Though most of the original commercial structures have been destroyed, both the community and administration buildings remain. Modern

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intrusions are typical of buildings found in any small rural community. About half of the private residences at Dyess date from the colony days, and are easily recognizable. In many ways Dyess is a typical small town in the Mississippi Delta; however, its origin as a planned rural community is readily apparent.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

D	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☒ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☐ RELIGION
1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE
1500-1599	☒ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☐ LITERATURE	☐ SCULPTURE
1600-1699	☐ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☒ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	☐ ART	☐ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER
1800-1899	☐ COMMERCE	☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☐ TRANSPORTATION
1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)
		☐ INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES May, 1934 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Howard Eichenbaum

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

During the early 1930's the United States experienced the worst economic depression in the Nation's history. Though all Americans were affected by the "Great Depression", some socio-economic groups suffered more than others. One such group were the small farmers and tenant farmers of the rural South.

The Roosevelt Administration recognized the overwhelming conditions of Southern farmers and made several efforts to aid them. One of the earliest farmer assistance programs of the New Deal was Dyess Colony.

Established in May, 1934, Dyess Colony was the brainchild of William Reynolds Dyess. Mr. Dyess, a farmer and contractor, was Arkansas' director of both the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration. Dyess was convinced that the swampy delta land in the southwest part of Mississippi County, Arkansas, could be transformed into productive farm land. He conceived the idea of building an agricultural community on this land, and early in 1934, submitted his plan to Harry L. Hopkins, Administrator of the F.E.R.A. Dyess' plan was strongly endorsed by Colonel Lawrence Westbrook, assistant to Mr. Hopkins, and the colony was approved and funded.

Originally known as "Colonization Project Number 1," Dyess Colony was first controlled by the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation. This corporation was set up by the Rural Rehabilitation Program of the Emergency Relief Administration in Arkansas. In 1936 the Resettlement Administration took over management of the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation. The legal structure of the colony was revised, and Dyess Colony Corporation was organized. When the Farm Security Administration was established in 1937, it became the third agency to administer Dyess.

Dyess Colony was an experiment in permanent reestablishment of the independent farmer. Intended as a pioneer effort, the colony was, in 1934, the only purely agricultural rehabilitation colony project in the country. The government's attempt to resettle destitute but deserving families at Dyess Colony was a success.

Dyess Colony was established on an almost inaccessible expanse of tree covered marsh land located in north Arkansas about fifteen miles from

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the Mississippi River. The land cost an average of \$2.50 per acre, and totaled approximately 16,500 acres. About 1,300 persons were employed in construction of the colony, using lumber cleared from the land.

The first buildings at Dyess were for the workers and consisted of barracks, a kitchen and dining hall. By mid-June, 1934, a temporary administration building had been completed, and a month later construction began on 500 houses at the colony. Howard Eichenbaum, a Little Rock architect, designed the three-, four-, and five-room houses constructed at Dyess. Each house was constructed on an individual twenty-to forty-acre farm. Though of simple design, each house met the demands of farm living. Some twenty variations of the basic floor plans helped eliminate the monotony. Each of the Dyess houses had a well and was wired for electricity. In addition to other outbuildings, each farm had a barn and chicken house. All the barns were of similar design, being about sixteen by twenty-four feet with ten foot shed on either side.

The formal dedication of Dyess Colony came on May 22, 1936, the second anniversary of the colony. In that year 482 families lived at Dyess, and 4,875 acres had been planted. By January, 1938, the Colony was on a sound basis. Sixty miles of gravel roads and ninety miles of drainage canals had been constructed, and a spur from the Frisco Railroad extended twelve miles to the colony. Dyess Center, the actual heart of the farm colony, contained a number of buildings, including a commissary, canning center, community building, school, hospital, cotton gin, feed mill, post office and even a motion picture theatre. The most prominent structure, then and now, was the two storey Greek Revival style administration building.

The only colonists accepted at Dyess were experienced farmers who had lost their farms in the economic depression. In addition, each farmer had to be under fifty years old, in good health, a resident of Arkansas, and Caucasian. The first year at the colony was a trial period for each family, after which they were evaluated by the farm agent and home economist. By 1938 some 115 families had earned deeds to their farms and 300 others had completed the one year trial and been recommended for retention as colonists.

Although Dyess was not a communal settlement, the colonists did work together on several activities, including the Dyess Theatre, twenty-acre school farm, and joint marketing of truck products. The cotton gin, run by cooperative methods, also provided employment for settlers.

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January, 1939, marked the completion of Dyess Colony. After that date recruitment of new colonists to fill vacant farms stopped. Those farms not filled were left vacant to allow for the natural expansion of the community. As federal loans were repaid and the colonists became owners of their farms, government control of the colony dwindled. Federal holdings were eventually liquidated, setting Dyess free of any extra control by the government.

Though Dyess Colony helped no great per cent of the people in Arkansas or even in Mississippi County, it did help some deserving farmers. This experimental project provided many impoverished farm families with the opportunity to build a better life. Even more importantly the success of Dyess Colony established a precedent after which future farm projects were modeled.

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Dyess Colony was a national sociological experiment in rural rehabilitation. The role Dyess played as a model for later resettlement farms made it an important historic site. Though established less than 50 years ago, Dyess Colony Center should be listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of its significance to modern American social and agricultural history.



9

Sharp, Floyd. Traveling Recovery Road. Archives, Arkansas History Commission.
Pittman, Dan. "The Founding of Dyess Colony." Arkansas Historical Quarterly,
Vol 29 (Winter, 1970), pp. 313-327.

20

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 168 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A   
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

8

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

	Latitude	Longitude
NW	35° 35' 44"	90° 13' 7.4"
NE	35° 35' 44"	90° 12' 25.3"
SE	35° 35' 14.7"	90° 12' 25.3"
SW	35° 35' 14.7"	90° 13' 7.4"

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
-------	------	--------	------

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
-------	------	--------	------

11

NAME / TITLE

Dianna Kirk, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

STREET & NUMBER

300 West Markham

CITY OR TOWN

Little Rock

DATE _____

3-11-75

TELEPHONE

(501) 371-1639

STATE

Arkansas

12

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE William E. Henderson

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE _____

3-11-75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE _____

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE _____

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY MAP FORM

RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH MAP

1 NAME

HISTORIC Dyess Colony Center

AND/OR COMMON

Dyess

2 LOCATION

CITY/TOWN Dyess

VICINITY OF

COUNTY Mississippi STATE Arkansas

3 MAP REFERENCE

Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army

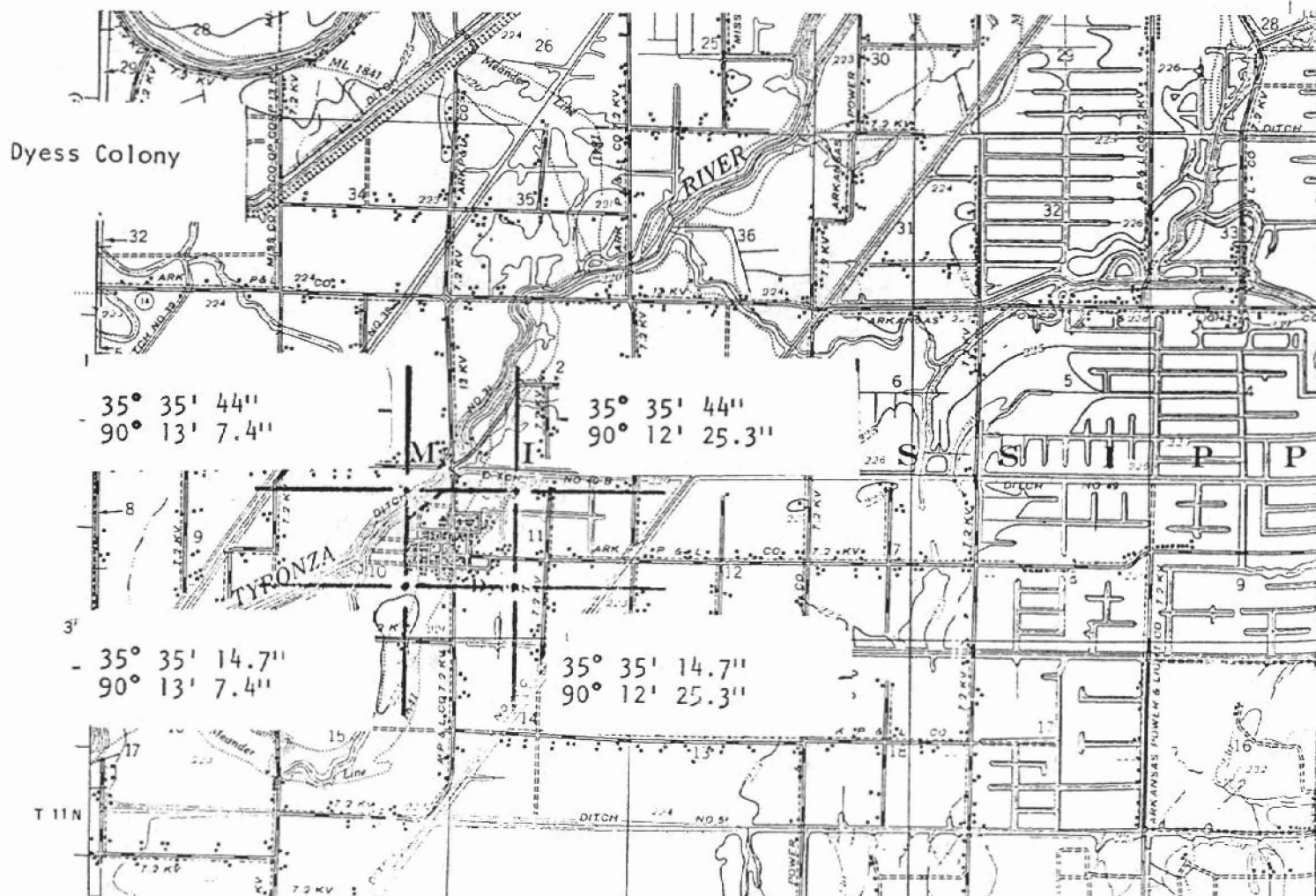
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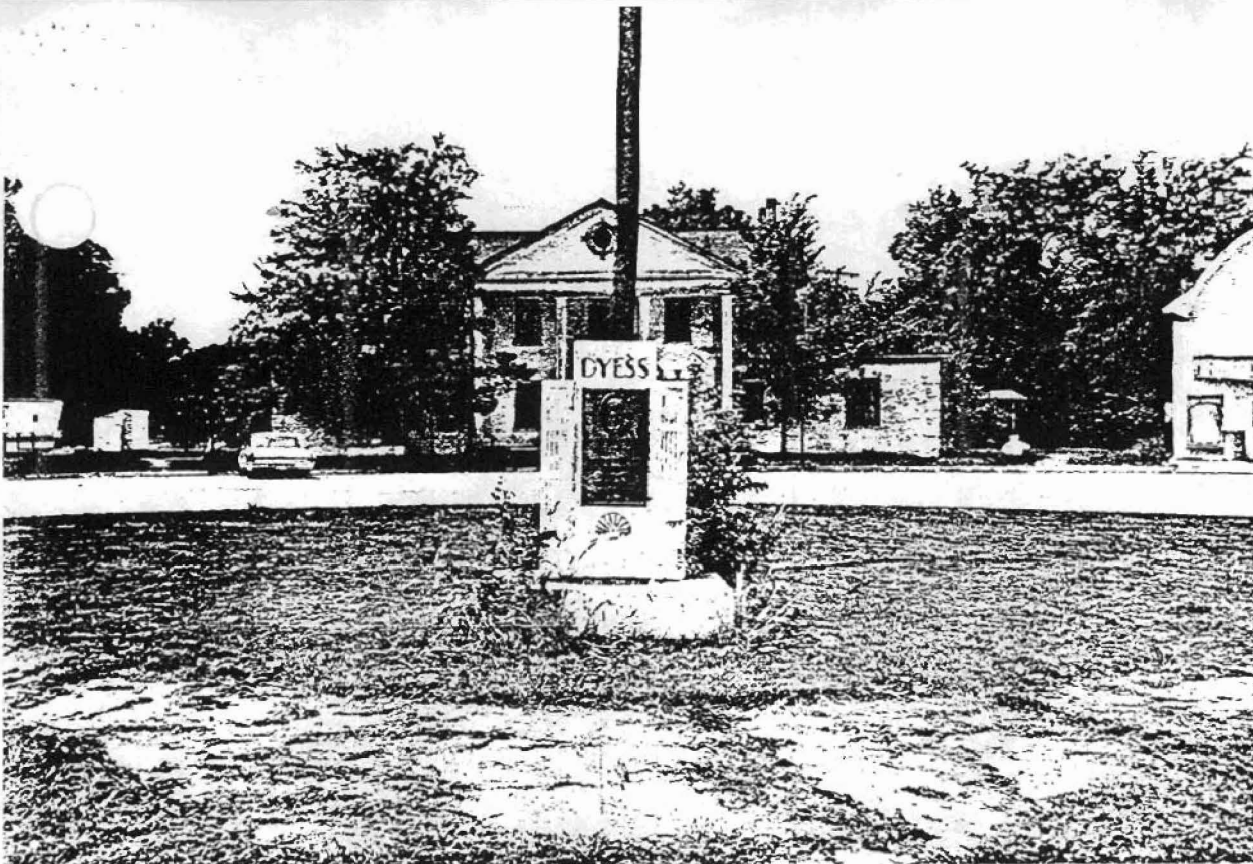
DATE 1956

4 REQUIREMENTS

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS

1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES
2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES





Form No. 10-301a
(rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED *DIANNA KIRK*

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

1 NAME

HISTORIC Dyess Colony Center

AND/OR COMMON

Dyess

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Dyess

____ VICINITY OF

COUNTY Mississippi STATE Arkansas

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Dianna Kirk

DATE OF PHOTO 1974

NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

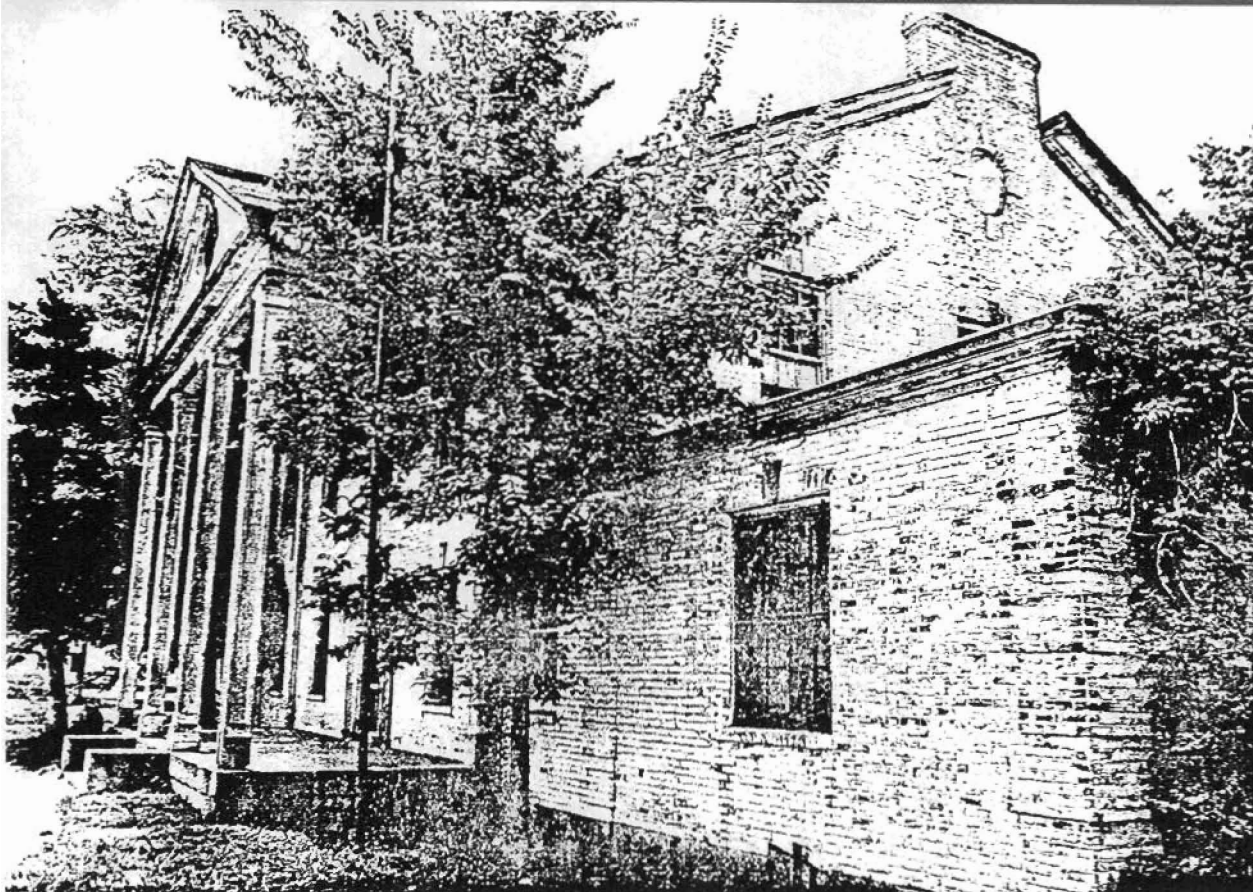
IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW DIRECTION ETC IF DISTRICT. GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

PHOTO NO

W. R. Dyess Memorial Marker, with Administration Building
in background, viewed from the east

1



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rev. 10-74)

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Dyess

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CITY/TOWN Dyess

___VICINITY OF

COUNTY Mississippi STATE Arkansas

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Dianna Kirk

DATE OF PHOTO 1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

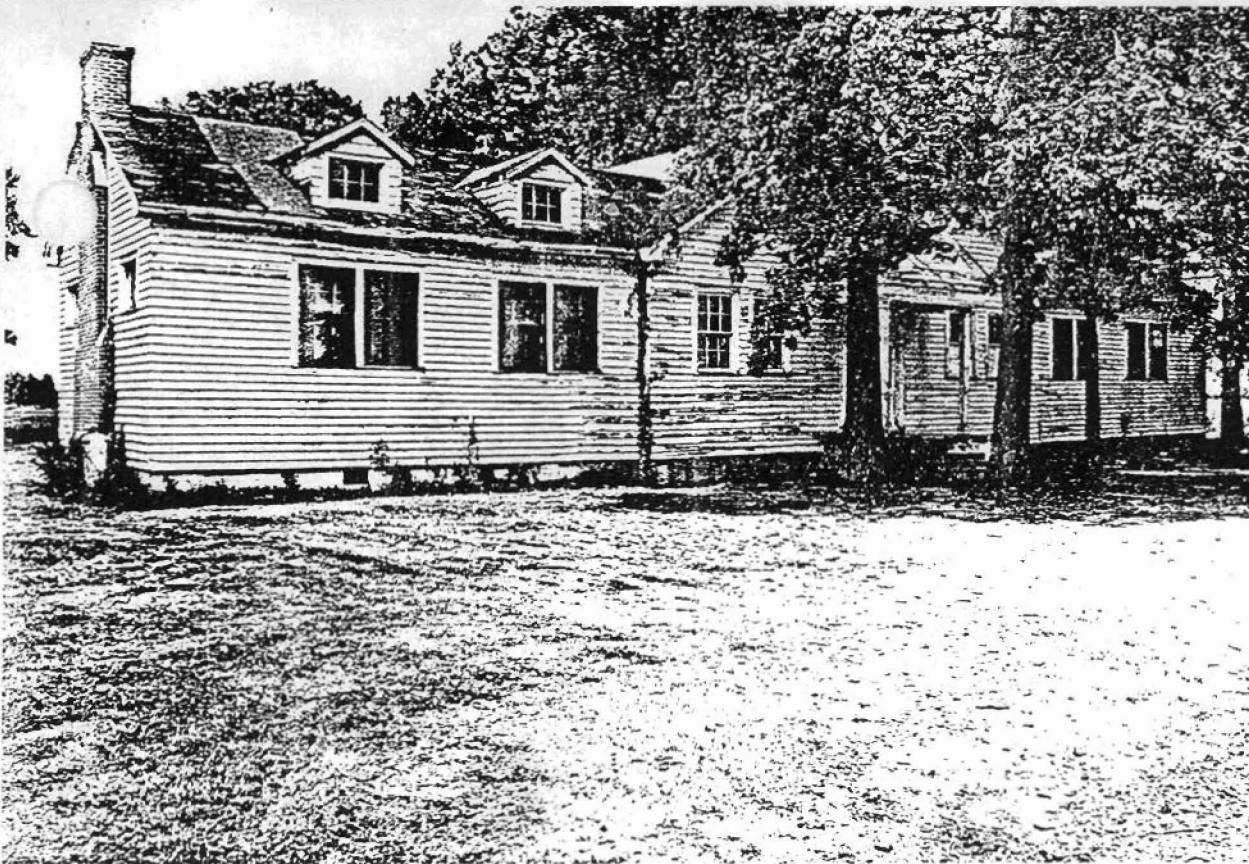
4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW DIRECTION, ETC IF DISTRICT. GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Administration building, viewed from the northeast

PHOTO NO

2



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HISTORIC

Dyess Colony Center

AND/OR COMMON

Dyess

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Dyess

____ VICINITY OF

COUNTY

STATE

Mississippi

Arkansas

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Dianna Kirk

DATE OF PHOTO 1974

NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

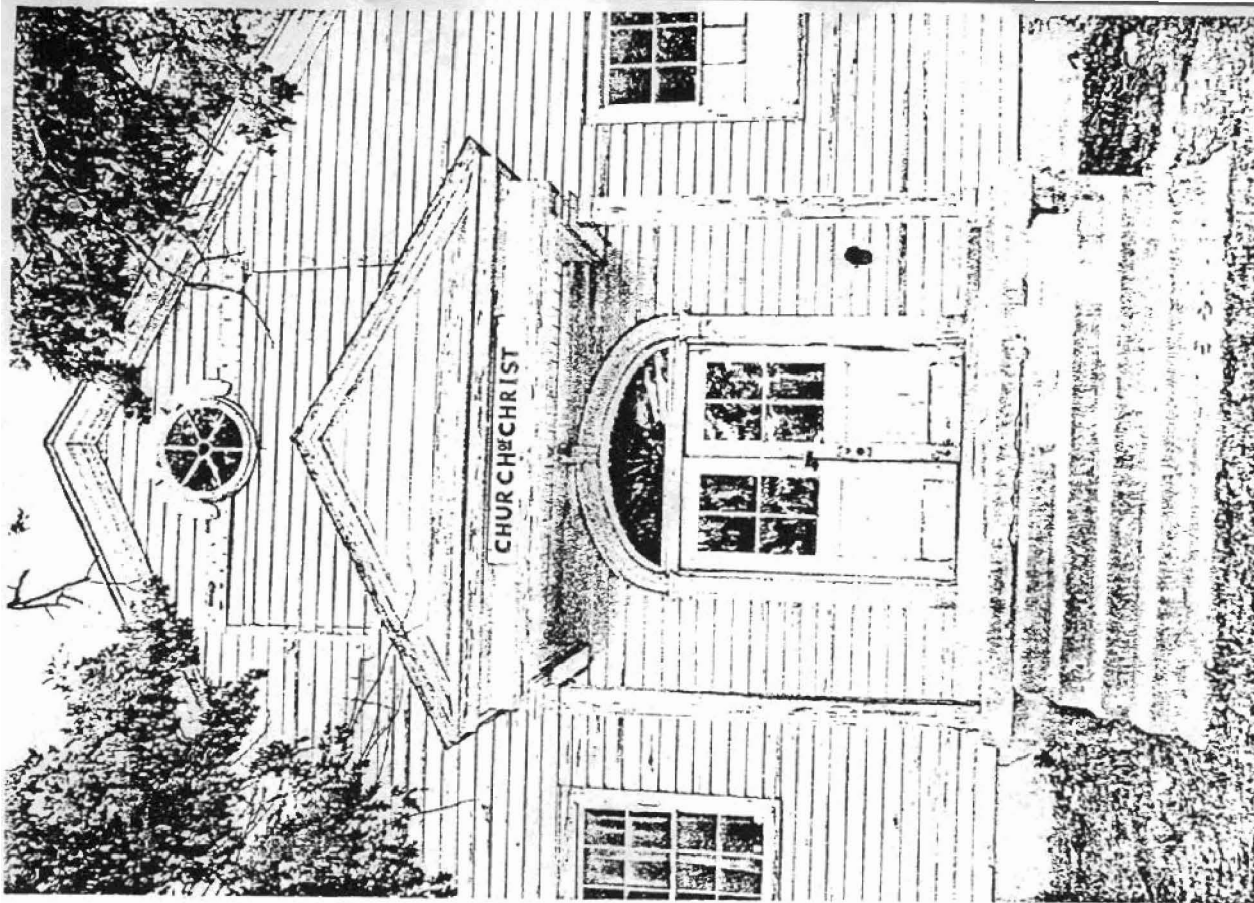
4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Community center building, viewed from the southeast

PHOTO NO

3



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Rev. 10-74)

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STATE
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PHOTO CREDIT Dianna Kirk

DATE OF PHOTO 1974

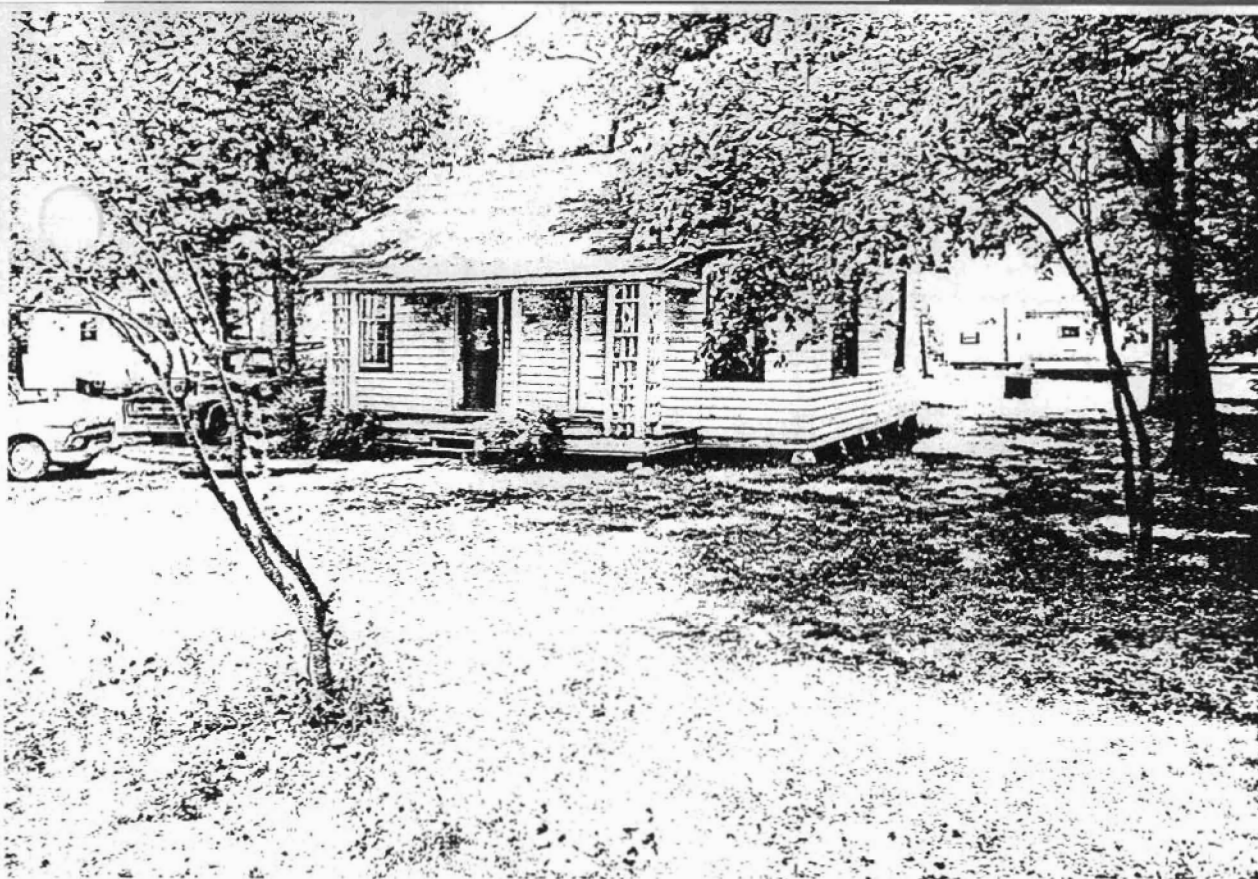
NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW DIRECTION ETC IF DISTRICT GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET
Community center building, entry detail

PHOTO NO

4



10-301a
4)

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PHOTO CREDIT Dianna Kirk

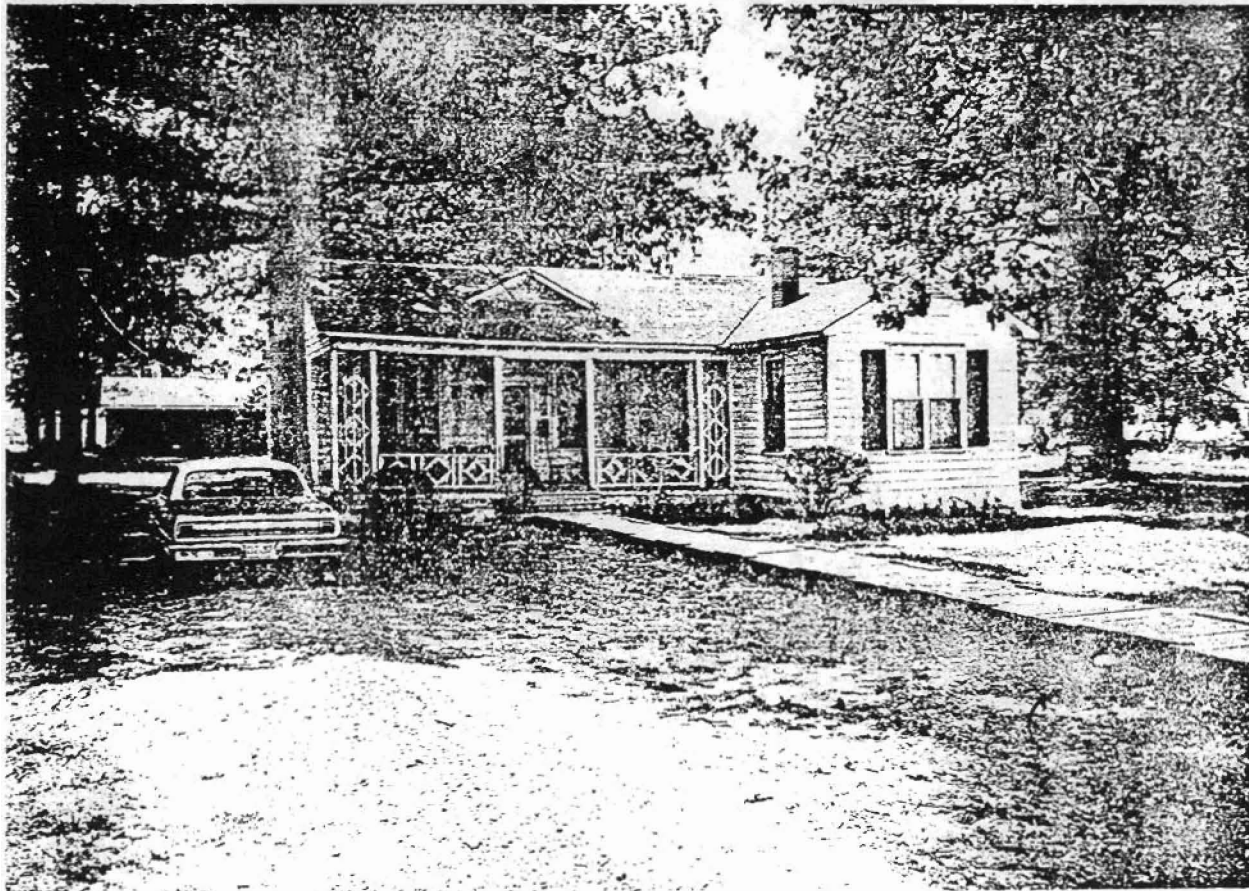
DATE OF PHOTO 1974

NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC IF DISTRICT. GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET
typical four-room house

PHOTO NO
5



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Dyess

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Dyess

___ VICINITY OF

COUNTY
Mississippi

STATE
Arkansas

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Dianna Kirk

DATE OF PHOTO 1974

NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW DIRECTION ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

typical five room house

PHOTO NO.

6