

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NR 1/29/07

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 Widner-Magers Farm Historic District

other names/site number MS0301

2. Location

street & number 3398 Arkansas North State Highway 181

not for publication

city or town Dell

vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Mississippi code 093 zip code 72015

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.)

Cecilia Mattar

12/08/06

Signature of certifying official/Title

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

- Ownership and Category checkboxes: private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal, building(s), district, site, structure, object.

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

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

"Get down the Shovel and the Hoe!: Cotton and Rice Farm History and Architecture in the Arkansas Delta, 1900-1955."

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/agricultural outbuilding
AGRICULTURAL/SUBSISTENCE/animal facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/work in progress
DOMESTIC/secondary structure
AGRICULTURAL/SUBSISTENCE/agricultural outbuilding

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/Plain/Traditional

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
walls WOOD/Weatherboard METAL/Tin
roof METAL/Tin
other BRICK

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property

National Register listing.)

- Criteria A, B, C, D with checkboxes and descriptions.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- Criteria A through G with checkboxes and descriptions.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

LOCAL

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

c. 1912-1957

Significant Dates

c. 1912-1957

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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):

- Documentation checkboxes: preliminary determination, previously listed, National Register, National Historic Landmark, Historic American Buildings Survey, Historic American Engineering Record.

Primary location of additional data:

- Location checkboxes: State Historic Preservation Office, Other State Agency, Federal Agency, Local Government, University, Other.

Name of repository:

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 1.34

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 766873 3974258  
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 Drucella Duncan, Edited by Sarah A. Jampole/Survey Historian  
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date September 1, 2006  
street & number 323 Center Street, Ste. 1600 telephone 501.324.9874  
city or town Little Rock state AR 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 Drucella Duncan  
street & number P O Box 115 telephone 870.564.2809  
city or town Dell state AR zip code 72426

**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 Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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### SUMMARY

Located in north Mississippi County on North Arkansas State Highway 181, approximately 1.6 miles north of Dell, Arkansas, the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District is an excellent example of a Depression-era Mississippi Delta farm, where cotton is the major crop. The collection of Plain/Traditional, wood-frame buildings is located around the periphery of the 1.34 acres, with an open area in the center of the complex. Each building is free of any distinctive or detailed ornamentation. The use and functions of the farm complex did not require such, since the primary purpose was for the sheltering of farm stock, supplies, and equipment. Set in a rural area, the headquarters faces west toward Arkansas State Highway 181 North, the highway being the west boundary. Located on the east side of Arkansas State Highway 181 North, the collection of residential and agricultural buildings is located along the south, east, and north periphery forming a "U" shape. To the south, east, and north of the complex, and west of the highway, are approximately 100 acres of cotton fields, part of the total acreage owned jointly by two of Earl Magers' grandchildren. Behind the complex and the cotton fields to the east flows the Pemiscot Bayou, the only access, other than foot, to the Dell area before 1902. Trees grow along the bayou, marking its path.

Looking toward the south from the highway, the farm manager's house is set apart from the rest of the complex by a gravel driveway and shallow ditch on the north side of the house. The drive splits approximately 100 feet from the highway. The left split turns into the work area. The right split continues to the back of the farmhouse.

Seventy feet from Highway 181 North, the front façade of the manager's house faces west. A simple Plain/Traditional house originally sheathed in weatherboard, this building is now sheathed in synthetic siding. The wrap porches and a hipped roof of galvanized tin are typical of the architectural style found in the Mississippi Delta history.

On the south side of the house are two small outbuildings. The chicken coop and the pump house face north, toward the house.

The left driveway split turns to the north, passing in front of the moved, non-contributing grocery store building, and then past a farm shop. Both buildings face west. The drive then turns to the west, in front of a large, transverse crib barn with enclosed side sheds, facing south. From here the drive leads to a second entrance onto the highway, completing the "U."

A three-crib barn is located approximately 23 feet from the north side of the farm shop. Thirteen feet from the north wall of the barn shed, a large corncrib stands. Both buildings face west. All buildings and outbuildings contribute to the original complex, with the exception of the grocery store building, which was moved from Dell in March 2006.

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Cypress wood and galvanized tin are the major materials used for all the contributing buildings. With the exception of the farm manager's home and the farm shop, all buildings are painted barn red, a trademark of the Widner- Magers properties. Originally, white paint trimmed all exterior door facings, window facings, and posts. The oldest building is the barn shed, which dates to circa 1912. The other major contributing buildings and outbuildings were built circa 1930-1939. With the exception of the manager's home and the chicken coop, no major changes have been made to the complex over the years. The staging center for all Widner-Magers Farm activity, this 76-year-old complex still stands as a tribute to earlier farming days of the Delta.

### ELABORATION

#### CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

##### *Pump House and Chicken Coop*

On the south side of the garage and breezeway are the pump house and the chicken coop. These Plain/Traditional outbuildings face north with an open span of 15 feet between them. Both have been moved from their original location. Both structures are constructed of cypress and are painted barn red.

The building to the left is the pump house. Once located to the right of the farm shop, it serviced a well, within a few feet of the right exterior wall. In 1995, the structure was disassembled, each piece numbered, and moved to Conway, Arkansas. There it was reassembled. In 2005, the building was again moved, fully assembled, on a flatbed farm trailer to its present spot at the farm complex.

With the exception of a few replacements of rotten boards and rusted tin roofing, the pump house is unchanged from its original state. The structure is a good example of box-construction, which was often used in mass-produced buildings. Rough cut, cypress sills are placed on four corner concrete piers. Joists are placed horizontally. The floor is of random sized and thickness of rough-cut cypress. Linoleum covers the floor, as was the custom. Two cypress boards are nailed on vertically at each outside corner. Two-by-fours are then nailed on horizontally along the tops of the vertical corner boards. Various widths of rough-cut cypress are nailed vertically to the outside of the building, forming a single thickness wall with no framing at all. Five notched, cypress rafters form a front-gabled roof that faces north. The roof is of galvanized, corrugated tin. The door is constructed of single, rough cypress boards, nailed vertically onto an inner "Z" brace. It is located centrally on the gabled end facing north. There is no other fenestration or distinctive detail work. The building measures approximately 8 feet by 10 feet.

Another Plain/Traditional building on the right was once the chicken coop. It was originally located approximately 25 feet from the east (rear) side of the main house, before the garage was added. In 2005, it was disassembled at its original site, and then reassembled at its present location. This outbuilding measures

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8 feet by 8 feet and is box-constructed, as described above. It stands on four concrete piers, one at each corner. A centrally located, six-light door, constructed of two three-light wood windows, found on the property, gives entrance on the north side. The type of original door is unknown. The west and east walls each have two of the three-light wood windows, hinged at the top. An attached wooden stick props the windows open. Originally, the chicken coop had no windows. Very little of the building's walls were salvageable. The windows were incorporated so that no new material had to be used on the outer structure. The south side of this building has no fenestration. All walls are of random width, rough cut cypress. Inside, a floor of tongue and groove pine boards is covered with linoleum. A gabled roof facing north is of galvanized, corrugated tin, painted silver.

### *Farm Shop*

According to one of Earl Magers' daughters, Mamie Magers Griffin, the farm shop was built circa 1939. It, too, is a Plain/Traditional style building with no distinctive decoration. Situated 141 feet from the highway, the farm shop faces west. It is 31 feet wide and 60 feet deep. The foundation is of poured concrete. Two gabled roofs face west following the ceiling heights of the interior, the center roof being taller. The walls, doors, and roof are of corrugated tin, painted silver, due to the many years of use and the rusting of the galvanized tin.

The interior walls are framed cypress construction, off a post and beam system. The walls and ceilings are covered with black gypsum board. The door is located in the center of the west wall. Corrugated tin is nailed to an interior "Z" frame. Distinct areas of work divide the interior into thirds. Workbenches flank each side of the door of the west one-third of the building. Four-over-four windows are centered in each of two bays. The original forge and its brick chimney are located in the center of the south wall. It is still functional. Another workbench is located on the north wall. The ceiling is 12 feet high.

The center section is 16 feet deep. The ceiling is 16 feet high. Two sets of doors open outward. They span the entire footage on the south and north sides. A hinged door above each set of doors opens upward. Farm equipment was brought in through these doors for repair. In the summer, both sets of doors were opened for ventilation.

The last work area is 23 feet deep, with a ceiling of 12 feet. Only one workbench on the north wall is located in this area. The rest of the space is open. Four-over-four windows are centered in each bay on the east wall.

### *Barn*

The largest of the Plain/Traditional farm buildings is the barn, built sometime in the early 1930s. Earl Magers bought the property in March 1930, and the barn was built soon afterward. It is 86 feet wide and 63 feet deep. The west wall is located 43 feet from Highway 181. The barn faces south. Rough cut cypress is used for the

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overall construction. The barn stands on concrete piers. There are six storage cribs in the center, supported by 8-inch by 8-inch sills and 3-inch by 8-inch joists. Two cribs open on the south side at the lower level. Above, two smaller doors open into the loft above the cribs. The north side is identically fenestrated. The remaining two cribs open inside the barn on the east and west walls of the crib area. Tongue and groove milled cypress is used on the walls and floors, and on the doors to the cribs. A loft spans the area above the cribs. It, too, is floored with tongue and groove cypress. A total of four sheds, two on either side, flank the crib area. The left south shed is divided from the next with a horizontal tongue and groove cypress board wall. Two gates open into the second shed on the south. Two doors covered in corrugated tin open on the north side. East of the cribs, the third shed has no gates on the south side. Originally, this third shed also had two gate openings on the south side. Again, two doors covered with corrugated tin open on the north. The last shed is separated from the third by a wall of horizontal tongue and groove cypress. Corrugated tin is used for the exterior siding, except for the loft area, which is sided with cypress bat and board. An extension outward from the peak of the gabled roof originally had a hoist system. It was once used to fill the barn with supplies and hay. Originally, the barn was painted barn red with white trim. Presently, it is entirely painted barn red. The entire building is roofed with five groove galvanized tin.

### *Barn Shed*

Facing west, approximately 23 feet from the north side of the farm shop and 35 feet from the east wall of the barn, stands the smaller and older barn shed. The current owners believe this building was part of the improvements already at the site when Magers bought the property in March 1930. From abstracts, the type of construction, and the size of the boards, it is estimated that the smaller barn shed was built circa 1912. Originally, Widner's farm stock was housed in this barn. Consisting of three sheds, each approximately 16.5 feet wide, the building is 51 feet wide and 32 feet deep. The floors are of dirt. The two inner walls between the sheds are of vertical, rough cut cypress, approximately 5/4 inch thick and 12 to 14 inch wide boards. The exterior front is of rough cut vertical cypress boards of various widths. A small loft door of the same vertical boards is centered above the middle shed. Exterior walls on the south, east, and north sides are of corrugated tin. The barn is painted barn red. It was originally trimmed in white. Its roof is galvanized, corrugated tin.

### *Corn Crib*

Thirteen feet from the north barn shed wall and facing west is the corncrib. In the 1930s, Magers had two buildings joined together to make this larger building. Both buildings are framed with cypress. The west elevation has a hipped roof, while the east elevation has a gabled roof. The joined buildings have no partition on the interior. It measures 10 feet wide and 22 feet deep. An opening in the center of the west wall marks where the door once stood. Concrete piers support the building. The roof is covered with deteriorated green composition asphalt shingles.

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### NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

#### *The Farm Manager's House*

Located 1.6 miles north of Dell, Mississippi County, Arkansas, the six contributing buildings and outbuildings and the two non-contributing grocery store buildings of the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District form a "U" around the periphery of the complex. Approximately 70 feet from the road, the farm manager's house is located on the south side of the complex, facing west toward Arkansas State Highway 181 North. The house was built in the early 1930s by local laborers. Due to the threat of floods in the early years, the house is built on a raised (three blocks high) concrete foundation instead of the more common, two blocks high foundation.

Full, integral porches under the principal roof were originally located on the west and east sides, establishing a front and a rear to the house. A four-paneled door opened into the living room on the right bay of the west (front) elevation. A single door in the center of the east (rear) elevation opened onto a screened porch.

During the early 1940s, the south half of the front porch was enclosed, adding almost 8 feet to the living room. At the same time, the north half of the rear porch was enclosed, thus adding space to a small bedroom.

In 1970, the north half of the original front porch was also enclosed. Interior walls on the north side were repositioned, adding a third bedroom. At the same time, the back porch was enclosed, on the south side, where a bathroom was added.

In 2005, the bathroom was relocated to the middle bedroom. The entire east wall was removed, and a 10-foot addition was made.

A wrap porch was also added at this time on the west, south, and north elevations. Concrete block piers support the addition. Six-inch square posts are equally spaced along the front and the north and south sides of the house. The porch's shed roof is of five groove galvanized tin and has a 2:12 pitch. A hipped roof with a ridge covers the original house and east addition. The five groove galvanized tin roof has a 7:12 pitch, replacing the composition asphalt shingles.

Another addition, made in 2005, is the 11 foot by 15 foot enclosed breezeway on the back, east wall, which now connects the house to a two-car garage. The garage is set back 33 inches on the north side and 14 feet on the south side. It, too, rests on a three block high, concrete foundation. The vaulted, tongue and groove ceiling is covered with the five groove galvanized tin. Along the open, east wall of the house, and south of the breezeway, is an exterior chimney of red brick.

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In 2006, a two-car garage was added on the east side of the breezeway. Built on a concrete foundation, the one and one-half story building has a hipped roof with a ridge. Centrally located on the east side of the garage roof is a shed dormer. Five groove galvanized tin also covers this roof.

### *Exterior Summary*

Originally, the house was sheathed with simple cypress weatherboard, painted white. Over the years, the siding rotted and was not repaired properly. Gaps between boards and sagging of the walls were patched with any available wood. When the original four-over-four, double-hung, wood windows were removed in 1970, care was not taken to replace the exact size of the older windows, leaving gaps below. Plywood was added to fill the gaps. Then aluminum lap siding was used to cover the entire house, hiding the patchwork. Over the years the aluminum lap siding leaked, causing the original siding to further deteriorate. With the 2005-2006 renovation, hopes of saving and restoring the original siding were not feasible. Therefore, the entire house, breezeway, and garage are now sided in white, Dutch-lap vinyl, giving the appearance of the original exterior wall material. The windows and doors are trimmed with wood facings, painted a medium gray. Three-board shutters, similar to the original, will be added before the end of 2006. The west, south and north facades of the house are sheltered under a wrap porch, as described above. A hipped roof, covered in five groove tin with a ridge shelters the main house. A breezeway joins the main house and the garage.

### *West Façade/Front Elevation*

Facing west toward Arkansas Highway 181 North, the manager's home has an asymmetrical façade. Starting at the left bay, two six-over-six, double-hung, aluminum windows are centered. On the right bay, beginning on the left, a four paneled, wood door with two upper stationary lights opens into the residence. A single six-over-six, double-hung aluminum window is centered between the front entrance and the right corner.

### *South Façade/Side Elevation*

Four bays comprise the south elevation of the main house. The first bay to the right includes the porch enclosure of the 1940s. It has no fenestration. The second bay is fenestrated by a pair of six-over-six, double-hung, aluminum windows. Another pair of six-over-six, double-hung, aluminum windows is centered in the third bay. The fourth bay, involving the 2005 additions (including the former bath plus ten feet) incorporates a single nine-over-nine, double-hung, vinyl window on each side of the center point of the addition. The shed porch roof covers the entire length of the main house south elevation.

A breezeway forms the back north wall of an outer courtyard, as it connects the main house to the garage. It is set back 14 feet from the southeast corner of the house and the northeast corner of the garage. A 15-light door is centered on its south wall, flanked by a double-hung, six-over-six, wood-frame window on each side.

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Centered under the eave, a six-light window is the only fenestration on the south wall of the garage.

### *East Façade/Rear Elevation*

Located on the east facade is the garage door, facing the cotton field and bayou, where it cannot be seen by the general public. The 18-foot, automatic door is located off-center, toward the right side. A shed dormer is centrally located on the garage roof, fenestrated with a four-light, stationary, vinyl window.

### *North Façade/ Side Elevation*

The general public sees the north elevation of the garage. Care has been taken in 2006 that the addition would resemble a carriage house off the main house. To accomplish this goal, the north elevation of the garage is fenestrated with centrally located, double barn doors, hung by rollers on a 20-foot overhead metal track. Each five-foot door is constructed of tongue and groove pine, vertical boards, nailed to "Z" braces. The doors are painted a dark gray. Above center hangs a green enamel shop light, originally used on another structure on the farm.

The north side of the breezeway sets in from the northwest garage corner and the southeast house corner 33-inches. It is fenestrated by a forty-nine light stationary window on the left side and a fifteen light door on the right side.

The wrap porch on the north façade begins at the northeast corner of the main house and continues around the front and south sides, as described earlier. The first bay to the left has a single, six-light stationary window just below the eave. The following bay has a centered, single, double-hung, aluminum window. The third bay and fourth bays each have a set of two, six-over-six, double-hung windows. The fourth bay includes the enclosure of the north side of the original front porch.

### *Interior*

The original interior floor plan of the house is basically intact. A load-bearing wall through the center of the house divides the almost-27-foot home. The bedrooms are located on the north side. The living room and kitchen are located on the south side. The front door opens into the living room on the left side of the south bay. The living room is roughly 13 feet by 21 feet. A 15-light door opens on the east wall of the living room into the kitchen/keeping room. The kitchen is about 30 feet deep. A brick, open-hearth fireplace, built in 2005, occupies the east end of the kitchen/keeping room. A wood panel door opening into the breezeway is positioned to the left of fireplace. On the north side of the manager's house, the three bedrooms are located, the center bedroom now a bath. Originally the interior walls throughout the house were of tongue and groove cypress, painted in many different colors over the years. During a 1970 renovation, sheetrock was used to cover the wood walls. New interior doors replaced the hand-made cypress four-paneled doors. In 2005, three of the handmade, cypress doors were found under a crib in the barn. They were rescued and refurbished. One

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door has a bullet hole in the upper panel, which was left as a conversation piece. These doors were returned to the home's interior. Many of the older doorknobs of glass, porcelain, and tin were also found scattered around the complex. These, too, have been incorporated into the interior doors.

Until 2000, there were no clothes closets. One of the farmhands living in the house at that time enclosed a part of each bedroom for closets.

### *Grocery Store Building*

Approximately 50 feet from the northeast side of the manager's home, a non-contributing grocery store building is located. Earl Magers had this Plain/Traditional style country store built circa 1920 on East Second Street in Dell, Arkansas. He then sold it to a Mr. Black. It served the black community until 1947, when Earl Magers again bought the property. By this time, most of the residents of the black community had moved to other towns. From that date until the 1970s, C.A. Smith, a grocer from the Dell area, rented the store building. The building and property has been in the Magers family from 1947-2006.

In 2005, it became apparent that the abandoned building would have to be torn down or moved, and the lots sold, in order to facilitate the expansion of the First Missionary Baptist Church of Dell. In March 2006, Johnson's Moving Company, a licensed company from Senath, Missouri, moved the grocery store building to the farm complex. The store was not altered in any way. Although the time periods overlap, the former grocery is considered a non-contributing building, since it has been moved from its original location in downtown Dell to the Widner-Magers Farm, thus it is not part of the original farm.

This gabled-roofed, Plain/Traditional style building faces west, approximately 135 feet from State Highway 181 North. Resting on a concrete pier foundation, the grocery store building measures 20 feet wide by 60 feet deep. A full, integral porch on the west elevation/front façade has a centrally located door, with six-over-six, double-hung windows on either side. Four plain square posts support the porch. The south elevation/side façade is free of fenestration, as is the east elevation/rear façade. On the north elevation/side façade, a 12-over-12, double-hung window is located 5 feet from the left corner. This window is a part of an addition in 1947. A second double-hung window is located 5 feet from the first window and is part of the original building. The windows have deteriorated over the years. Most of the glass is missing. Both windows are covered with plywood from the inside. An exterior, wood door opens to the right beside the window. Originally, rough cut vertical cypress boards, painted barn red covered the exterior. In 1947, white shingles were added to cover the cypress boards. Then in 1994, man-made lap siding was added, and the entire building was again painted barn red. The original transom windows lining the upper area of the north and south sides were covered with the lap siding during the 1994 renovation. A roof of galvanized, corrugated tin covers the building.

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The original interior room exhibits a box-construction. Painted, composition wallboard covers the walls and ceiling. At the east end of the north side, a single, double-hung window is covered with plywood. In 1947, 14 feet was added on the east side of the building for storage. This addition is cypress wood framed. A two-panel, wood door on the left side of the original building's east wall opens into the room. This wall, within the added room, displays the vertical cypress boards of the original building. The remaining three walls and the ceiling are tongue and groove horizontal boards. The floors throughout the interior are tongue and groove cypress boards.

### INTEGRITY

The Widner-Magers Farm Historic District, built over a period of years from c. 1912 to c. 1939, retains all seven elements of integrity. Although the buildings have seen alterations and additions, and the uses of some of the buildings have been adapted through the years, the complex continues today as it did nearly 100 years ago—that of a functioning, productive farm in the Arkansas Mississippi Delta. The farm is located on Arkansas Highway 181 North, about 10 miles west of Blytheville, Arkansas, and a little over a mile from Dell, Arkansas. When the railroad came through Dell in 1902, the town prospered. The railroad allowed for logging companies to move in, and behind these logging companies came the farmers. J. D. Widner was one of the farmers who took advantage of the logging boom, selling part of his land holdings to a logging company while keeping the best land and the farm for himself. After holding onto his real estate for many years, Widner sold to Earl Magers. Although under Mager's control, the farm and buildings changed over the years, the elements of location, setting, feeling, and association have remained unaltered. Upkeep and early restorative efforts had some negative impact on a few of the buildings in the complex; however, care has been taken in recent years to replicate the original look and appearance of the farm buildings, thus the farm buildings retain integrity of design, materials and workmanship. The farm evolved and continued to support the lives of the Widner and Magers families, and the complex as a whole continues today as a wonderful example of a Plain/Traditional historic district that exemplifies the ability of the families to adapt the various buildings to their needs and uses.

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### SUMMARY

Constructed over a period of years, spanning from 1912 to 1939, the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion C** as a wonderful example of a collection of Plain/Traditional buildings in the Dell vicinity, Mississippi County, Arkansas. The main house, though altered and reconfigured throughout the years, continues to serve as it did when originally built—as a residence for the manager/owner of the farm. In addition to the house, a nice collection of six contributing ancillary structures and building, and two non-contributing buildings, comprise the historic district. The property evolved during the period directly prior to and after the Great Depression, as both labor and land resources became available. Dell entrepreneurs took advantage of the opportunities presented by the coming of the Jonesboro, Lake City and Eastern Railroad, and then the subsequent coming of the logging companies, buying cleared land that would, in later years, be plowed and cultivated into profitable cotton farms. As such, the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District is also being nominated under **Criterion A** for its association with cotton farming in Dell and Mississippi County, Arkansas. Set against a backdrop of cotton fields and the Pemiscot Bayou, the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District has been a center of agricultural activity since the late 1890s. The historic district is being submitted under the context, “Get Down the Shovel and the Hoe! Cotton and Rice Farm History and Architecture in the Arkansas Delta, 1900-1955.” The property has remained in the ownership of the Magers family for over 75 years.

### ELABORATION

The Widner-Magers Farm Historic District is located on Arkansas State Highway 181 North in the northern part of the Arkansas Delta of Mississippi County, Arkansas, nine miles west of Blytheville, Arkansas, and 10 miles south of the Missouri Bootheel. It is 1.6 miles north of the present town of Dell, in the township of Hector.

In the early days of this area, the Pemiscot Bayou extended from a point just South of Cairo, Illinois, and became the upper stretches of the Left Hand Chute of Little River. Flatboats and steamboats passed from the Mississippi River below Cairo to this Pemiscot Bayou and descended to the junction of Little River with the St. Francis River near Marked Tree, Arkansas, then down the stream to the Mississippi River again at Helena, Arkansas. The only access to the Dell area was by boat on the Pemiscot Bayou or on foot following the Indian trails. The land was low and swampy. The trees and underbrush were so thick in places that the sun could not shine through.

The original absentee owner of the property was Thomas J. Blackmore, who acquired 159.17 acres on June 17, 1855, through the Swamp Land Act of 1850. This property would pass through several more absentee owners until 1878, when W. B. Sizemore, one of the original pioneers of the area, bought it. He owned the land until his death, when his son Robert Sizemore inherited it. J. D. Widner apparently bought the land

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sometime around 1896. In an affidavit of March 1926, Hugh and J. W. Perry stated that J. D. Widner had lived and farmed the acreage for 30 years.

Between 1878 and 1902, the Dell community was located north and west of the Pemiscot Bayou. The settlement had a population of approximately 200 people. Widner and his family were a part of this settlement. Neighbors included the Hector families, who were the first settlers east of Big Lake. The Hector family moved to the area in 1832, and the township is named after them. Other families in Dell included the Perrys, the Sizemores, the Petersons, the Rays, and the Daughterys. Many of the original families were of Cherokee descent, including the Hectors. Their houses were built on the many Indian mounds along the Pemiscot Bayou, for the area was very swampy and subject to flooding each year. A number of the early settlers are buried on one of the old cemetery mounds approximately 1/2 mile south of the Widner homestead. Descendents of these early families still live in the area. In fact, a descendent of Sam Hector lived on the Magers farm until his death in 1995.

The community depended on the Pemiscot Bayou as access in and out of the area. There were no roads, only trails. The swampland was flooded much of the year, which made ground travel almost impossible. The Dell community was on somewhat higher ground. A post office was reported to have been in Dell since 1889, but the postal service records states the first post office was in 1897, located in J. B. Richardson's store, on the south side of the bayou. Richardson also owned a loading dock in Dell, where goods could be brought in and cotton, wood, furs, fish, and game could be sent south to the Mississippi River or north to St. Louis, Missouri. A wooden bridge crossed the Pemiscot Bayou at Richardson's store. In 1896, School District #23 was formed. The schoolhouse was built not too far south from Widner's farm. The building was also used as a community church.

In 1902, big news arrived at the Dell community. The railroad was coming! The Jonesboro, Lake City, and Eastern Railroad was building a bridge across Big Lake, just west of Dell, in order to access the thousands of acres of virgin timber. W. F. Rozell from Holly Springs, Mississippi, owned much of the land at the center point of the proposed railroad between Manila and Blytheville. He gave the Jonesboro, Lake City, and Eastern Railroad permission to come across his land. Then he laid out a plan for a new town named Rozell, just south of the community of Dell. Richardson quickly moved his store, and the post office, to Rozell. Others followed him, opening hotels, boarding houses, more stores, saloons, and restaurants. For three years the town was known as Rozell or Rozell/Dell. However, in 1905, Richardson was forced to drop the name Rozell, as another town named Rozelle was already established in Mississippi County. The area families met and decided to continue with the name of Dell, in honor of the community that had been located just to the north. So, Dell on the Pemiscot Bayou became Dell on the Jonesboro, Lake City, and Eastern Railroad.

Dell was a boomtown. Farmers from all over the country moved in behind the massive logging industry, buying the cutover land for as little as 50 cents per acre. Some of the original farmsteads north of Dell

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were divided into small farm lots. Widner apparently sold part of his acreage in this fashion, but he kept the best land and his farmstead for himself until 1930.

Earl Magers was one of the many farmers who came to Arkansas to buy the cheap, rich, swampland. He arrived with his wife and two daughters in 1916. The year before, the family had moved from their home in Hayward, Missouri, to Yarbrow, Arkansas. Magers was not impressed with the land there. He made a trip further south to the Dell area, only to find richer soil, plus the opportunity to fund his farm through real estate transactions. He returned to Yarbrow to gather his family.

Magers was a major influence in the shaping of the Dell community. From 1916 until 1957, when he died, Magers remained in Dell. He bought and sold many parcels of land, including lots in and outside of Dell. He was not, however, a real estate agent. His interest was in helping the community grow. In 1919, he bought the remainder of the First Addition of Dell owned by the Sparks Brothers Land Company, Inc. He kept an entire block of lots for his own home and for the future homes of his three daughters. He sold the remainder lots to other families. He also built many of the early houses in Dell, with the help of local labor. He set aside one section of the First Addition of Dell for the black community. There he had several of the houses and establishments built. One of those buildings, the grocery, is now located at the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District.

In 1918, Earl served as recorder for the Dell town council. From 1925-29, he was mayor of that same council. From July through October 1928, he was postmaster for Dell. During the 1920s, he took his turn with others as town marshal. That was the days of walking the levee to make sure no one dynamited the long mounds of dirt in order to relieve the water pressure up north but causing flooding south. He also rounded up many stills, holding raids on moonshiners during the Prohibition.

One of Magers' major accomplishments occurred during the Great Depression, when most school systems operated in the red and many had to close. With only an eighth grade education, Magers, and the school's principal, Mr. Mullins, kept the Dell School in the black for all but one year. Magers served on the Dell School Board from 1933-1941 and was instrumental in consolidating Half Moon, Ekron and Perry schools into the Dell School District. Until 1939, the Dell School only had eight grades. Students had to travel 10 miles to Blytheville in order to finish high school. Magers worked hard to turn the Dell School into a 12 grade system. In 1939, Dell had its first graduating class.

Magers also served on the Dell Methodist Church Board of Directors for many years. When the church leaders decided they needed a new facility, he was appointed to the building committee. The new church was dedicated in 1950. There was no mortgage on it, and all debts were paid in full. The new church appeared in *Life* magazine.

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Three cotton gin companies were built in Mississippi County due, in part, to Magers' efforts. The State of Arkansas incorporated the Dell Gin Company, which was located inside the Dell City limits, on June 5, 1926. Magers was one of the first stockholders, along with C. F. Floyd, J. N. Welborn, Charles Armstrong, E. M. Woodard, J. L. Wallis, S. T. Freeman, and E. A. Stacy. He was elected secretary and appointed, along with Charles Armstrong, to "look after the building of the gin and purchase material." The Dell Gin Company ran until 1975, when liquidation of the assets commenced.

On May 20, 1946, the State of Arkansas incorporated the Farmer's Gin Company of Dell. Earl Magers, Ulric Moore, Leslie Moore, Russell Greenway, and Dewey Sheppard were the principle stockholders. The ginning facilities were located approximately one mile from Dell, on Highway 18 East. The Farmer's Gin Company was in operation until 1985.

The third cotton gin Magers helped established was built at Half Moon, Arkansas. This structure was entirely composed of poured concrete. Because of the threat of fire, most cotton gins in the area were framed in wood, but the walls and roof were covered in tin. This concrete building was an experiment in the traditional construction concept.

Magers was interested in developing the farming industry in Mississippi County by using innovative ideas. One example was his foresight in the use of an irrigation system during hot, dry summers. In 1951, he was the first farmer in this area to build and use such a system. Area farmers were invited to witness the event, which was well attended. Most farmers today still use irrigation.

Another innovative practice Magers began was to clean, weigh, and bag a part of the soybean crop as it was harvested in the field. Enough of the bagged soybeans were kept for the next year's planting. The excess bags were sold to other area farmers at a reduced rate, bringing down the cost of buying seed each year.

For himself and his family, Magers was interested in obtaining the best farmland in the area. On March 5, 1930, he bought the 50.51-acre farmstead from J. W. Widner, son of J.D., and his wife Kittie. He paid \$6,566.30 for it (\$4,566.00 cash to the Widners and took over a \$2,000.00 note). He already owned a number of acres in the Dell area, but this property was centrally located and an excellent choice for a farming headquarters. Also, there were several houses, barns and outbuildings that could be incorporated into the complex. Magers moved the original Widner home to a new location for one of his farmhands and built a new house for his farm manager. This is the present house found at the headquarters. Within the 50.51 acres Magers bought, more farmhouses were built for the 10 to 15 families who worked for him. A 1938 map indicates at least 12 houses lined either side of the road on the Magers property, close to the complex. Two large barns were also built within a mile from each other to house the livestock, hay, and equipment used for farming. The barn, still standing today at the farm complex, housed the mules, a few horses, and some of the wagons. The cribs in that barn held corn and feed for the stock. It also stored cottonseed each year. One of the old wagons and a few pieces of the original equipment are still housed in this barn. The small barn shed,

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built by Widner and located at the farm headquarters, was also used for animal stock.

The largest barn Magers built was less than a mile away. Located on the Pemiscot Bayou, it stored hay and was shelter for the cows and horses. A shed for the pigs was close-by. Both of these buildings were torn down years ago.

All barns, farmhand houses, outbuildings, and sheds were painted red with white trim, Mager's trademark. Cypress was the wood of choice, for it was very abundant in the area. Lumbering was still a big business until the late 1930s. Much of the lumber used on the Magers farm was virgin timber, cut and milled close-by. It was plentiful, cheap, and a natural deterrent of termites and other insects. The barns and buildings were built to last. Unfortunately, when farming turned to mechanization and tractors replaced mules, the sheds of the old barns weren't wide enough to house the tractors and their equipment, which is one of the main reasons some beautiful old barns were torn down. The large barn and the smaller barn shed at the headquarters are the only ones left on the original Magers acreage.

In 1957, Earl Magers died of cancer, as was the fate of many of the early farmers. Irene Magers Duncan, mother of the current owner, inherited part of the 1000+ acres and the 1.34-acre farm headquarters. She and her husband, Curtis Duncan, moved to Dell in 1950. He worked for Magers as the Farmers Gin manager and "right hand man." After Earl's death, Irene's inheritance became the C. C. Duncan Farm. Curtis Duncan ran the farm, while maintaining his position at the Farmer's Gin Company. In 1975, he retired from farming. The Dilldine Farms of Half Moon, Arkansas, began renting the Widner-Magers land for crop rent and continues to do so today.

For the next 30 years, the farm complex was used very little, mainly for the storage of cast-off farm equipment and a multitude of old tires. Only Mr. Dilldine's farmhands occupied the farmhouse. For the most part, these barns and buildings, with all the rich history within their walls, laid in wait. The complex waited and watched as one by one the other farmhouses, barns, and outbuildings disappeared from the area. Its only inhabitants were barn owls, rabbits, mice, and snakes.

In December 2004, Irene Magers Duncan passed away suddenly. Earl Magers had left the farm to the "heirs of her [Irene's] body," being Richard Duncan and Drucella Duncan. Drucella Duncan is now the sole owner of the farm.

The Widner-Magers Farm Headquarters as an opportunity to preserve a part of the disappearing Delta history. It's an opportunity for visitors to observe a farm complex of the 1930s in the Mississippi Delta, where few original buildings remain. It is a part of Arkansas' history that needs to be kept and recognized, so that the future may know our past.

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Constructed between the years 1912-1939, the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District is comprised of six contributing buildings and outbuildings, and two non-contributing buildings. Located on Arkansas State Highway 181 North, approximately 1.6 miles north of Dell, Mississippi County, Arkansas, the farm is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** for its association with cotton farming in Dell and Mississippi County, Arkansas. Set against a backdrop of cotton fields and the Pemiscot Bayou, the Earl Magers Farm Headquarters has been a center of agricultural activity since 1930. J. D. Widner's enterprising spirit and foresight contributed to his purchase of roughly 160 acres of fertile land in 1896, in an area that would soon become known as Dell, Arkansas. Widner's ownership of the land continued until March 6, 1930, when Earl Magers bought 50.51 acres from Widner's son and his wife, J.W. and Kittie Widner. Over the years, Earl Magers made many valuable contributions to the Dell community, especially in the areas of farming and agriculture, and he vastly improved the farm complex during his 27 years of ownership. Because of Mager's contributions to cotton farming in the Arkansas Mississippi Delta, the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District is being nominated under the context, "Get Down the Shovel and the Hoe! Cotton and Rice Farm History and Architecture in the Arkansas Delta, 1900-1955."

Serving J. D. Widner and Earl Magers as a farm, the buildings that comprise the complex are free of excessive detailing and ornamentation, as the uses of the building did not require such. Due to the simplicity of the architecture of the eight buildings on the farm, the Widner-Magers Farm Historic District is also being nominated under **Criterion C**, as a good example of a collection of 20<sup>th</sup> century Plain/Traditional architectural-style buildings, which have been maintained, with few changes, by the J. D. Widner and Earl Magers families for 100 years.

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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

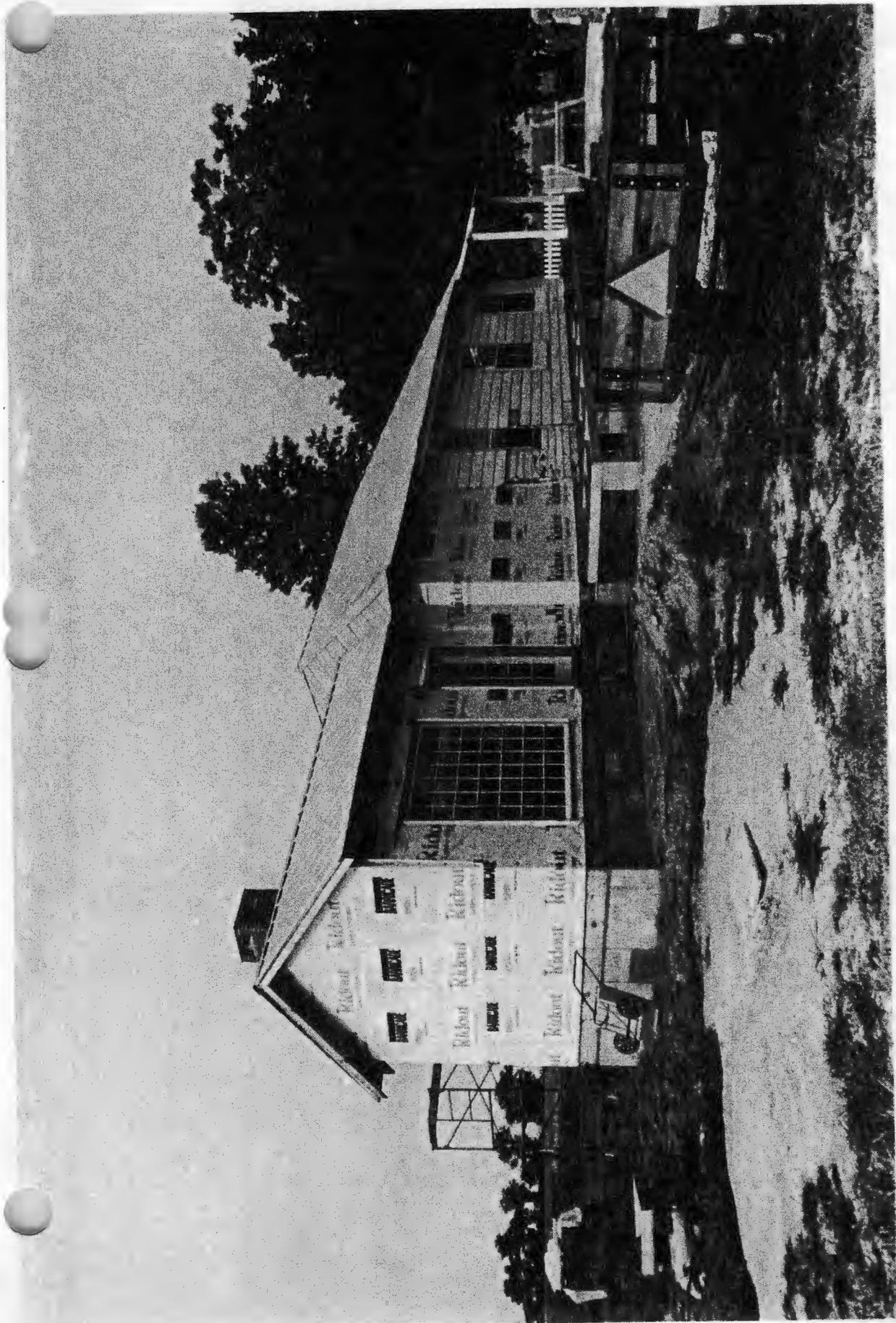
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## VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

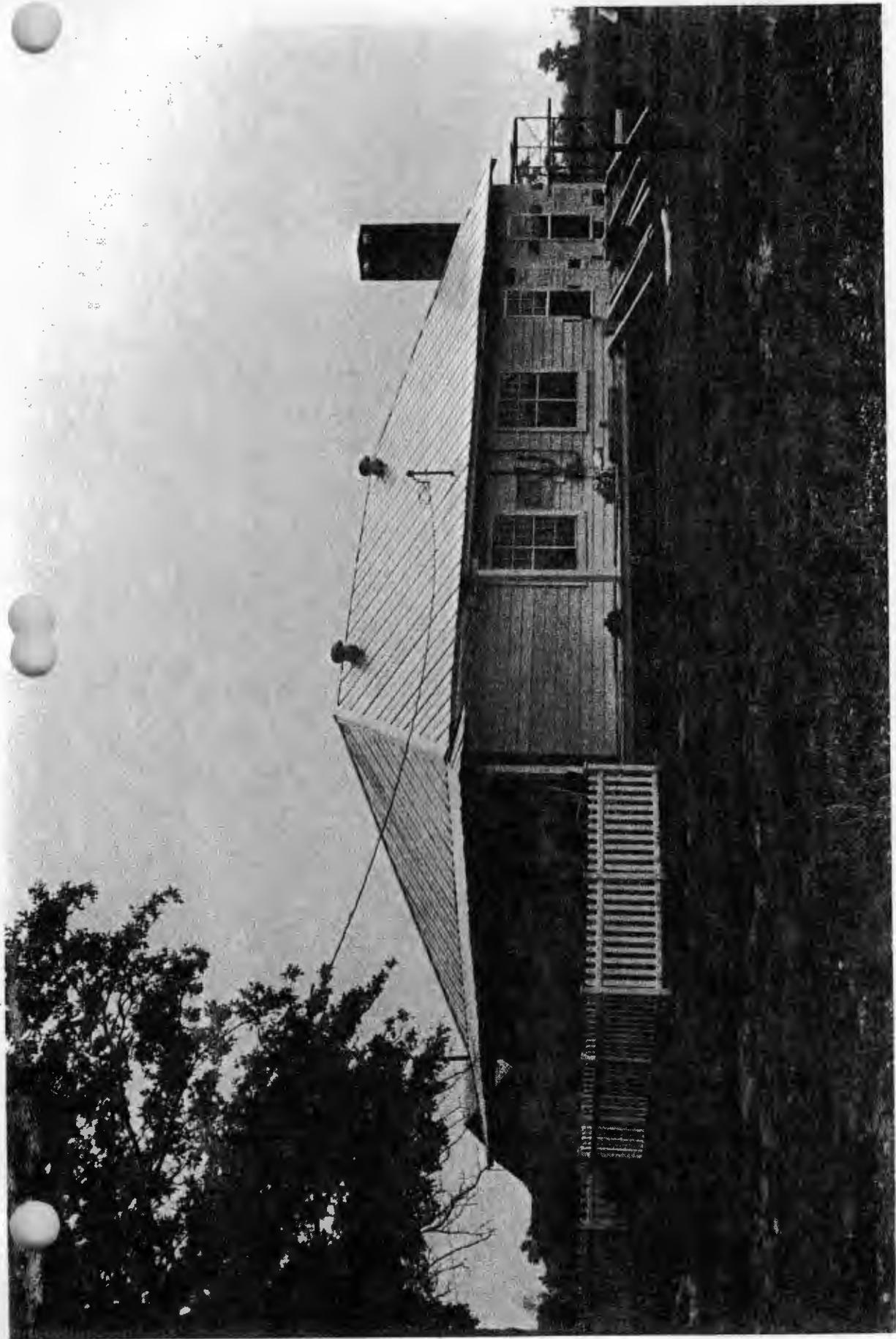
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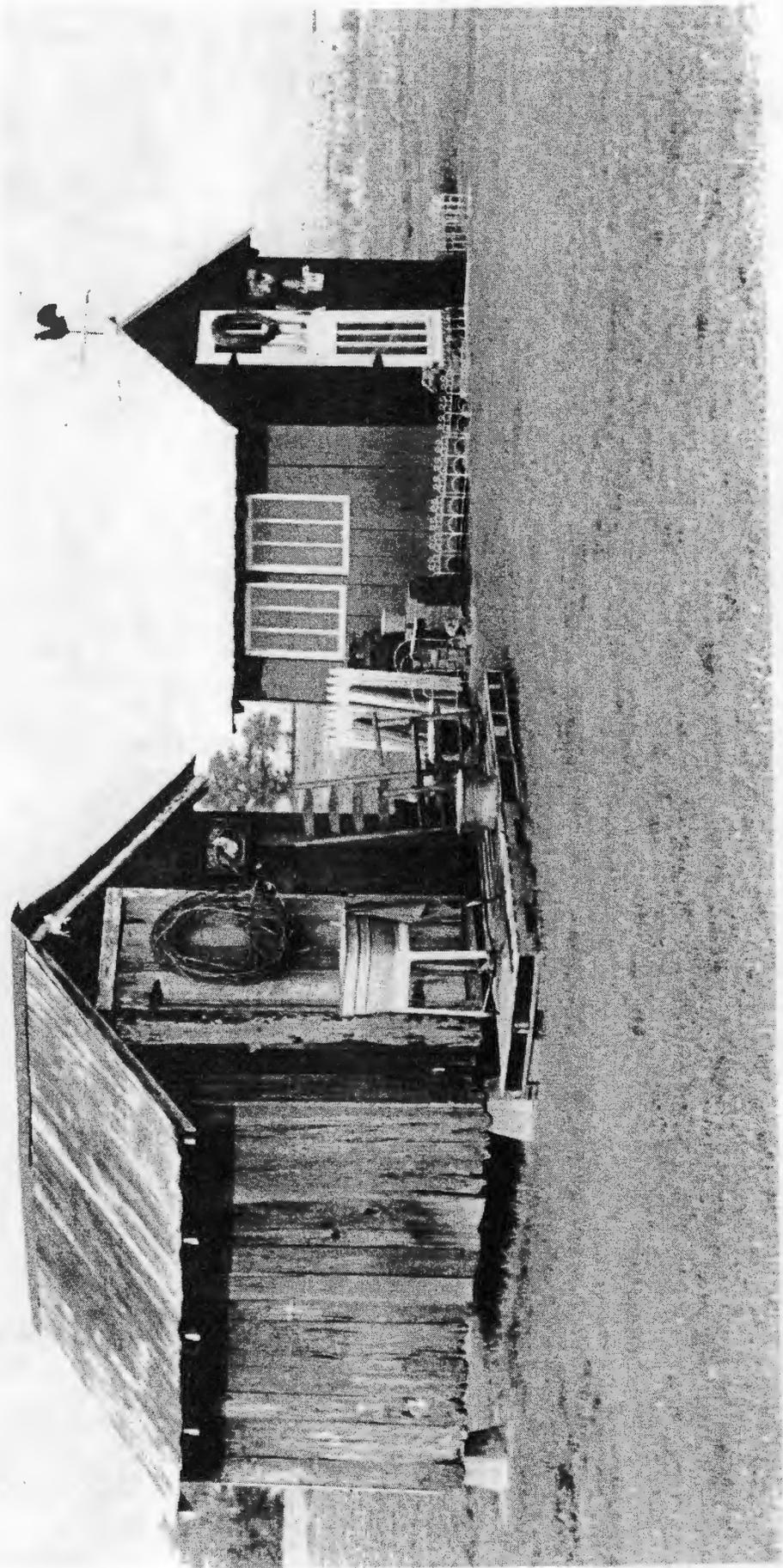


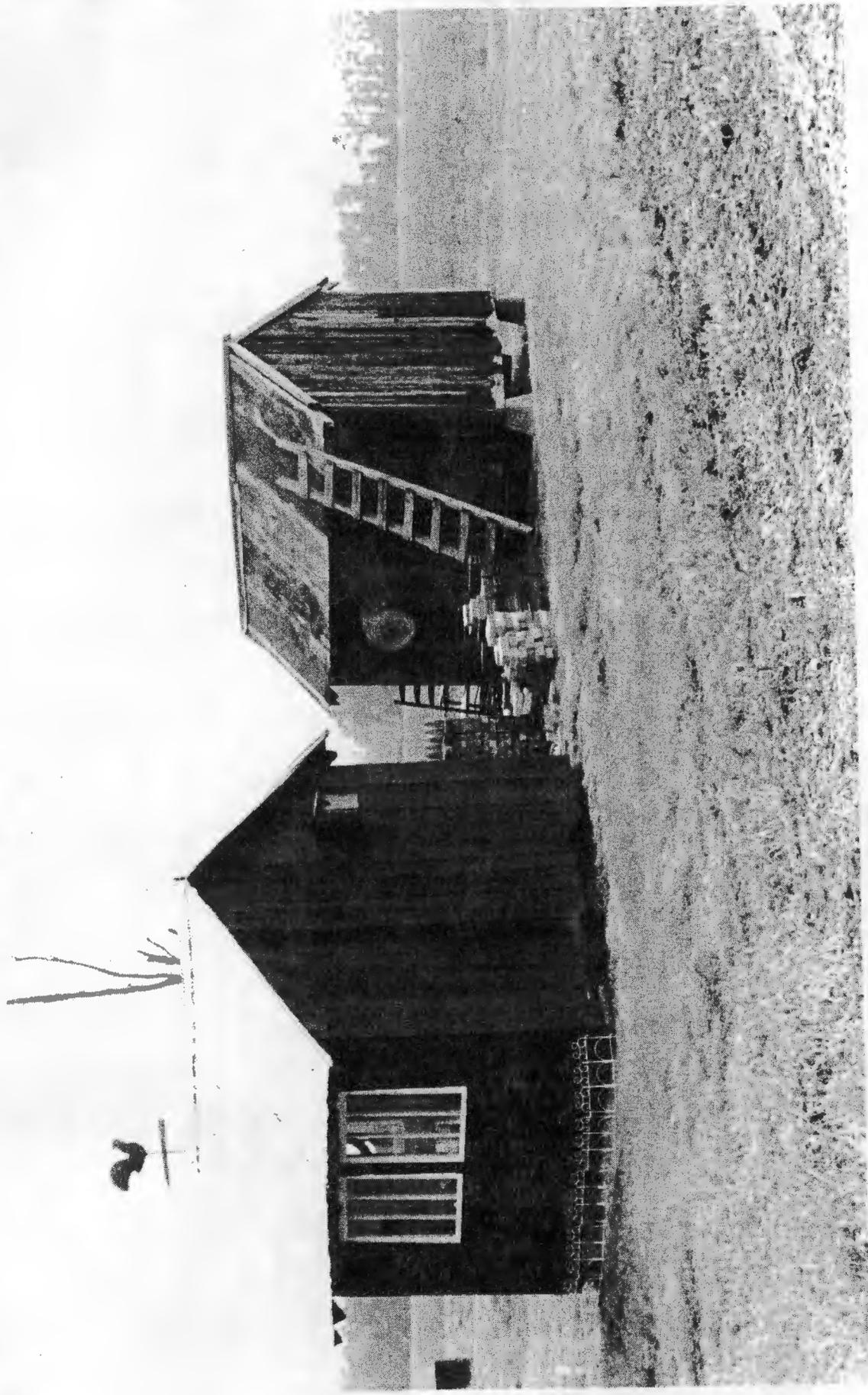








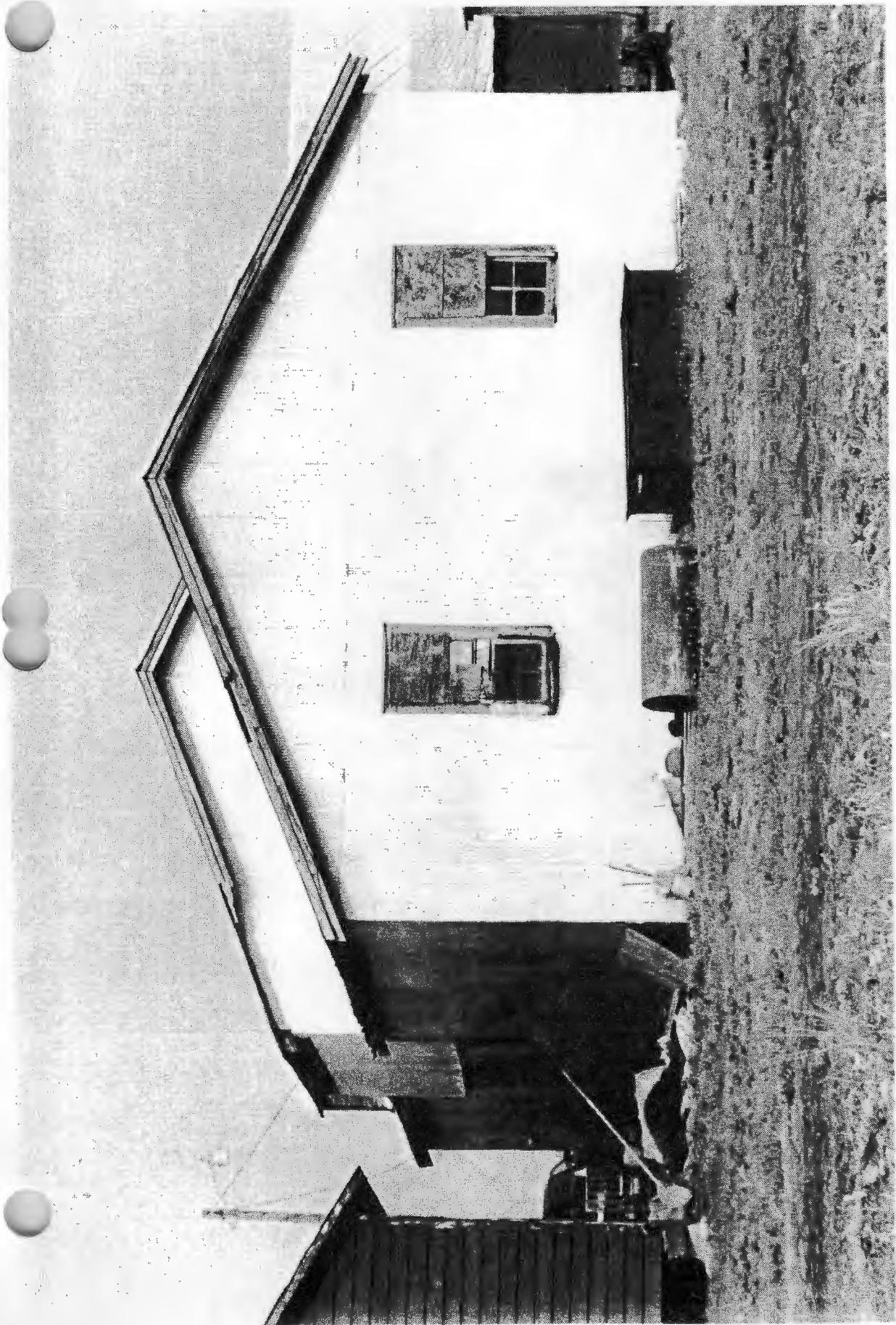


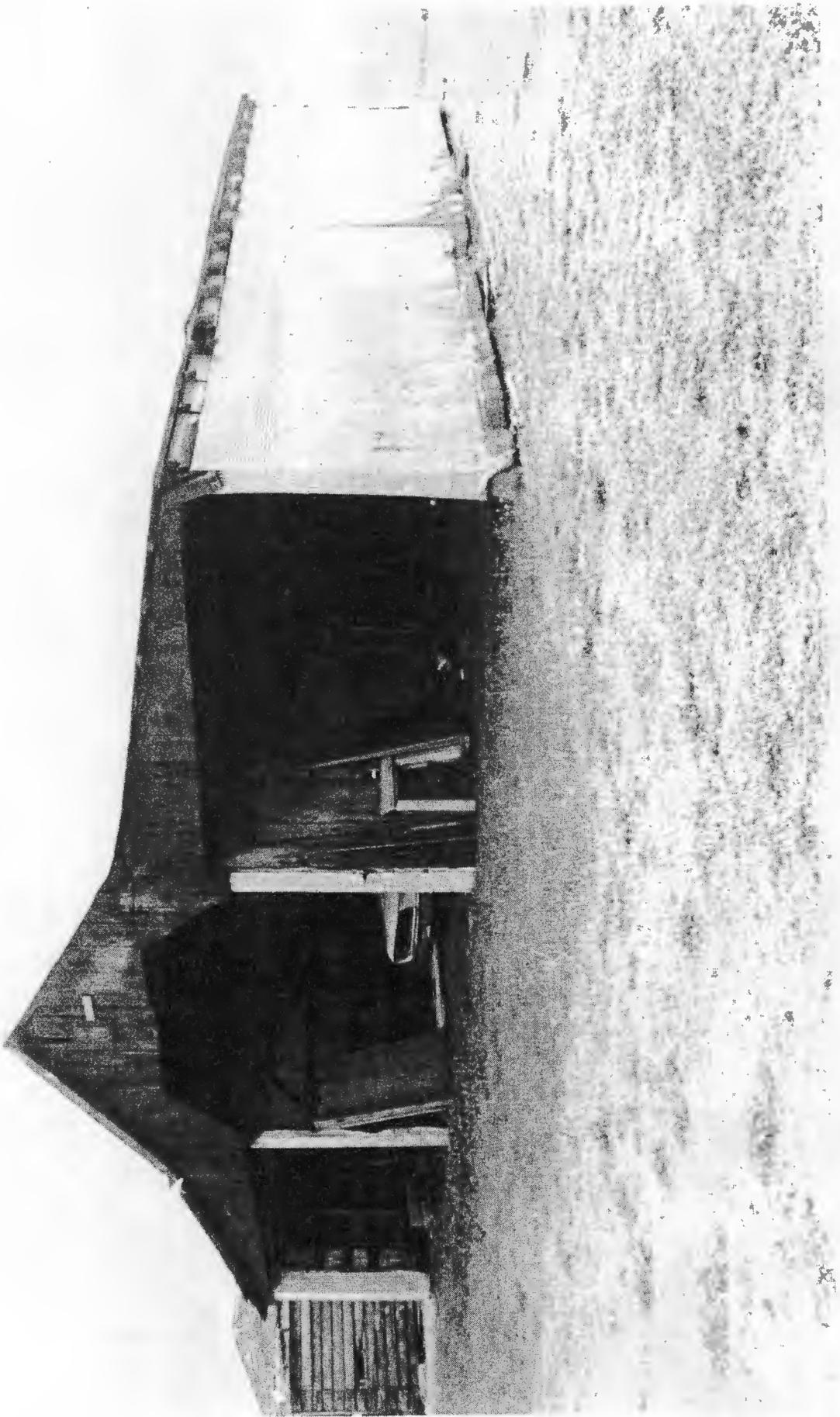




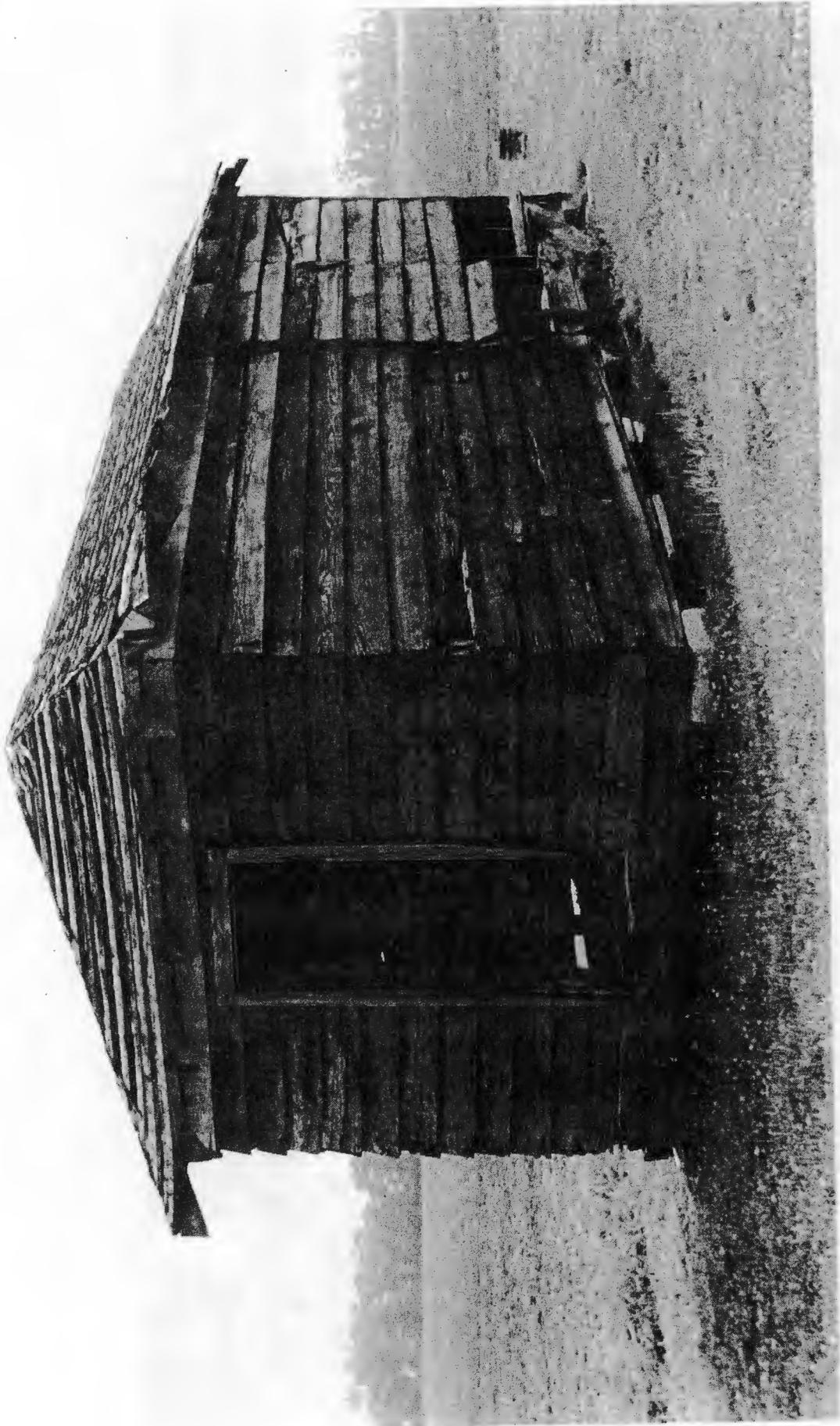


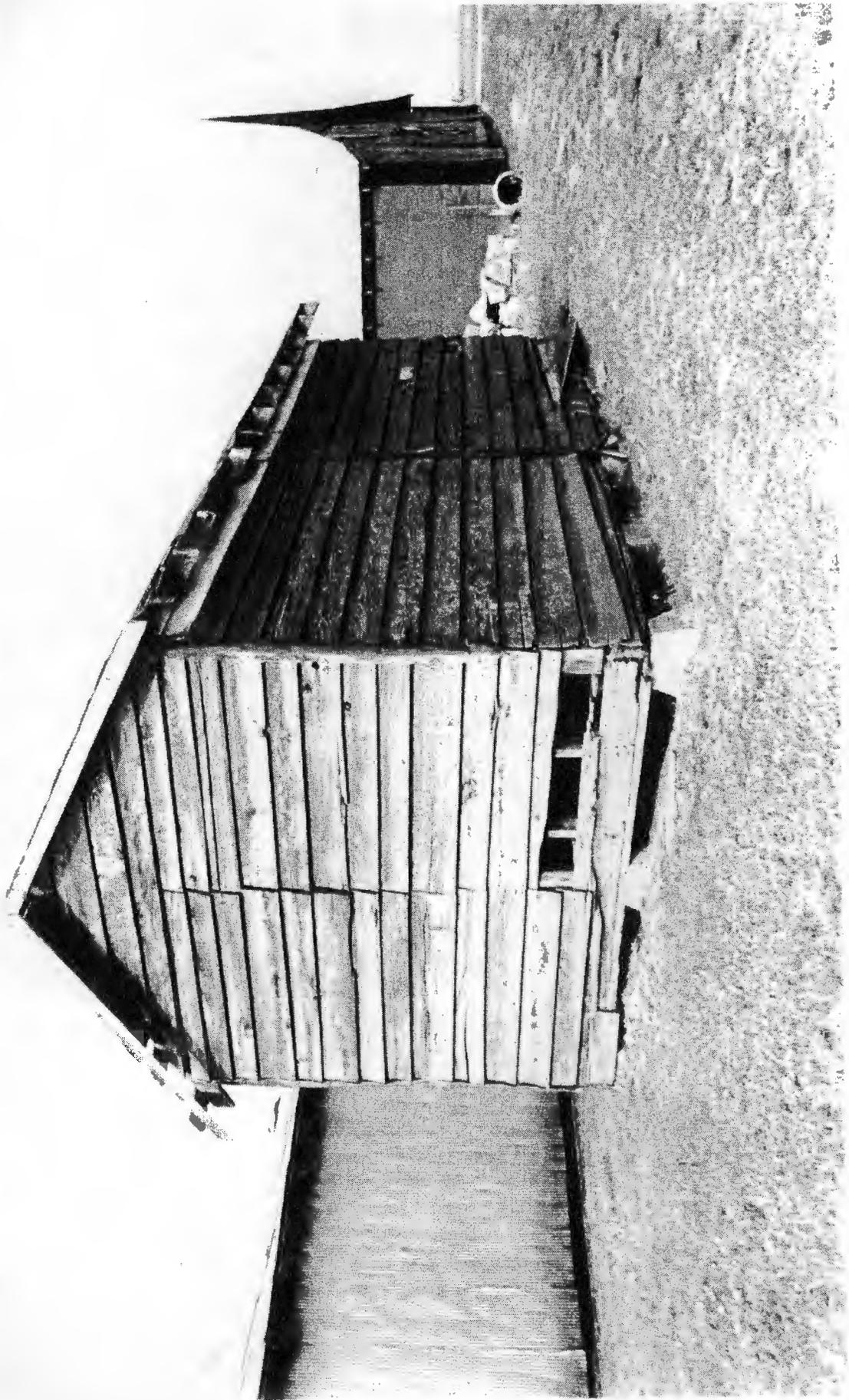


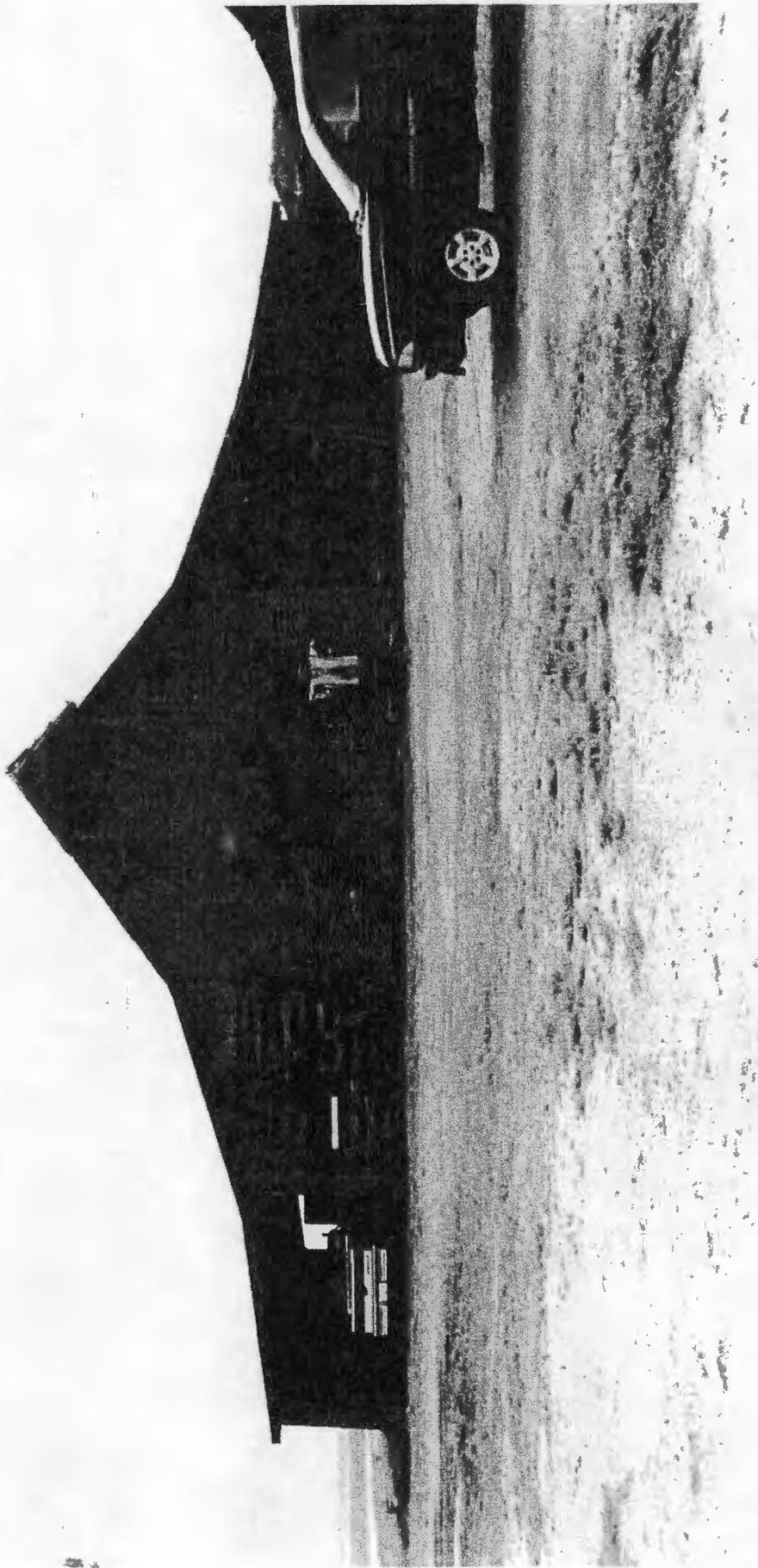


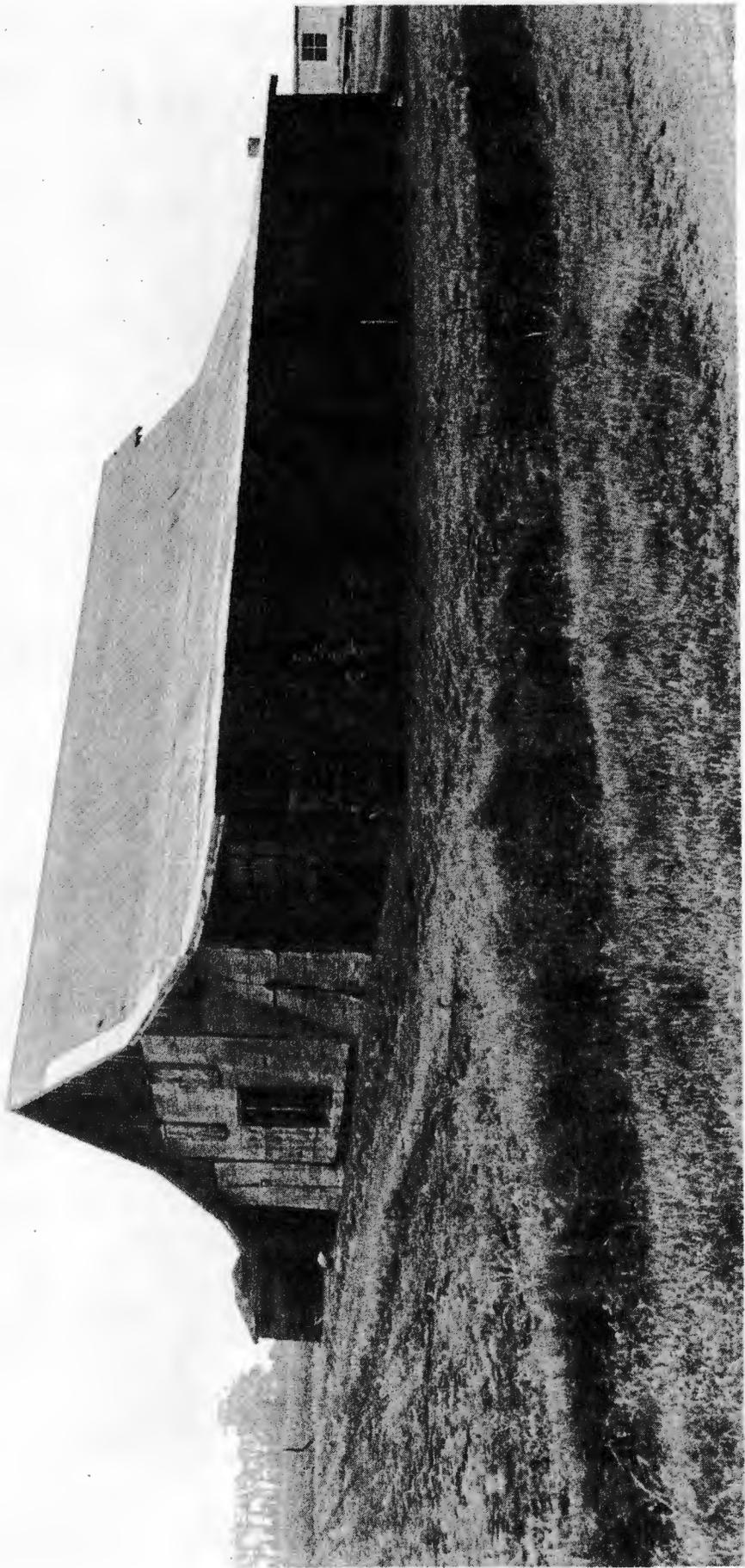






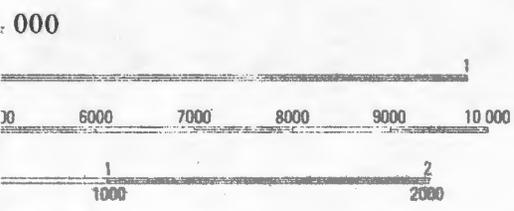
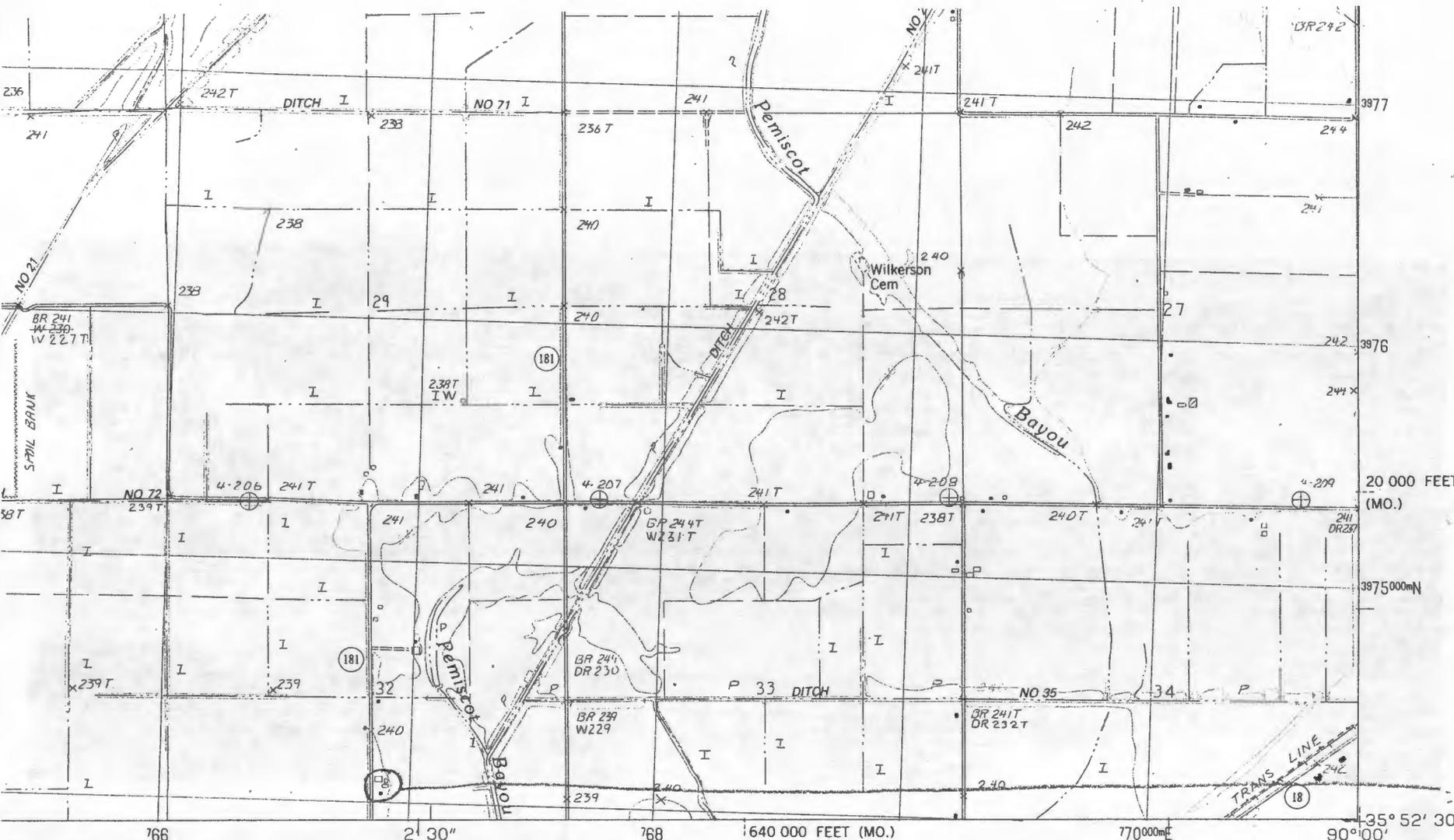












1	2	3	1 Arbyrd 2 Hornersville 3 Denton
4		5	4 Manila North 5 Blytheville 6 Manila South
6	7	8	7 Dell 8 Luxora

ADJOINING 7.5 QUADRANGLE

ROAD LEGEND

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

HALF MOON, ARK.-MO.  
PROVISIONAL EDITION 1983

35090-H1-TF-024

AL 5 FEET  
Multiply by .3048  
Multiply by 3.2808

MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
COLORADO 802 FOR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
N, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72204

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 DELL MOUND, MISSISSIPPI, MO, AR