

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NR 7/24/08

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 Benton Commercial Historic District

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Portions of 100 and 200 blocks of N. Main, N. Market, S. Market, N. East, W. South, and Sevier Streets ☐ not for publication

city or town Benton ☐ vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Saline code 125 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.)

Catherine Matthews
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/14/08
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

Benton Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Saline County, Arkansas
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

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

Contributing

Noncontributing

33

16

buildings

4 (vacant lots)

sites

structures

objects

33

20

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

3

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic- Hotel

Commerce/Trade: Financial Institution, Specialty Store,
Department Store

Social: Meeting Hall

Government: Courthouse

Funerary: Mortuary

Recreation & Culture: Theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: Financial Institution, Specialty Store

Social: Meeting Hall

Government: Courthouse

Funerary: Mortuary

Recreation & Culture: Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian: Italianate

Late 19th & Early 20th Century American Movements:
Commercial Style

Modern Movement: Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete, Brick

walls Brick, Stucco, Metal, Wood

roof Asphalt, Metal,

other

Narrative Description

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

Benton Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Saline County, Arkansas
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- ☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Commerce

Community Planning & Development

Period of Significance

1902-1958

Significant Dates

1902

1939

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

N/A

Architect/Builder

Frank Ginocchio, Edwin Cromwell

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☒ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Benton Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Saline County, Arkansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Area of Property 10.790 Acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	15	537784	3824949
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	15	537962	3824943

3	15	538002	3824715
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	15	537718	3824598

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sandra Taylor Smith, Preservation Consultant
organization Prepared For: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date January 14, 2008
street & number 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street telephone (501)324-9880
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 Multiple Owners
street & number telephone
city or town state zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Summary

The Benton Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** for its association with the development of Benton, Arkansas, county seat of Saline County, and **Criterion C** for its assortment and quality of twentieth-century commercial buildings. The district is being nominated with **local significance**. The Benton Commercial Historic District represents the development of the city through 1958, with its period of significance spanning the years from 1902 to 1958. The district contains fifty-three buildings, three of which were previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Of the total number of buildings (excluding the three individually listed in the National Register) in the district, 33 (67%) contribute to the historic significance while 16 (32%) do not contribute to the significance of the district. The buildings in the Benton Commercial Historic District are brick, twentieth-century commercial buildings, some of which display architectural elements of styles such as Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Art Deco. However, the majority of the buildings in the district are simple vernacular commercial designs with minimal detail.

Elaboration

The Benton Commercial Historic District is comprised of the core of the historic central business district of the city. The fifty-three buildings in the district are reflective of the history and development of Benton.

Saline County, Arkansas, lies just west of the center of the state. Pulaski County, the capital of the state, bounds it on the east, Grant County on the south, Hot Spring and Garland counties on the west, and Perry County on the north. Saline County contains approximately 723 square miles. The county seat of Saline County is Benton, which is at an elevation of 416 feet, and was chosen as the county seat due to its central location on the road to Little Rock at a point where the Southwest Trail crossed the Saline River. The Southwest Trail, a Native American trail, was part of a national road leading from Missouri to Little Rock, then south to the Red River. The city of Benton, first settled in 1833, was formally established in 1836, the year Arkansas became a state. Benton is approximately 18 square miles, with a 2006 population of 27,717. Benton is considered part of the Little Rock-North Little Rock, Arkansas, greater metropolitan statistical area.

The area contained in the Benton Commercial Historic District lies within the original plat of the town as filed in 1836. The city was laid out in a grid, with a public square, on which the Saline County Courthouse stands. The majority (53%) of the buildings in Benton's Commercial Historic District were constructed in the period between 1900 and 1929. Another twenty-one buildings (39% of the total) were constructed between 1930 and 1959. Only three buildings have been constructed since 1958 in the area that comprises the Benton Commercial Historic District.

1900-1909

Four buildings in the Benton Commercial Historic District were constructed in the first decade of the twentieth century. The earliest extant building in the district is the Saline County Courthouse, constructed in

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1902. The courthouse is a two-story Romanesque Revival style building, designed by Arkansas's most prolific early twentieth-century architect, Charles L. Thompson. Of brick construction, the Saline County Courthouse features round-arched openings on the north and south ends of the open center hallway. The multiple gable roofline is dominated by a corner clock tower. The courthouse stands in the public square that occupies an entire city block on the northern edge of the city's commercial historic district. The John L. Hughes building at 111 N. Main is more typical of the early twentieth-century buildings in the district in its simple brick vernacular commercial design. Constructed in 1908, the one-story building utilizes brick pattern in the upper portions of the front wall as its main decorative elements. The Hughes Building was constructed by local contractors W. A. Atkinson and son Bill, who built many of the early buildings in Benton's business district. The Mickie Cash Store Building at 102-104 West South Street is a two-story brick building, constructed c. 1908. This long building is prominently located at the intersection of N. Main, W. South, and River Streets. It features round-arched double-hung windows on portions of the front (north) and east elevations. The Ashby Building at 106-108 N. Market, constructed in 1908 for Ashby Undertakers, features recessed brick panels with metal vents in the upper level of its front (east) wall. A decorative scalloped brick pattern spans the top of each of the recessed panels. A band of smaller, recessed panels at the top of the front of the building forms a cornice.

1910-1919

Sixteen or 30% of the total number of buildings in the Benton Commercial Historic District were constructed between 1910 and 1919. The earliest of the buildings constructed in this decade is the Bank of Benton Building at 102 North Market Street. Built c.1910, the building is two-stories and of brick construction with stucco walls. Second story windows on the front (east) and south elevations feature arched tops. Decorative use of brick in recessed panels provides interest in the upper story of the front. A cast concrete cornice band features a scalloped design. Another building built in 1910 is located on the same block at 110 North Market and is a small one-story structure with recessed brick panels and scalloped brick cornice above an intact storefront with plate-glass windows, wood-panel kickplate and stationary transom windows.

Buildings on the north side of the 100 block of West South Street, 115, 117, 119 West South are small, brick commercial designs with upper front recessed brick panels and decorative brick scalloping, similar to other early twentieth-century buildings in the district. Although remodeled in the late 1940s to its original appearance, the J. M. Caldwell, later Gingles Department Store Building at 145 West South, was originally constructed c.1915. The building has served as a local landmark since its construction at its location on the busy corner at West South and North Market Streets.

The Odd Fellows Building at 123 North Market and the Stinson Building next door at 125 N. Market were both constructed in 1913. Both are two-story brick buildings with minimal detail except for brick pattern on the second story walls of the fronts. The Odd Fellows Building (NR 05-26-04) features a raised center parapet with cast concrete nameplate.

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Buildings in the Benton Commercial Historic District constructed in the period 1910-1919 are not confined to one area of the downtown, but are scattered among all of the streets. The large two-story building at 101-107 S. Market is the largest of the historic buildings in downtown Benton. Constructed of ornamental concrete block c.1914, this building contains four commercial spaces fronting South Market Street. Another four buildings in the historic district were also constructed c. 1914 and are located at 207 West South, 118 and 126 North Main, and 124 North Market. These buildings are one-story, of brick construction, with brick pattern in the upper walls of their fronts providing their only decorative detail.

Two buildings in the district constructed c.1915 at 128 North Market Street and 108 West Sevier are simple one-story commercial examples of their time period, as is the Kelley Building at 119 North Market Street, built in 1917.

1920s

In the early 1920s streets in Benton were gravel or dirt. In the downtown business district there were wide concrete sidewalks and although streets were unpaved, there were concrete sidewalk crossings going from corner to corner at all of the intersecting streets.

Unlike most small towns in Arkansas, there was not a lot of new construction of business buildings in downtown Benton during the prosperous years of the 1920s. Only nine buildings constructed in this decade are located in the Benton Commercial Historic District. Some of these 1920s buildings are simple brick vernacular expressions of then-popular commercial architecture.

Constructed c.1920, the building at 209 North Main is an example of a typical small commercial building, one-story and of brick construction with little decorative detail. Similarly small, the one-story building at 118 West Sevier is brick with little decoration. Other buildings constructed in this decade employ the use of subtle design elements such as the buildings on the north side of East Sevier Street. Constructed in 1924, the Martin Building at 108 East Sevier and adjacent building at 114 East Sevier feature buff color brick walls with contrasting dark red glazed brick outlining window bays and first and second story cornice lines.

The Benton Masonic Lodge Building at 109-113 North Market is of brick construction with the front (west) wall faced with cut stone block. The two-story building features characteristics of the Art Deco style in its first floor cast concrete cornice with Masonic design, fluted pilasters flanking the center entry topped by a large cast concrete Masonic emblem. The building also features three two-story window bays recessed on the upper level of the front elevation.

1930s

Because of the Great Depression, Benton's only bank closed. Only three buildings in the historic district were constructed during the 1930s. Buildings at 109 West South and 115-117 North Market were built c.1930 and resembled the typical simple, one-story brick commercial building seen in downtown in the previous

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decades. In 1939 a federal post office was constructed at 129 North Main Street. A minimal use of Art Deco design is seen at the building's centered entry with decorative iron grill above. The building was designed by Louis A. Simon, architect of many Federal Post Office buildings constructed in the 1930s. The building is currently owned and occupied by the Salvation Army.

1940s

The majority of the buildings in the Benton Commercial Historic District constructed in the 1940s were a result of the national building boom at the close of World War II. Business in Benton flourished with the swell in population by the returning soldiers and peace-time stability. Twelve buildings in the district were constructed in the years following World War II. The automobile industry, invigorated by the ending of the war, also increased its presence in downtown. In Benton, auto showrooms were located on East Sevier Street. The building at 113 East Sevier was constructed c.1946 as an auto showroom. The large one-story building features large plate glass windows across the front (north) and a overhead garage door on the east end of the front. Side and rear elevations of the building contain industrial type awning windows.

Other buildings constructed in the 1940s in the historic commercial district include simple one-story brick structures such as seen at 210-212 West Sevier where there is no detail in the brick wall on the front, but two modern aluminum frame plate glass storefronts offers two retail spaces.

This period also included modern updates to some of the older buildings downtown. The Caldwell Building at 145 West South was remodeled and faced with buff color brick and aluminum frame plate glass windows during the 1940s. The use of the buff colored brick sets the buildings of this period apart from those built earlier.

The Royal Theater at 111 South Market Street was built in 1920 as a theater, but was completely remodeled and refaced in 1948-49. The remodeling of the building was designed by Little Rock architects Frank Ginocchio and Edwin B. Cromwell.

1950s

Six buildings in the historic district date from the early 1950s. They are scattered on five of the streets in the district. These buildings, such as the one at 221 North Main Street, which was constructed as a Goodyear Service Store, while the building at 215 Main was built c.1950s for Otasco. These large brick one-story buildings' functions were oriented toward the auto industry which had sales showrooms around the corner on East Sevier Street and repair facilities on East South Street. The Newbill Motor Company constructed an auto sales showroom at 104 East South c.1955. Of buff brick, the building features no decorative detailing, focusing all attention to the large plate glass showroom windows on its front (south).

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1959-Present

Only three buildings in the Benton Commercial Historic District have been constructed since 1959. The Thomas Auto Garage at 115 East Sevier was constructed c.1960 and a medical clinic at 112 North Main and bank at 146 West South were constructed in the early 1990s.

Integrity

With a large majority of the resources contributing to the historic significance of the Benton Commercial Historic District, there is a strong visual connection to its period of significance. With the exception of the three buildings in the district constructed after 1958, the majority of the non-contributing buildings are historic, but have been altered on their facades by the application of aluminum slipcovers or other non-original material roofs attached over their storefronts.

The Benton Commercial Historic District is a cohesive group of buildings that maintain the integrity needed to convey their architectural and historic significance. These building possess integrity of location and setting as they retain their original setbacks and configurations. The buildings, that contribute to the significance of the district remain true to their original design and display the historic materials used in their construction as well as the attention to detail that expresses the workmanship displayed when built. The buildings in the district continue to maintain their integrity of association as they have continuously been used as places of commerce in downtown Benton.

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BENTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT PROPERTY LIST

<u>C/N/C</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>CONSTRUCTION DATE</u>
C	102 N. East Street	c.1946
C	108 N. East Street	D1947
C	108B N. East Street	c.1950
NC	104 E. South Street	c.1955
C	108-110 E. South Street	c.1946
C	102-104 W. South Street	c.1908
NC	146 W. South Street	c.1990
NC	109 W. South Street	c.1930
NC	111-113 W. South Street	c.1945
NC	115 W. South Street	c.1912
C	117 W. South Street	c.1913
C	119 W. South Street	c.1913
C	145 W. South Street	c.1915
NC	205 W. South Street	c.1924
NC	207 W. South Street	c.1914
NC	112 N. Main Street	c.1990
NC	118-122 N. Main Street	c.1914
C	126 N. Main Street	c.1914
NC	101 N. Main Street	c.1948
C	111 N. Main Street	D1908
C	125-127 N. Main Street	c.1946
C	129 N. Main Street	D1939
C	201 N. Main Street	c.1950
C	209 N. Main Street	c.1920
NC	215 N. Main Street	c.1950
NC	221 N. Main Street	c.1955
C	108-114 W. Sevier Street	c.1915
NC	118 W. Sevier Street	c.1929
IL	200 W. Sevier Street	D1902 (NR Listed 11-22-76)
C	210-212 W. Sevier Street	c.1946
C	113 E. Sevier Street	c.1946
NC	115 E. Sevier Street	c.1960
C	108-112 E. Sevier Street	D1924
C	114 E. Sevier Street	D1924

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NC	122 E. Sevier Street	c.1928
C	101-107 S. Market Street	c.1914
IL	111 S. Market Street	D1948-49 (NR Listed 09-27-03)
C	113-117 S. Market Street	c.1946
C	105 N. Market Street	c.1950
C	109-113 N. Market Street	c.1928
C	115-117 N. Market Street	c.1930
C	119 N. Market Street	D1917
IL	123 N. Market Street	D1913 (NR Listed 05-26-04)
C	125 N. Market Street	D1913
C	102 N. Market Street	c.1910
C	106-108 N. Market Street	D1908
C	110 N. Market Street	c.1910
C	114 N. Market Street	c.1946
C	116 N. Market Street	c.1946
NC	120 N. Market Street	c.1924
C	122 N. Market Street	c.1924
C	124 N. Market Street	c.1914
C	128 N. Market Street	c.1915

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Summary

The Benton Commercial Historic District in Benton, Saline County, has served as the nucleus of the county's business and government since it was formed in 1836. The district consists of fifty-three buildings situated in the original plat of the city. Three of the buildings in the district were previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Saline County Courthouse at 200 W. Sevier (NR 11-22-76), the Odd Fellows Building at 123 N. Market (NR 05-26-04), and the Royal Theater at 111 S. Market (NR 09-27-03). The majority of the buildings in the district are simple, vernacular commercial structures built between 1902 and 1958. The Benton Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register with **local significance** under **Criterion A** for its representation of the growth and development of the city and **Criterion C** for the buildings' representation of early to mid-twentieth century commercial architecture.

Elaboration

Benton, Arkansas, is situated near the center of Saline County which was established in 1835 with land taken from Pulaski County on the north and Hempstead County on the south. The area is rich in natural resources. Hardwood timberland spreads from the foothills of the Ouachita National Forest to the Saline River bottoms, and a variety of minerals including bauxite, granite and nickel are found in the county. The soil of Saline County varies from stoney loam to fertile river bottom with a clay bed used to produce goods ranging from common brick to fine pottery clay.

The Benton area was traveled through and occupied for hundreds of years before the first Eastern settlers arrived. The ancient Native American trail from Missouri to the Red River, known as the Southwest Trail, crossed the Saline River close to what is now downtown Benton. The most noted remaining signs of prehistoric occupation are preserved in two large earthen mounds. The largest, three miles southwest of Benton, is known as the John Hughes Mound. Another mound, almost as large, is five miles to the northwest.

The many Native American tribes that once occupied Arkansas had been driven from the region by European diseases and intertribal wars long before the Louisiana Purchase was signed in 1803. Shortly after the agreement was signed, the United States Congress authorized improvements on the Southwest Trail. With the improvements came a new name, the Congress

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or National Road. The improved road brought a new flow of settlers from the St. Louis junction down into the Arkansas Territory. After the War of 1812 it was most often referred to as the Military Road and by the mid-nineteenth century, the old route became known as Stagecoach Road. Most of Arkansas's early settlers and their needed supplies traveled from points east to St. Louis and down this ancient trail.

One of these sojourners was William S. Lockhart and his family who came from North Carolina. They settled at the Saline River crossing of the Military Road in 1815. Soon other travelers settled nearby and by 1820 it is reported that the community around the Saline Crossing had grown to 83 homesteaders. Salt was always an important resource of the area and in 1827 the first salt works plant was built. Around the same time, the first water-driven gristmill in the area was established further up the Saline River.

The Military Road continued to serve as an important route in the expansion of the United States and in 1831 Congress appropriated \$15,000.00 for needed improvements. The Arkansas Territorial legislature followed suit by issuing several contracts along the route. William Lockhart was given the right to build a toll bridge over the Saline River and operate it for twenty years. Later that same year a post office was opened at Lockhart's crossing and he was made postmaster.

Within two years a settlement formed on the road to Little Rock but it was four miles northeast of Lockhart's toll bridge. The settlement grew quickly with the first business opening in 1834. The next year Saline County was established and the small hamlet, because of its central location, was selected as the county seat. In 1836 after the Arkansas Territory became a state, the town was chartered and formally named Benton after the Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton. The original plat, drawn on silk, shows the streets and blocks of the downtown district as still seen today.

Later in 1836, five commissioners, David Dodd, Jesse Bland, Abijah Davis, Rezin Davis, and Jarrette McCarty were elected to choose a location for the county seat for the new county of Saline. The communities in the running were Collegeville, Caldwellton (named after the State Representative for Saline County), and Benton. Benton, the town with the largest population,

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near the center of the county, and most importantly, located on the main road to Little Rock, was selected for the seat of government of Saline County.

Soon after Benton became the county seat, the post office at Lockhart's Saline River crossing was moved to Benton. Green B. Hughes, a respected gristmill owner, was appointed the postmaster. Green Hughes was later elected representative from Saline County to the State Legislature. The first Saline County Courthouse along with a jail was constructed in 1838. The 60x60 foot structure was made of brick, but so poorly constructed that it had to be condemned in 1855. The existing Saline County Courthouse was completed in 1902.

Attesting to the diversity of the new town is the establishment within the first years of Mrs. Jeffries's Female School and the construction of a horse track and a Jockey Club. Benton was a leader in providing free education not available in most of the southern states in the mid 1800s. Saline County boasted twenty tuition-supported schools with over 500 students. A county-wide free public school system with fifteen schools was initiated in 1872. The Benton School District was formed in 1885 with the support of a public referendum. In 1900 surrounding school districts were consolidated into the Benton district and by 1928 rural students without access to high school courses were allowed to attend Benton High at no charge.

From its earliest days Benton thrived due to its location on the Military/Stagecoach road but in 1863 it brought four regiments of Union soldiers. The first brick house built in Benton (c.1850) by James Henry Shoppach, a highly educated German immigrant, was confiscated by the Union occupying forces to serve as a headquarters. The home of William Ayers Crawford was also taken over in 1863. Confederate forces mounted several offenses against the Federal regiments around Benton and Saline County. The most noted of these was the battle fought at Hurricane Creek. Later, David O. Dodd the son of one of Benton's prominent families, was hanged by the Union soldiers for being a Confederate spy.

Like most of the South, Benton and Saline County struggled after the war but had the advantage of possessing two important natural resources that were needed for the post-war reconstruction, salt and lumber. Saline County had supplied salt for Arkansas, parts of Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas since the 1830s. The lumber industry that began in the region in 1836 recovered after

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the Civil War and flourished. Furniture production in the Benton area accounted for a sizable part of commerce by 1900. Owosso Manufacturing began building windows and screen doors in Benton in 1906.

Another business begun after the Civil War was pottery. John Hyten opened a new business utilizing another regional natural resource, clay. By the turn of the twentieth century, there were thirteen pottery manufacturers in the Benton area. Hyten Pottery later named Eagle Pottery produced pottery until the 1930s from the fine local clay called kaolin. In 1911 John Hyten's son Charles, started Niloak Pottery (kaolin spelled backward). Niloak Pottery with its multicolor "mission" swirl became highly valued by collectors nationwide. The company was reorganized in the late 1940s to Winburn Tile Company and continues to produce pottery from the local clay. The coarser clay in the region was and still is used to manufacture quality bricks.

Saline County's most defining natural resource, bauxite, was not discovered until 1887 just northeast of Benton. Bauxite, the crucial component in the manufacturing of aluminum, was surface mined with a large labor force using picks and shovels. In 1893, the laborers used blocks they cut from the bauxite mines to construct the only known bauxite building in the world for the office of Dr. Dewell Gann, Sr., in downtown Benton. In exchange Dr. Gann provided free medical service for the low paid miners. The Gann building was donated to the city in 1946. It was used as a library until 1980 when it became a museum featuring local history.

A mill for crushing the ore was built in 1897 at Bauxite, the company town established four years earlier by Pittsburg Reduction Company (later named the Aluminum Company of America, or ALCOA). The hard working people of Benton and the region provided the majority of the bauxite used in the United States. The proud people of Saline County were responsible for the thousands of pounds of aluminum that built the airplanes that became the decisive factor in winning both the first and second World Wars. During World War II, the economy of Saline County was significantly helped by the Bauxite mines. The peak output of bauxite was reached in 1943. Bauxite mining declined after WW II but continued until 1990 when all of the ore had been exhausted.

Benton, the town that was begun because of its strategic location on the Southwest Trail,

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continued to flourish when the Cairo and Fulton Railroad, generally following the old trail, passed through Benton in 1873. The rail line, later changed to the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad, became part of the Missouri Pacific Railroad system in 1917. The Federal Government brought new opportunities in 1929 when it paved the new highway US 67 from Little Rock to Benton and on across the Saline River with a concrete bridge. Benton became a hub for other highways and roads to surrounding towns.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Benton had a population of just over 1,000. There were no paved roads in the town, but there were paved sidewalks, paid for by the property owners. Downtown at all of the intersecting streets, there were concrete sidewalk crossings going from corner to corner. Streets were first paved in 1927. Electric lights were introduced in 1904, but electricity was supplied only from sundown to midnight. Public water service and a sewer system were in place by 1915. Benton hosted concerts, Chautauquas, circuses and thrived.

Business in the town flourished in the 1920s. There were taxi services that brought passengers to the downtown from the two railroad depots. Several hotels were located in Benton's downtown along with all types of retail goods and services. Restaurants were plentiful as were furniture stores, and wagon yards. An automobile sales showroom was located in the building at 122 East Sevier.

The Arkansas State Legislature established the State Hospital for Nervous Diseases in 1929 on a 3,000-acre site southwest of Benton. The hospital became a major source of employment for Saline County and Benton and provided employment in the service and medical fields.

By the 1940s, U.S. Highway 67/70 bypassed downtown Benton. That highway became a frontage road when Interstate 30 was opened between Benton and North Little Rock in 1961. I-30 included frontage roads on both sides that attracted commercial development away from the core of the city. Through all the change in travel patterns and decline in local industries, downtown Benton continues to be the governmental and commercial center of the county.

Significance

The Benton Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic

Benton Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Saline County, Arkansas
County and State

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Places under **Criterion A** and **Criterion C**. The Benton Commercial Historic District is a part of the original land plat submitted when the town was formed and established as the county seat in 1836. The early growth and development of the town began around the courthouse square and radiated outward in the ensuing years. The buildings located in the district are significant examples of Benton's political, commercial and social history. They are also significant representations of vernacular versions of architectural styles from 1902 to 1958. The year 1902 is the construction date of the oldest extant building, the Saline County Courthouse, and 1958 being the cutoff date for resources deemed historic based on their fifty-year age. The buildings located in the district are architecturally significant for the restrained version of twentieth century commercial styles that they portray, including Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Art Deco. The Benton Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance**.

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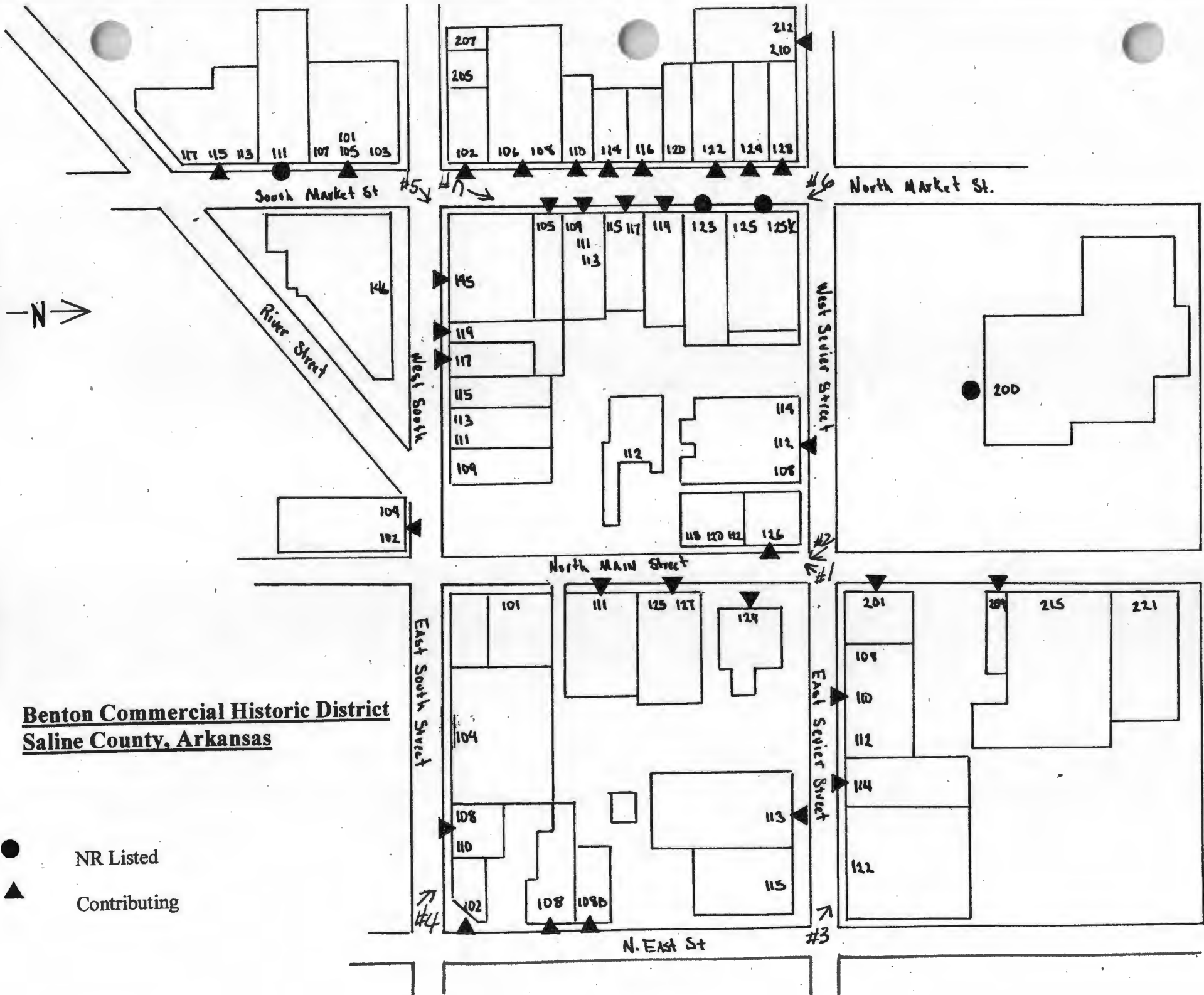
Section number 10 Page 1

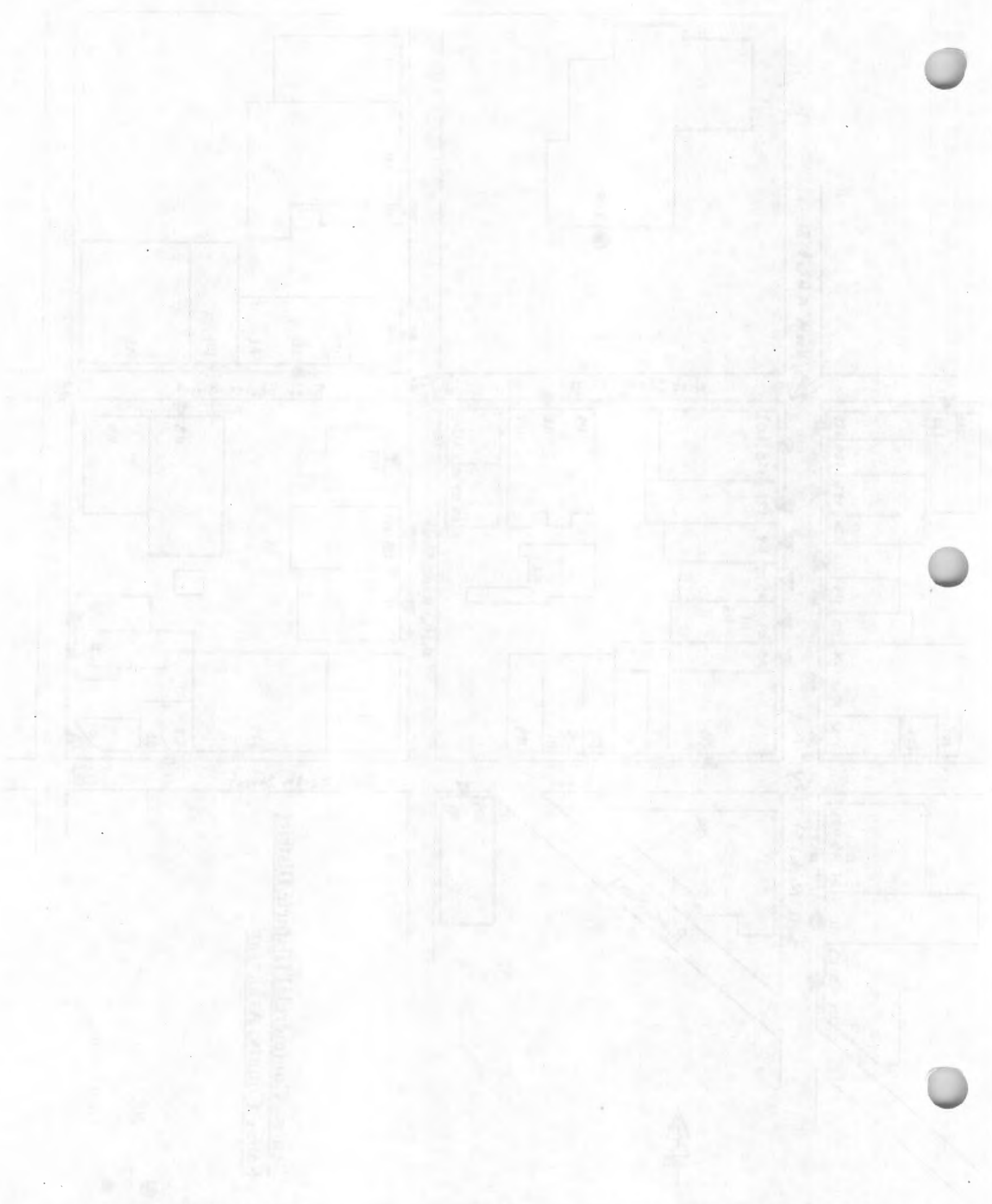
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point at the intersection of W. Conway and N. Market Streets, the boundary of the Benton Commercial Historic District runs east along W. Conway Street to the mid-point between N. Main Street and N. East Street where it turns and runs south along the rear property line of buildings on the east side of the 200 block of N. Main Street, then turns to run east behind buildings on E. Sevier Street to its intersection with N. East Street. At this point intersecting with N. East Street, the boundary turns to run south along the center line of N. East Street to the intersection with E. South Street. At E. South Street the boundary turns and runs west along E. South Street to the intersection with S. Main Street. At E. South and S. Main Street the boundary turns south to run along the building at 102-104 W. South and runs west, then north to River Street to include the 102-104 W. South Street building. At River Street the boundary runs southwest to the alley behind the building at 113-117 S. Market Street. The boundary then runs north along the alley to the west of Market Street to its intersection with W. Sevier Street. At W. Sevier and the alley west of N. Market Street, the boundary runs along W. Sevier Street for ½ block, then turns to run north along N. Market Street to the point of beginning.

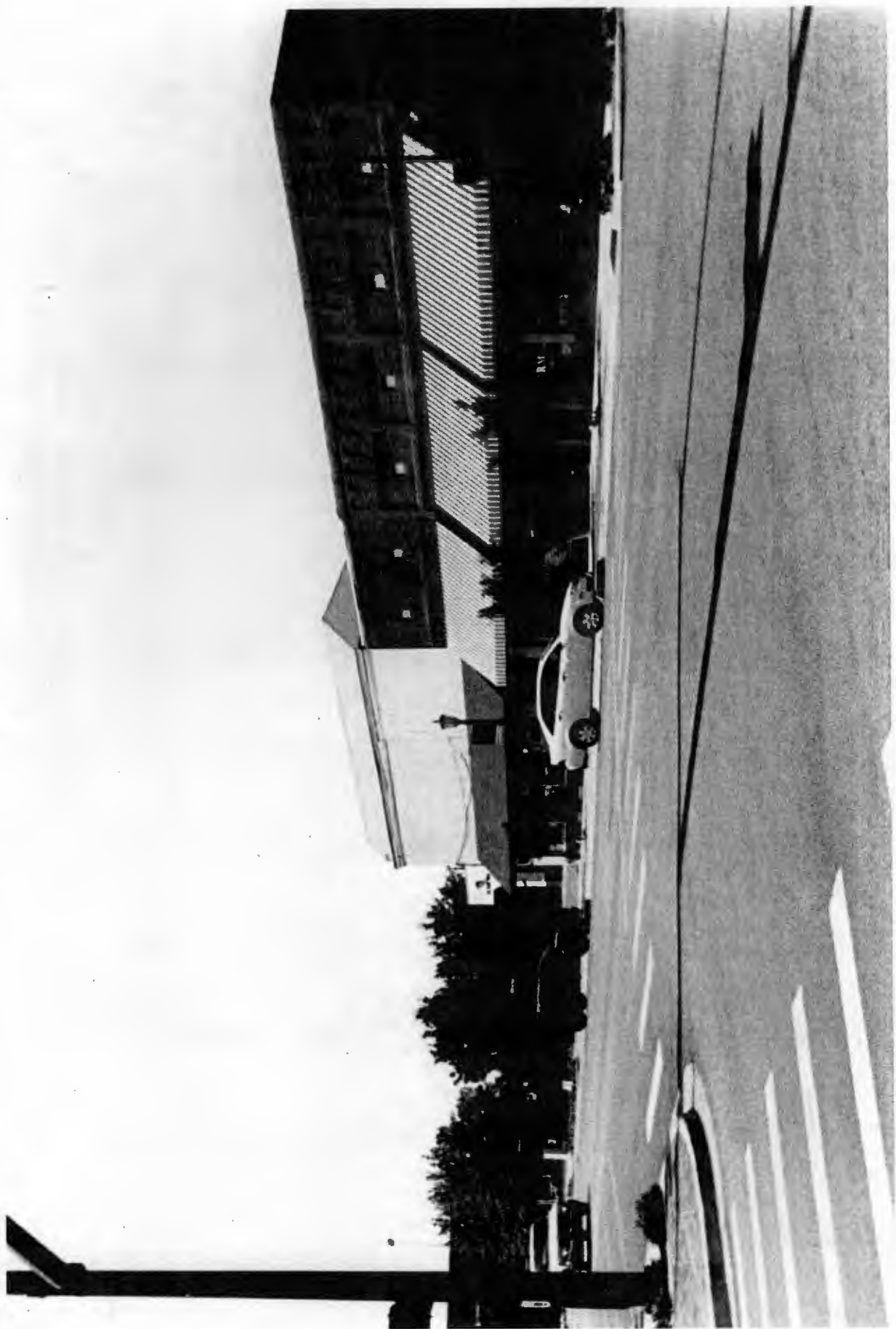
BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The Benton Commercial Historic District includes contiguous and intact historic resources at the center of Benton's commercial core whose original functions were commercial and governmental in nature. The built environment included in the district documents Benton from 1902 through 1958. The Saline County Courthouse is situated in the northern portion of the district and the historic commercial area of Benton radiates to the east and south of the courthouse. The boundary encompasses the area that has always been Benton's commercial center and highlights those buildings that portray Benton's commercial development during the 20th century.





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1. 11D-120 N. MAIN
BENTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

2. SALINE CTY., AR

3. PHOTO BY SANDRA TAYLOR SMITH

4. 9-10-07

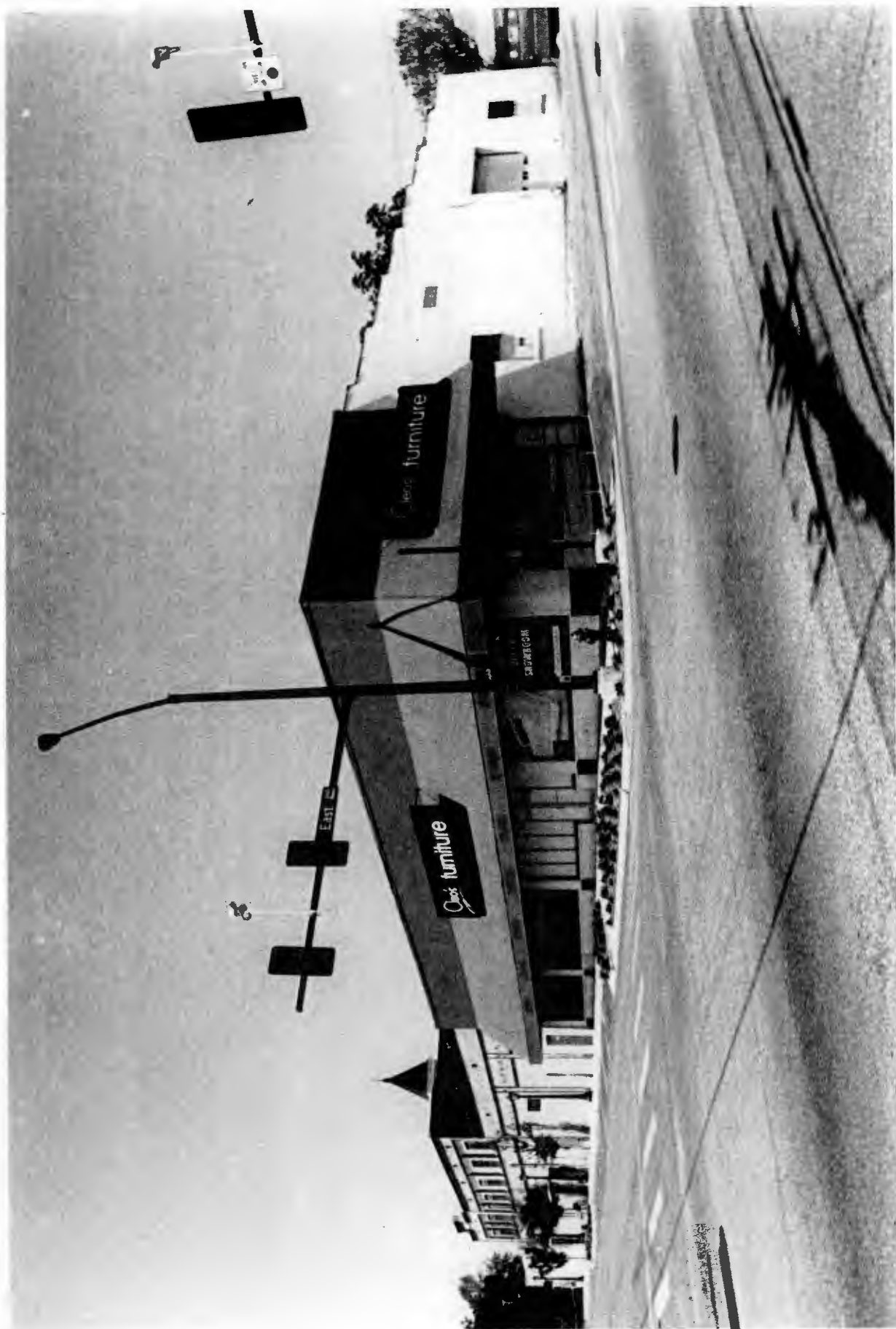
5. NEGATIVE AT AHPP

6. VIEW LOOKING SOUTHWEST FROM SEVIER & MAIN STREETS

7. PHOTO #1



1. EAST SIDE 100 BLOCK N. MAIN ST.
BENTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
2. SALINE CTY, AR
3. PHOTO BY SANDRA TAYLOR SMITH
4. 9-16-07
5. NEGATIVE AT AHP
6. VIEW LOOKING SOUTHEAST
7. PHOTO #2



1. LEAS1 SIDE 100 BLOCK E. SEVILEK
BENTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

2. SALINE CTY, AR

3. PHOTO BY SANDRA TAYLOR SMITH

4. 9-16-07

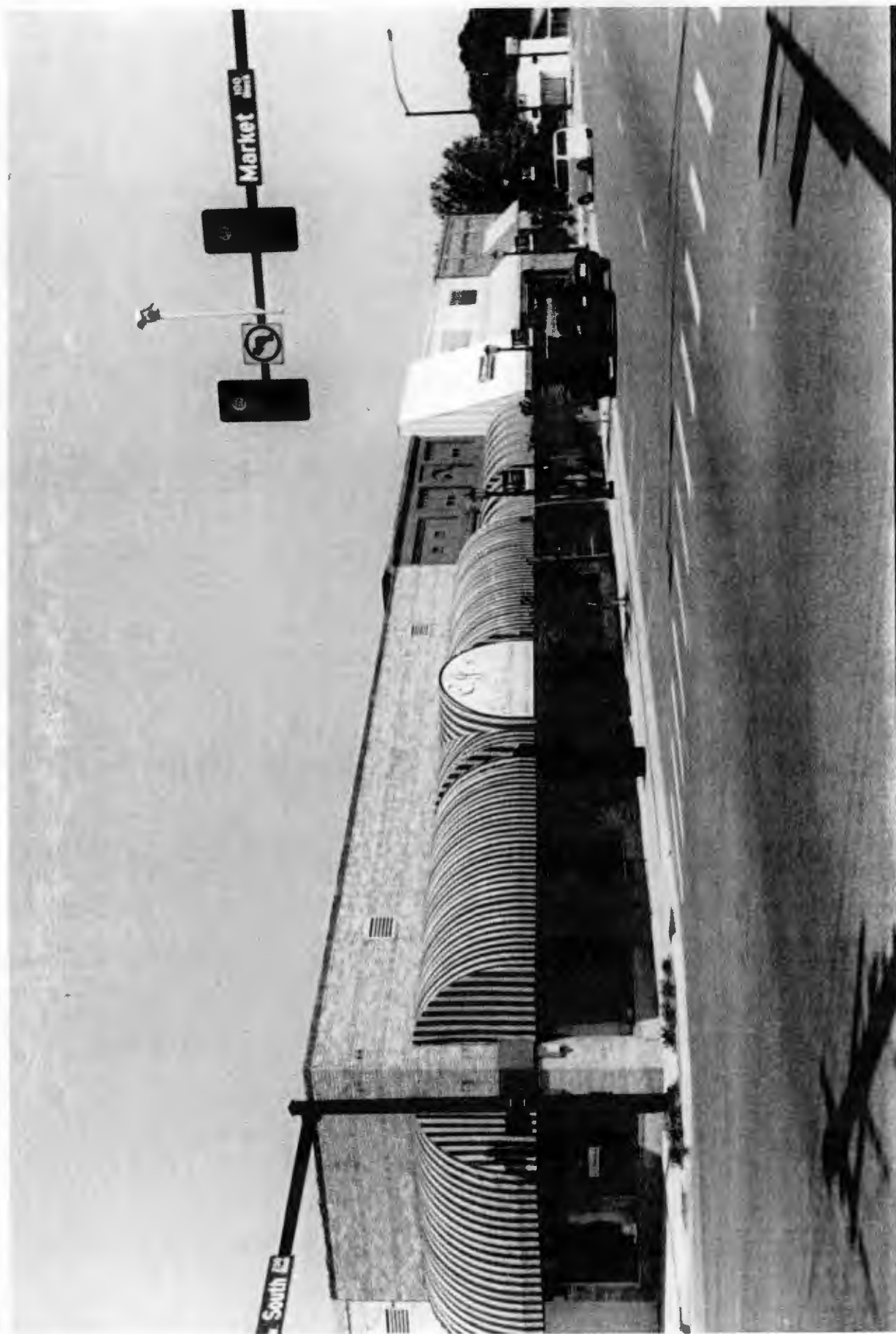
5. NEGATIVE AT AHPP

6. VIEW LOOKING NORTHWEST

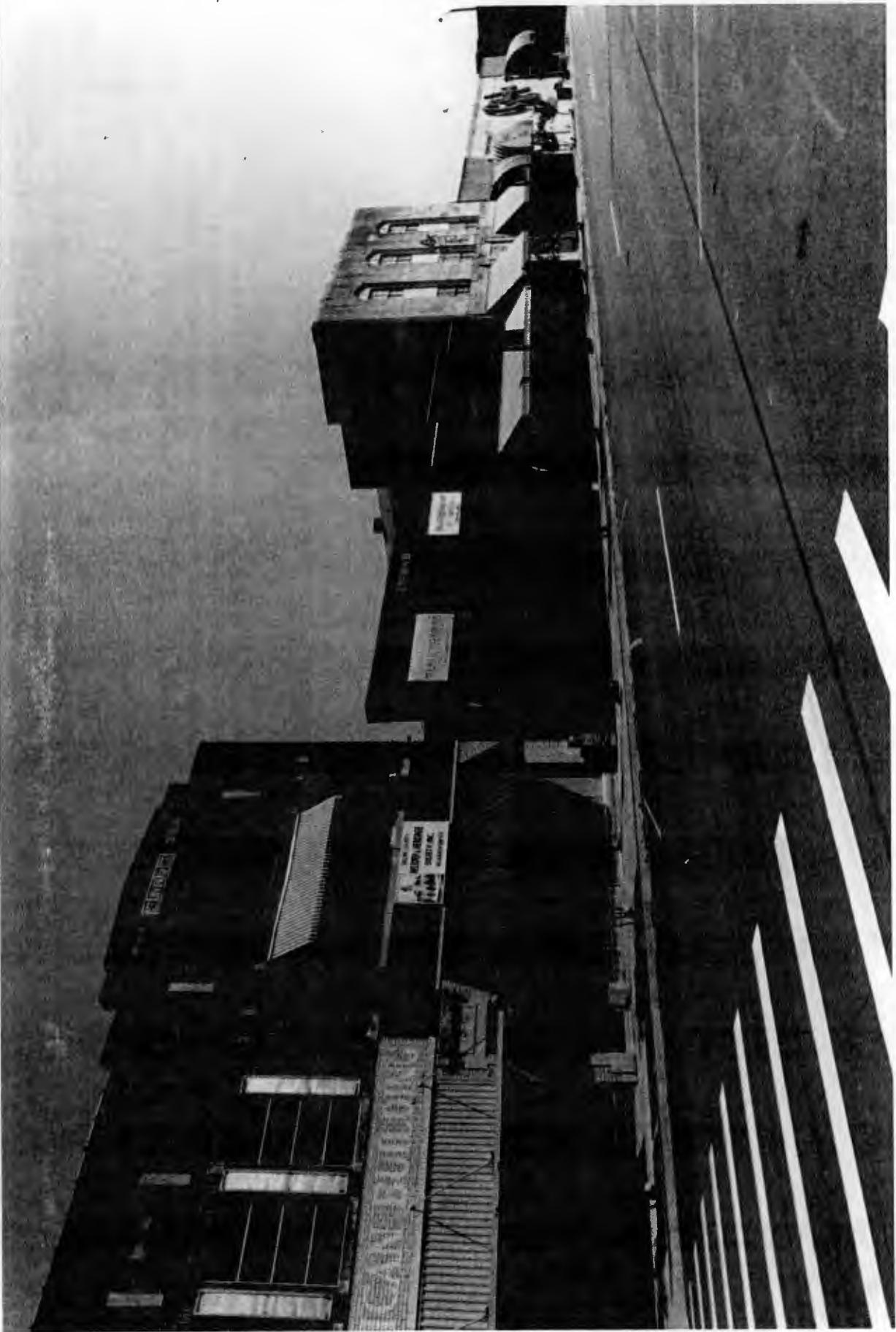
7. PHOTO #3



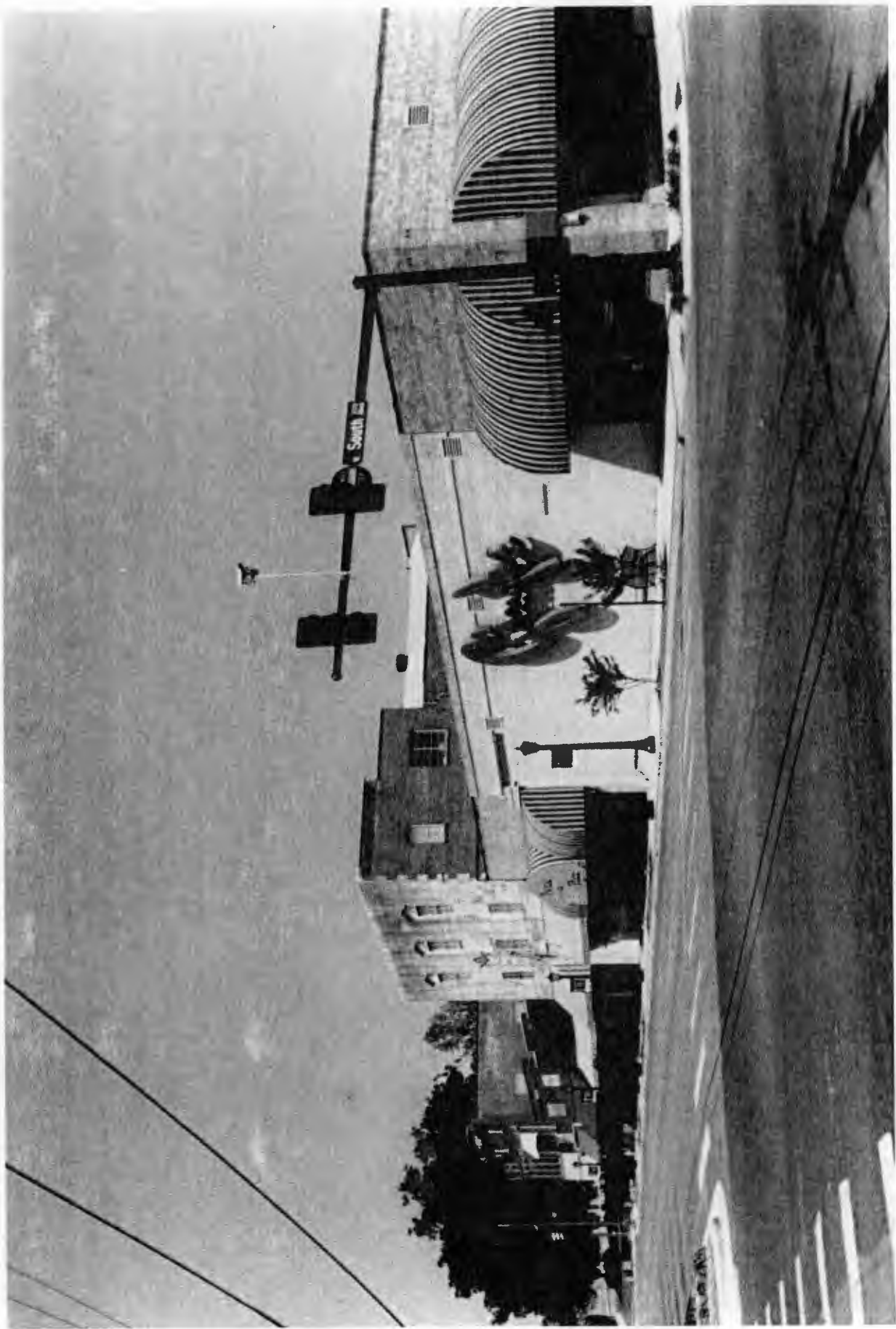
1. 100 BLOCK, EAST SOUTH ST.
BENTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
2. SALINE CTY, AR
3. PHOTO BY SANDRA TAYLOR SMITH
4. 9-16-07
5. NEGATIVE AT AHPP
6. VIEW LOOKING NORTHWEST
7. PHOTO #4



1. 100 BLOCK WEST SOUTH ST.
BENTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
2. SALINE CTY, AR
3. PHOTO BY SANDRA TAYLOR SMITH
4. 9-16-07
5. NEGATIVE AT AHPP
6. VIEW LOOKING NORTHEAST
7. PHOTO #5



1. SOUTH SIDE IVY BLUCK N. MARKET
BENTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
2. SALINE CTY., AR.
3. PHOTO BY SANDRA TAYLOR SMITH
4. 9-16-07
5. NEGATIVE AT AHP
6. VIEW LOOKING SOUTHEAST
7. PHOTO #6



1. LEASI SIDE 100 BLOCK N. MARKET
BENTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
2. SALINE CTY, AR
3. PHOTO BY SANDRA TAYLOR SMITH
4. 9-16-07
5. NEGATIVE AT AHPP
6. VIEW LOOKING NORTHEAST
7. PHOTO #17

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