

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations 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 First Methodist Church

other name/site number Mt. Zion Methodist Church, First Methodist Episcopal Church, Marietta Baptist Church

2. Location

street & town 114 North Marietta Street N/A not for publication

city or town Excelsior Springs N/A vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Clay code 047 zip code 64024

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 forth 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.)

Mark A. Miles
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO

Sept 11, 2009
Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
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:

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

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 : _____)

First Methodist Church
Name of Property

Clay County, MO
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 the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious facility

Current Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

vacant

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and early 20th Century Revivals

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone
walls brick
walls other: Stone-Kote
roof asphalt
other

Narrative Description

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

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

First Methodist Church
Name of Property

Clay County, MO
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.
- X **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:

- X **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- 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.

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

Areas of Significance
(enter categories from instructions)

architecture

Period of Significance
1948

Significant Dates
1948

Significant Persons
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Walker, Robin A.

Knipp, Richard Construction Co.

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

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:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- X Other Name of repository:

Excelsior Springs Museum, Excelsior Springs, MO

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

First Methodist Church
Name of Property

Clay County, MO
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/5 3/9/4/5/0/5 4/3/5/5/5/3/0
Zone Easting Northing

2 / / / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

3 / / / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

4 / / / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Excelsior Springs, Original Town, all of Lots 1, 2, and 3, and east 17 feet of Lot 4, Block 4

Property Tax No. 12311001900100

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This is the property historically associated with the church building remodeled and added on to in 1948.

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rhonda Chalfant, Ph.D.

organization Chalfant Consulting date 12-07-2008

street & number 619 West 32nd Street telephone 660-826-5592

city or town Sedalia state MO zip code 65301

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

name/title Downtown Excelsior Partnership, Inc

street & number P.O. Box 513 telephone 816-630-5060

city or town Excelsior Springs state MO zip code 64024

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 listings. 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 20503.

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Section number 7 Page 1

**First Methodist Church
Clay County, MO**

Summary: The First Methodist Church located at 114 North Marietta Street in Excelsior Springs, Clay County, Missouri, was built in 1948 using portions of the existing 1903 church that was damaged by fire in 1947. The building uses an interior modeled on the Akron Plan, a design of church auditoriums that provided flexible, partitionable spaces for Sunday School classrooms or overflow seating. The one-story church uses the cross gable symmetrical plan and retains many of the 1903 Gothic Revival window openings. On the east façade, a gabled parapet topped by a small decorative cupola denotes the entryway, which was converted from a large arched window that now serves as a transom. The bay is flanked by square tower pavilions topped by large octagonal cupolas supported by buttresses and enhanced with carved floral details just under the roofline. A 1948 addition to the west of the original building is utilitarian but blends well with the remodeled portion of the building. The building retains its integrity.

Elaboration: The First Methodist Church, also called the Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1903-1926), the First Methodist-Episcopal Church (1926-1968), the First United Methodist Church (1968- 1992), and more recently the Landmarks Baptist Church, and the Marietta Street Baptist Church, is located at 114 North Marietta Street in Excelsior Springs, Clay County, Missouri. The building is on a corner lot, bounded on the north by West Excelsior Street and on the south by an alley. The church is a half-block north of West Broadway, the town's main business street in the town's original commercial district. A fence separates the property from the building to the west. There is little lawn as the front (east) steps meet the sidewalk, and the building occupies most of the lot. The building does not reflect a clear architectural style; instead, it combines elements of the Gothic Revival style with elements that perhaps suggest the Spanish Colonial Revival style.

The original 1903 building was in the Gothic Revival style. Built in 1903 by J. M. Courtney, the east façade of the building faced North Marietta Street and the north façade faced Excelsior Street near the downtown part of the city.¹ The red brick building sat on a raised limestone foundation. The dominant features of the building were the pavilion towers of unequal heights on the north and south ends of the east façade, and the Gothic arched stained glass windows on the east, north and south facades (illustration 1).²

The 1903 building served until February 17, 1947, when a fire destroyed much of the interior of the building and the stained glass windows.³ Although the church considered demolishing the remains and erecting a new building, a decision was made to hire Kansas City architect Robin A. Walker to design a building that would use the existing exterior walls and create an addition to the west.⁴

Walker's design retained the original cross gable plan, the Gothic arched fenestration, and the pavilions. New stained glass windows were installed in memory of former members or in honor of members and church organizations. The pavilions were made equal in height, and new towers were built. The towers are smaller than the pavilions, are supported by buttresses, and surrounded with a decorative parapet along the edge of the tower. A floral design accents the

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**First Methodist Church
Clay County, MO**

roofline of each tower. The top of each tower is accented with a diamond shaped finial. The towers feature Gothic arched windows with small panes (illustration 2, photos 1,2,3,4).

On the east façade of the building, the central window was replaced by a central entrance. The original Gothic arched fenestration was retained, but the arched portion of the original central window now serves as a transom over a double-door entrance. A porch roof covers the doorway. The doorway is flanked on either side by Gothic arched stained glass windows. A round topped cupola reminiscent of the Spanish Colonial bell towers accents the center of the gabled roof. The entrance on the north pavilion was made into a window to match the window on the south pavilion. The asymmetrical appearance of the 1903 building was made symmetrical by these changes (illustration 3, photo 1,3,4).

The north façade retains the original fenestration with Gothic arched windows. The window on the north pavilion was made into a doorway with a porch roof to protect the entrance (illustration 3, photo 5). A segmental arched window is on the original rear part of the north façade.

The south façade retains its original fenestration, with Gothic style windows centered under the gable roof. A chimney was added in the area to the west of the original gable (photo 6).

The addition to the west of the building is utilitarian, featuring metal window frames and awning windows with six lights. On the north façade of the addition, a doorway covered with a porch allows access into the classroom and office area. Four bays are spaced evenly along the addition, with a window, a set of steps to the doorway, and two windows on the basement level. A window, the door, and two windows are on the first story. Four windows are on the second story (photo 5).

The west façade of the addition features five bays, asymmetrically arranged. On the first story, a central doorway covered by a long porch roof is centered on the façade, with a six-light metal awning window above it and a similar window above that. On either side of the central bay are bays with six-light metal awning windows marking the first and second stories. On the south side of this bay is a six-light, metal awning window on the second story, and a pair of small one-over one windows on the first story. On the north side of this bay is a six-light metal awning window on the second story and a pair of small, one-over-one windows on the first story. On the ground floor, single light windows allow light to the basement (photo 8).

The south façade of the addition is inset and allows a parking space next to the building. On the south façade of the addition are four bays, with two windows, a doorway to an iron fire escape, and a window on the second floor. On the first floor are two windows, an expanse of wall under the fire escape door above, and a window of the first story (photo 7).

The roof pitch of the addition is slightly less steep than that of the rear of the original building, marking the location of the addition in relation to the original building (photo 5).

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**First Methodist Church
Clay County, MO**

According to an article in the Excelsior Springs Daily Standard, the exterior of the building was originally covered with Stone-Kote, a concrete product applied like stucco and textured and incised to resemble roughly cut stone blocks (photo 1,9).⁵ The Stone-Kote was applied to give the appearance of quoins at the corners (photo 10). One photograph of the church shows the Stone-Kote resembling vari-colored cut blocks (illustration 4), but church historian Margaret Brown, who has been a member of the church since 1946, remembers that the existing surface was what was installed when the building was rebuilt. Brown notes that the Stone Kote was originally painted beige.⁶

Interior

The narthex opens off the front door on the east side of the building. In the pavilion on the south end of the narthex is an area for hanging coats. In the pavilion on the north end of the narthex is an area with stairs to the basement and to the balcony. The stained glass windows in the narthex are particularly striking. The transom window is in shades of mauve, blue, and pale yellow glass. The windows on either side of the doorway honor former members (photo 4). The windows on the north and south pavilion feature the cross and crown motif popular in church windows and representing the crown in heaven awaiting those who devote themselves to Christ.

The interior of the building follows the Akron Plan, a way of designing church interiors with auditorium areas that could be partitioned off for Sunday School classrooms.⁷ The auditorium opens from the narthex. On both the north and south sides of the auditorium are rooms separated from the auditorium by partitions approximately three feet tall. Sliding partitions could be used to close these areas from the auditorium. These areas were planned for classroom space when the partitions were closed and could be used with the partitions open for overflow seating if the auditorium was full.⁸ The south wall of the south room features striking stained glass windows, as does the north wall of the north room. The center window features a central panel with a cross and side panels with dogwood flowers, symbolic of the crucifixion of Christ (photos 12, 13, 14).

A balcony spans the area above the narthex (photo 13). Additional classroom or overflow seating occupies the balcony area above the portioned classrooms on the first floor. These areas are partially open to the auditorium but have no sliding partitions (photos 14, 15).

On each side of the auditorium were panels holding backlit stained glass pieces. One illustrated the Last Supper and the other illustrated Christ in Gethsemane. The spaces behind the panels hold HVAC duct work. These panels are now covered, one with clear glass and one with plywood (photo 15).

The chancel area of the auditorium features a coved ceiling. The west wall of the chancel features an inset Gothic arched choir seating area, now highlighted by a plaque of a cross. In front of the choir area is the chancel, separated from the auditorium by an altar rail and a lectern

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on the south and a pulpit on the north of the center opening in the altar rail. Gothic arched doorways leading to the addition are on either side of the choir area. Above the doorways, Gothic arched screens concealed the works of the electric organ. The light fixtures in the auditorium are hanging hexagonal brass fixtures with frosted glass between the brass framework (photo 16).

Between 1910 and 1912, the congregation began to excavate a basement under the building to create more Sunday School classrooms and a fellowship hall. After a storm damaged the building, work on the basement was halted and money in the building fund was used to repair the building. The basement was completed in 1926.⁹ The basement is now used as a fellowship hall and dining area.

The exterior of the building has changed little since its construction in 1948. The interior of the church retains its integrity, despite water damage to the plaster walls.

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Notes for Section 7

¹ *One Hundredth Anniversary, 1984-1994* (Excelsior Springs, MO: First United Methodist Church, 1984), 11, pamphlet on file at the Excelsior Springs Museum.

² Photograph of 1903 church on file at Excelsior Springs Museum.

³ "Methodist Church Fire Loss is Over \$25,000," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 20 February 1947.

⁴ "Completion of Church Nears," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 21 April 1948.

⁵ "Completion of Church Nears," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 21 April 1948. Frank W. Walker, *The Building Estimator's Reference Book*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Frank R. Walker, 1918); photograph on file at Excelsior Springs Museum.

⁶ Photograph on file at Excelsior Springs Museum; Margaret Brown correspondence with Rhonda Chalfant.

⁷ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 176-177.

⁸ "Completion of Church Nears," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 21 April 1948.

⁹ *Dedicatory Service, The Methodist Church* (Excelsior Springs, MO: privately printed, 1954), 12, pamphlet on file at Excelsior Springs Museum.

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First Methodist Church Clay County, MO

Summary: The First Methodist Episcopal Church building at 114 North Marietta, Excelsior Springs, Clay County, Missouri, is locally significant under Criterion C, ARCHITECTURE. Built in 1948, it was designed by Robin A. Walker, a Kansas City architect known primarily for the churches he designed in the Kansas City area and in other locations throughout Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa. Though constructed and used for religious purposes, the property meets Criterion Consideration A because it derives its significance from its design. The building demonstrates Walker's skills as a church architect, especially his ability to creatively re-use portions of an earlier building. Walker's design used the walls and fenestration of a 1903 building whose roof and interior were destroyed by fire. The building is in a transitional style using primarily the Gothic Revival style with some elements that are reminiscent of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. Also noteworthy is the use of a modified Akron Plan, featuring flexible, interchangeable spaces for Sunday School classrooms and worship. The Akron Plan is a building tradition introduced in 1868 in the First Methodist Church in Akron, Ohio and was an uncommon choice for mid-twentieth century church designs.¹ The period of significance, 1948, is the date when the remodeled building was constructed. The building, which its owners plan to use as a performance space and art gallery, retains its integrity.

Significance: The First Methodist Church is located at 114 North Marietta Street, Excelsior Springs, Clay County, Missouri. Excelsior Springs is a small town (population approximately 11,000) located about thirty miles northeast of Kansas City.

Excelsior Springs, Missouri, was surveyed and platted in 1880 at the site of a number of mineral springs near two forks of the Fishing River. One spring had been discovered during the early 1840s by a Mormon immigrant who farmed the area and recognized the mineral spring which the locals called "copperas water," according to the *History of Clay County*.² Several stories from the local folklore have been preserved and offer other explanations of the first use and exploitation of the springs. These stories identify men harvesting wheat or hunting in the 1880s as the discoverers of one of the springs, which they drank from and, noticing its mineral taste, suggested the spring had medicinal qualities. An African American man identified in some accounts as Travis Mellion used the water, and he or his daughter was cured of scrofula in a few weeks. Others in the neighborhood followed his example.³ Still another printed story seeks to give credibility to the springs' healing powers by suggesting that the springs were discovered with the help of an Indian named Wapoo, whose wounds were healed by washing in the iron water of the springs and who shared his secret with the white men.⁴

Whatever the story of the discovery of the springs' medicinal powers, they were exploited by the Rev. Dr. J. V. B. Flack, a minister from Missouri City, Missouri, who heard of the cures and sent samples of the water to chemists Wright and Merrill in St. Louis. Their analysis found the waters contained iron manganese, soda bicarbonate, sulphur, saline, and lithia. The Rev. Flack began advertising the springs, and encouraged A. W. Wyman, owner of the land on which the springs were located, to lay out a town. County surveyor Thomas Benton Rogers platted the town in

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September 1880. In its early years, much of the town's population lived in tents or shanties along the hills near the springs. In February 1881, the town was incorporated, and in March, the town acquired a post office and the name Viginti. Two years later the name of the town was changed to Excelsior Springs.⁵

Excelsior Springs existed primarily as a tourist site catering to the visitors who came to take the waters. Early visitor Dr. J. J. Gaines remembers riding to the springs in a lumber wagon, taking a picnic lunch, and collecting water in fruit jars and jugs from the five gallon keg buried in the clay to catch the flow of water from the springs. Later visitors were able to ride the stage coach to the town and stay in the hotels that soon opened.⁶ In 1887, the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad line from Kansas City reached Excelsior Springs, increasing the number of tourists and the number of permanent residents whose businesses served the tourist trade.⁷

The *History of Clay County* identified four separate springs—the Excelsior, the Saratoga, the Relief, and the Empire—each with water containing a different combination of minerals including iron, alumina, and magnesia. These waters were said to be able to cure everything from “rheumatism” to “deranged liver” to “female complaint.”⁸ By 1930, twenty springs had been identified and the town had become a major resort. Excelsior Springs then had two sanitariums, a federal government hospital, several bathhouses, massage parlors, and recreation facilities with dancing, tennis, movies, bowling, fishing, and golf.⁹

In 1888, the Methodist congregation of Excelsior Springs erected a frame building at the corner of Concourse Avenue and Kansas City Avenue. The building had no separate Sunday School classrooms; instead, classes met in small groups in various parts of the auditorium.¹⁰ By the first years of the twentieth century, the congregation realized it had outgrown the building, and needed more space for worship as well as more and better arranged space in which to hold Sunday School classes.¹¹ Fortunately, an opportunity for a new building came in 1903.

The Sunday School had originally begun in England and later in the United States as a way of teaching literacy by teaching working children to read scripture and as a way to inculcate appropriate Christian behavior to lower class children.¹² By the mid-nineteenth century, the Sunday School was a firmly established part of evangelical Christian churches, providing an extension of home instruction in scripture and Christian morality to the children of church members. Its goals had expanded to include teaching denominational doctrine and nurturing Christian development and Biblical knowledge in all children. Sunday School was an important part of the Methodist Church's mission.¹³

The position of the community as a health resort is relevant to the building of the Mt. Zion Methodist Church in 1903. A visitor to the Excelsior Springs' resort, A. E. Humphreys of Denver, Colorado, provided the means to build the 1903 church. Humphreys had become a friend of Methodist pastor, the Rev. E. J. Spencer, and donated the money for the purchase of a building

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lot at the corner of West Excelsior Street and North Marietta Street. After this gift, the Rev. Spencer began collecting money to erect the building in honor of Mr. Humphreys. Humphreys instead asked that the church honor his mother, Mrs. Eleanor A. Humphreys. The church was named Mt. Zion Methodist Church, in honor of Mrs. Humphreys and the church she attended. Church histories do not indicate where Mrs. Humphreys' church was located.¹⁴

The building, built by local contractor J. M. Courtney, was completed in 1903, and included the bell from the earlier building.¹⁵ The red brick, Gothic style building costing \$6500 featured Gothic arched windows, corner pavilions topped with asymmetrical towers with pyramid roofs, and corner entrances (illustration 1). It boasted a steam heating system that kept the building comfortable throughout, a pipe organ purchased by the ladies of the church, and stained glass windows, including one identifying the church as Mt. Zion Methodist Church.¹⁶

On February 17, 1947, tragedy struck the church when its building partially burned. According to the Excelsior Springs Daily Standard, police on regular rounds discovered the fire at 4:38 a.m. and summoned the Excelsior Springs Fire Department. Dense smoke made fighting the fire difficult, but eventually the fire was extinguished, as was a small secondary fire. The fire had started in the wiring of the electric pipe organ, which burned through the floor and fell into the basement. Fire, heat, smoke and water damaged the interior of the church, ruining most of the furnishings and breaking the stained glass windows. Damages, mostly covered by insurance, totaled approximately \$25,000.¹⁷

The church board met, agreed to hold worship services at the Beyer Theater, and began to discuss whether to rebuild the existing building or to build a new one. On February 20, 1947, the *Daily Standard* reported that church architect E. F. Jansson of Chicago would visit Excelsior Springs, survey the site, and present "definite plans" for a new building.¹⁸ On March 7, the *Daily Standard* reported that the administrative board of the church voted to begin immediate plans to raise money for the \$100,000 building.¹⁹ On March 11, the *Daily Standard* printed a sketch of his proposal, a native stone building facing North Marietta Street but covering the lot between Excelsior Street and Broadway Street. The proposed building was L-shaped, with a gabled auditorium at the north (at the site of the original building) connected to a smaller gabled wing by an arcaded wing (illustration 6).²⁰

Although people gathering to watch the fire had made donations to the church's building fund, apparently adequate funds were not available for the construction of the building Jansson proposed.²¹ The nation was experiencing a recession following World War II. Both the economic strains of the Great Depression and the rationing of gasoline and tires during the war likely caused money shortages in towns like Excelsior Springs that had tourism as the basis of their economy. As a result of financial strains, the building committee voted to hire architect Robin A. Walker of Kansas City to present plans at a lower cost for a renovation of the existing building and an addition to the west.²² Even after work began, the building committee had to

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ask repeatedly in local newspapers for funds.²³

Robin A. Walker was born in 1884 in Shelton, Nebraska, and studied architecture under George Berlinghof at Lincoln, Nebraska. He came to Kansas City in 1907, and continued his studies in Kansas City (illustration 7). He joined the firm of Frederick C. Gunn, a prominent Kansas City architect who worked throughout the western states. In 1924, Walker was living and working in Eldorado, Kansas. While living in Kansas, he was named poet laureate of the state. Walker published many poems in the *Kansas City Star*.²⁴ Walker returned to Kansas City where he worked as an architect. In 1931, he designed Fire Station # 11 at 2033 Vine in Kansas City, now listed in the Kansas City Register of Historic Places.²⁵ At the time of his death he lived at 7323 Brooklyn Avenue and maintained offices in the 1200 block of Walnut. Although he built offices and schools, Walker specialized in designing churches; his 14 column-inch obituary in the *Kansas City Star* identifies him as a "church architect here for many years" and focuses on the range of his work in Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa. He designed churches in Versailles, Columbia, Richmond, Marshall, Higginsville, Windsor, Chillicothe, Waverly, Craig, Carrolton, Slater, Kansas City, and Excelsior Springs, Missouri, as well as in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Greensburg, Kansas.²⁶

Walker's churches in the Kansas City area include Central Christian Church, the First Baptist Church of North Kansas City, the Armour Heights Church, the Temple Baptist Church, the Ninth Church of Christ, Scientist, and the Baptist Church of Grandview. At the time of his death in 1950, four of his designs were currently under construction in the Kansas City area.²⁷

Designing a church presents special challenges for an architect. First, the building must accommodate adults as well as children and youth, and serve several functions, including public worship, education, fellowship, shared meals, and social time. In addition, many congregations have a deeply imbedded notion of what a church ought to look like, reflecting traditional Christian symbolism such as the cross, but also including such architectural details as a steeple, stained glass windows, Gothic arches, and placement of the pulpit and altar. In fact, editor Vernon Reed, writing in the *Midwest Architect*, comments that designing church buildings is especially difficult because the architect must balance what Reed calls the "wispy design considerations" and "human foibles" with the very practical needs of seating, traffic flow, spatial arrangement, lighting, acoustics, and mechanical systems.²⁸ To further complicate the architect's task, he or she must work within the amount of money specified by the budget committee.

Walker's task in designing the church in Excelsior Springs using the remaining walls of the fire damaged building was no doubt difficult. The exterior walls of the building were sound, but needed a new and updated appearance. The church also needed improved mechanical systems that could take advantage of new technology. In addition, the interior of the church was destroyed. Some members of the congregation saw the need for a larger auditorium to accommodate a larger congregation, and the building committee agreed that additional classroom

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**First Methodist Church
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space was needed.²⁹

During the spring of 1947, work proceeded on the building. Walker and construction foreman Forrest Sisk supervised preparatory work, which included removing debris from the fire and clearing the site.³⁰ The building committee implored people to give to the building fund and advertised for bids for various aspects of the rebuilding, and postponed opening of the bids to allow local contractors plenty of time to submit bids.³¹ Contracts were signed in July 1947, and Richard Knipp Construction Company of Columbia, Missouri, was chosen as builder.³² The cornerstone was laid on July 21, 1947, in a ceremony by the Clay County A. F. & A.M. Lodge No. 207 and various ministers and church officials.³³ The name of the church was changed to First Methodist Church.

Although some of Walker's works—Fire Station No. 11 and the Versailles Baptist Church—were in the Art Deco style, Walker chose not to use that style for this building.³⁴ Instead, in designing the Excelsior Springs church, he used elements of the existing brick shell of the 1903 building. He developed a style that combined elements of the Gothic Revival style, which in many people's minds typified what a church should look like, with elements such as the central faux bell tower that may evoke stylistic associations with the Spanish Colonial Revival style. This style was popular in the County Club Plaza area of Kansas City, through which Walker probably drove when commuting from his office to his home.³⁵

Walker's design gave the building a new and updated look. Walker removed the asymmetrical towers from the building and replaced them with towers of identical height mounted on the corner pavilions of the east façade. The towers are smaller than the pavilions, and are accented with buttresses and decorative embellishments. Walker also added a central faux bell tower topped with a finial and accented with dentils at the peak of the gable. Walker removed the pavilion entrances and created a central entrance. He used the existing Gothic arched fenestration of the original building and added Gothic arched windows to replace the doors in the pavilions. Walker also used the cruciform gable roof line of the existing building. When the building was completed, it was praised by the *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard* as "the city's most modern church structure." The press identified the style as "modern Gothic architecture," and praised the "distinctive towers" as part of the design (illustrations 2, 3).³⁶

Walker successfully dealt with the mechanical systems by adding a forced air furnace system to supplement the steam radiator system. He added air conditioning. Modern technical features included a public address system with earphones for the hearing impaired, electrical chimes, and a new organ. The basement provided a banquet room capable of seating 250 people, a modern kitchen, and Sunday School classrooms in addition to those in the auditorium and in the building addition to the west of the auditorium.³⁷

Walker dealt with congregational concerns about auditorium seating and classroom space by

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using a modified Akron Plan auditorium. The *Daily Standard* described the auditorium as having seating for three hundred, with additional seating for two hundred in the balcony and the four alcove classrooms, two on each side of the auditorium, one upstairs and one downstairs. The downstairs classrooms were separated from the auditorium by sliding panels.³⁸

The Akron Plan was not a typical element of mid-twentieth century church design. However, Walker's introduction of the Akron Plan featured in the auditorium demonstrated his strong background in church design and his skill in meeting the functional needs of a congregation encumbered both by budget concerns and by the space limitations of the existing brick shell of the 1903 church. He drew upon a key element of the historic Akron Plan—the utilitarian manipulation of space described by Kilde as a solution to the congregation's need for additional Sunday School classrooms as well as for increased seating for worship services.³⁹ To manipulate the space, Walker employed a traditional Akron Plan device, moveable partition walls, that served to transform the space from one purpose to another. Classroom space was created when sliding partitions were pulled down to join two fixed low partitions (about three feet high) that ran along the sides of the auditorium. When the sliding partitions were recessed, the classroom space reverted to congregational seating. Classroom space and congregational seating were further increased through introduction of another vestigial element of the historic Akron Plan—use of a balcony along the east wall and the use of partially opened classrooms along the upper portion of the north and south walls.⁴⁰

In his later years, Walker seems to have developed a style of church architecture that combined Gothic Revival style with elements that suggest the Spanish Colonial Revival style such as domed cupolas, faux bell towers, and rounded buttress. Within two years of the completion of the First Methodist Church in Excelsior Springs in 1948, Walker was commissioned to design several more church buildings. Blueprints for the Central Christian Church in Kansas City show a building with Gothic Revival elements such as a crenellated tower supporting a steeple and Gothic arched windows; the building also has an interesting domed cupola tower and rounded buttresses typical of the Spanish Colonial Revival style (illustrations 8, 9).⁴¹ Blueprints for the Christian Science Church at 27th Street and Highland Avenue in Kansas City show Gothic Revival elements including a crenellated tower supporting a steeple, a crenellated pediment, and a circular art glass window. The building also uses Spanish Colonial Revival elements such as a “vaguely Moorish” doorway and a Spanish Colonial Revival style cupola (illustrations 10, 11).⁴² These two churches were being built when Walker died at the age of 66, so he was perhaps denied the opportunity to become more well known for his use of this style.⁴³

The building has suffered some deterioration, including fallen plaster and delaminated Stone-Kote, as a result of being vacant. However, the building is usable and retains its integrity. A local community theatre group wants to purchase the building for use as performing and gallery space.

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¹ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 176-179.

²

² *History of Clay County* (Indianapolis: National Historical Co., 1885), 384.

³ *Excelsior Springs: America's Haven of Health* (Excelsior Springs, MO: Chamber of Commerce, 1930), pamphlet on file at the State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

⁴ *Wapoo: Keeper of the Springs* (Excelsior Springs, MO: privately printed, n.d), passim, pamphlet on file at the State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

⁵ *Clay County Missouri Centennial Souvenir* (Liberty, MO, Liberty Tribune, 1922) 66, pamphlet on file at the Excelsior Springs Museum.

⁶ *Clay County Missouri Centennial Souvenir*, 66-67.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ *History of Clay County*, 384.

⁹ *Clay County Centennial Souvenir*, 66-67.

¹⁰ *Dedicatory Service: The Methodist Church* (Excelsior Springs, MO: The Methodist Church, 1954), 11, pamphlet on file at the Excelsior Springs Museum.

¹¹ *First United Methodist Church Directory* (Hollywood, CA: J. Frank and Sons, 1978), 3.

¹² Anne Boylan, *Sunday School* (New Haven: Yale, 1988), 164.

¹³ Boylan, 164-165; William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 227-228.

¹⁴ *One Hundredth Anniversary, 1884-1984*, 11.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *First United Methodist Church Directory*, 3; *One Hundredth Anniversary, 1884-1984*, 12-13.

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¹⁷ "Methodist Church Fire Loss is Over \$25,000," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 18 February 1947.

¹⁸ "New Methodist Church Will Be Built in City," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 20 February 1947.

¹⁹ "\$100,000 Church is Planned," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 7 March 1947.

²⁰ "Sketch of Proposed \$100,000 First Methodist Church," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 11 March 1947.

²¹ "Methodist Church Fire Loss is Over \$25,000," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 18 February 1947; *One Hundredth Anniversary, 1884-1984*, 14.

²² "Completion of Church Nears," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 21 April 1948.

²³ "Rebuilding of Church Begins," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 16 May 1947; "Contract is Signed for Church," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 10 July 1947; "Delay Letting Contract for Church Work," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 19 June 1947.

²⁴ "Robin A. Walker, Poet Laureate of Kansas," *Kansas City Star*, 19 April 1924.

²⁵ "Kansas City Committee Record, 090156," 25 March 2009, Kansas City Office of City Clerk <http://cityclerk.kcmo.org/LiveWeb/Meetings/Committee_Minutes>, accessed May 2009.

²⁶ "Robin A. Walker Dies," *Kansas City Star*, 11 August 1950.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Vernon Reed, "architect must play assimilator role in designing religious buildings," *Midwest Architect*, Vol. 2, No.1, 1973, 3.

²⁹ *One Hundredth Anniversary, 1884-1984*, 14.

³⁰ "Rebuilding of Church Begins" *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 16 May 1947.

³¹ "Contract is Signed for Church," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 10 July 1947; "Delay Letting Contract for Church Work," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, June 19, 1947; "Bids are Requested," *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, June 20, 1947.

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³²“Contract is Signed for Church,” *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 10 July 1947.

³³“New Corner Stone is Laid,” 22 July 1947.

³⁴ Raymond Elder, *History from the Past of the Kansas City Fire Department* (n.p.: privately published, 2008); *History of Morgan County* (Versailles, MO: Morgan County Historical Society, 1979), 429.

³⁵William Worley. “The Man Who Gave Us ‘The Plaza Style’ and the Stoplight at Linwood and the Paseo,” *Kanass City Tribune*. <<http://kctribune.com/article.cfm/article+18205>>, accessed October 2008.

³⁶“Completion of Church Nears,” *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 21 April 1948.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹“Completion of Church Nears,” *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 21 April 1948; Kilde, 113-115.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹Blueprints for Central Christian Church at Linwood Boulevard and Cleveland Avenue, on file at Western Missouri Historic Manuscripts, University of Missouri, Kansas City; James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell, “American Houses, Spanish Styles,” *Old House Journal*, <http://www.oldhousejournal.com/American_Houses_Spanish_Styles/magazine/1302>; Mark Bradley, “Mission Style Architecture in California,” <<http://www.articlesnatch.com/Article/Mission-Style-Architecture-in-California/412117>>, accessed October 2008.

⁴²Blueprints for Church Edifice for Christian Science Society at 27th Street and Highland Avenue, on file at Western Missouri Historic Manuscripts, University of Missouri, Kansas City; James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell, “American Houses, Spanish Styles,” *Old House Journal*, <http://www.oldhousejournal.com/American_Houses_Spanish_Styles/magazine/1302>; Mark Bradley, “Mission Style Architecture in California,” <<http://www.articlesnatch.com/Article/Mission-Style-Architecture-in-California/412117>>, accessed October 2008.

⁴³“Robin A. Walker Dies,” *Kansas City Star*, 11 August 1950.

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Photographs

1. Exterior, east façade
2. Tower detail
3. Window detail
4. Window detail
5. North façade
6. South façade
7. South façade
8. West façade
9. Stone-Kote on east façade
10. Stone Kote Quoins
11. Stone-Kote on north façade
12. Window in narthex
13. Interior of auditorium, taken from chancel platform
14. Interior of auditorium taken from north side of auditorium
15. Interior of auditorium taken from south side of auditorium
16. Interior of chancel area taken from east end of auditorium

Photographs taken by Rhonda Chalfant, Ph.D.
Negatives on file with Rhonda Chalfant, Ph.D.

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First Methodist Church. Clay County, MO

Illustration 1: Photo of 1903 building taken in 1930s, on file at Excelsior Springs Museum

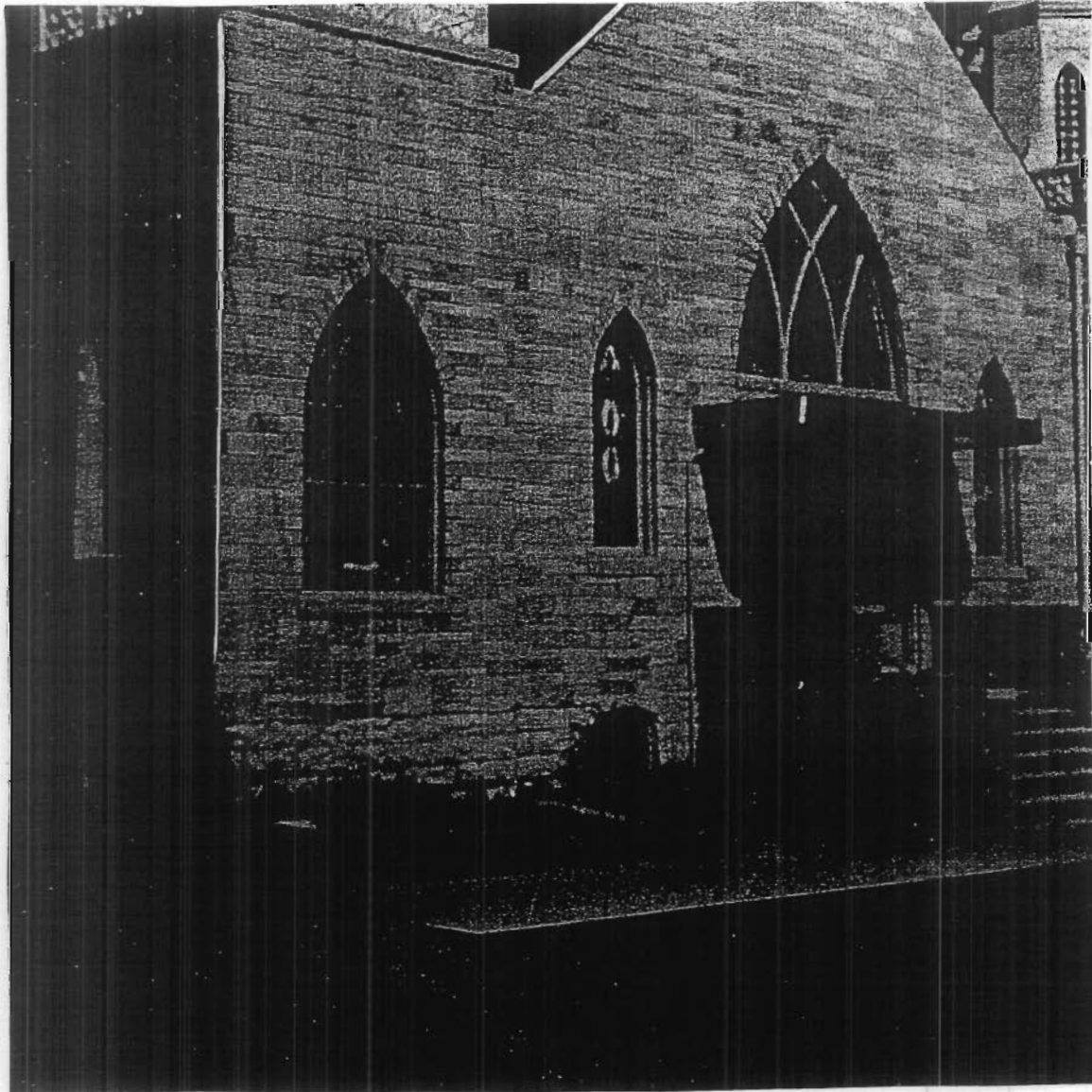


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Illustration 4: Undated photograph of 1948 building, on file at the Excelsior Springs Museum

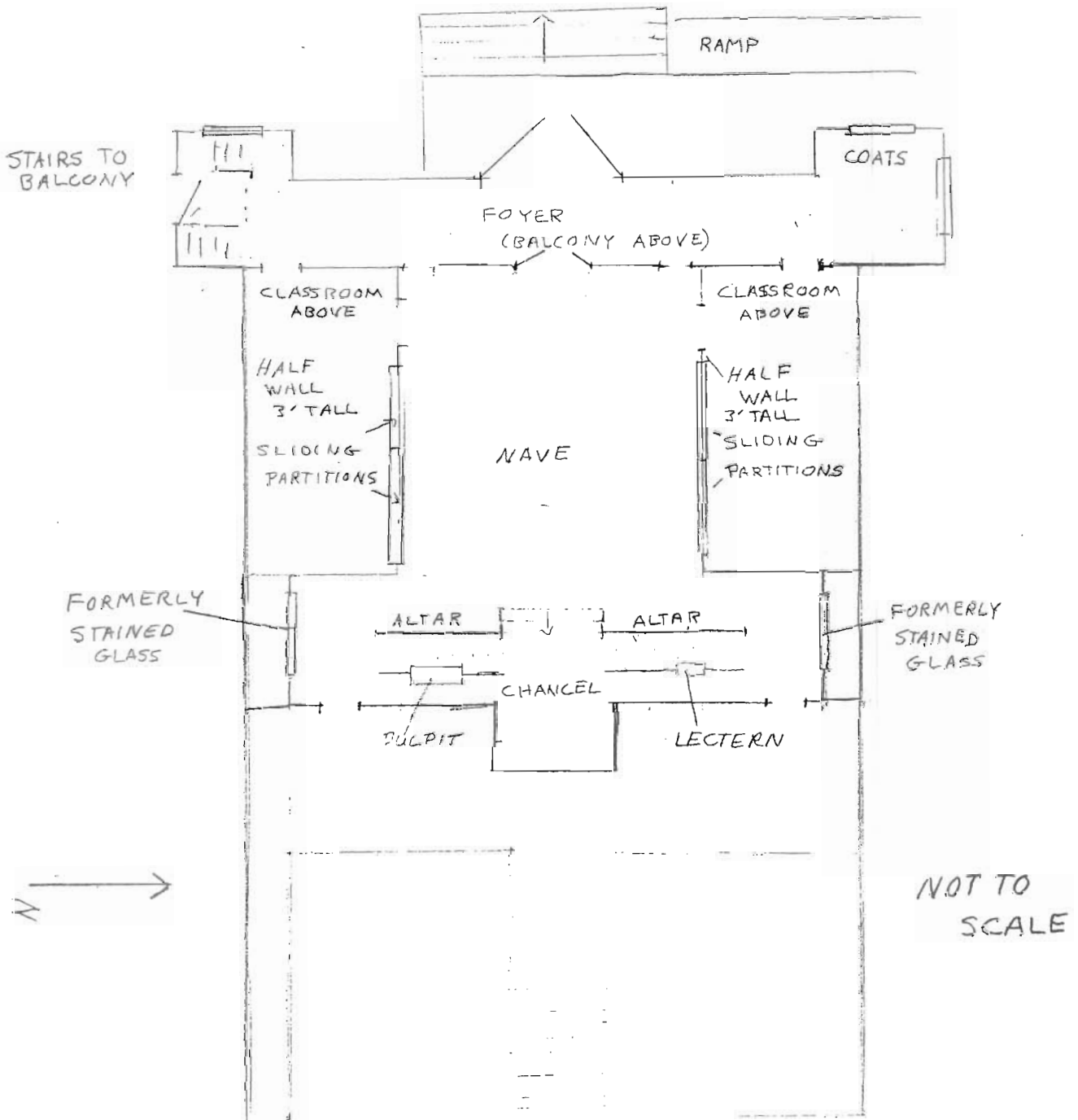


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Illustration 5: floor plan



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Illustration 6: Architect's drawing of proposed building, as shown in *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, 11 March 1947

The Daily Standard

The World's Greatest Newspaper—for Excelsior Springs and the Clay-Ray Area

TUESDAY EVENING, MARCH 11, 1947



Home of the Ten I

Sketch of Proposed \$100,000 First Methodist Church



Shown here is the architect's sketch of the \$100,000 church which the First Methodist congregation plans to construct in Excelsior Springs between Broadway and Excelsior with entrances facing Marietta. To be built of native stone, the church will be a Gothic style edifice, complete with an educational plant, dining hall, large foyer and a worship hall with seating capacity for 400. Looking at the picture, the educational plant will be on the left, just off Broadway; the worship hall to the extreme right, just off Excelsior and extending west to form one portion of the 'L'. Bronze plaques will be placed in the foyer, the doors to which can be seen in the center foreground. The parish and dining hall will be large enough to accommodate various civic gatherings and church officials plan to permit its rental for such activities. A drive to raise funds for the building is planned within the next few weeks. The decision to construct a new building was brought about through the February 17 fire which destroyed the interior of the old structure.

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Illustration 7: Robin A. Walker, as shown in his obituary in the *Kansas City Star*, 11 April 1950



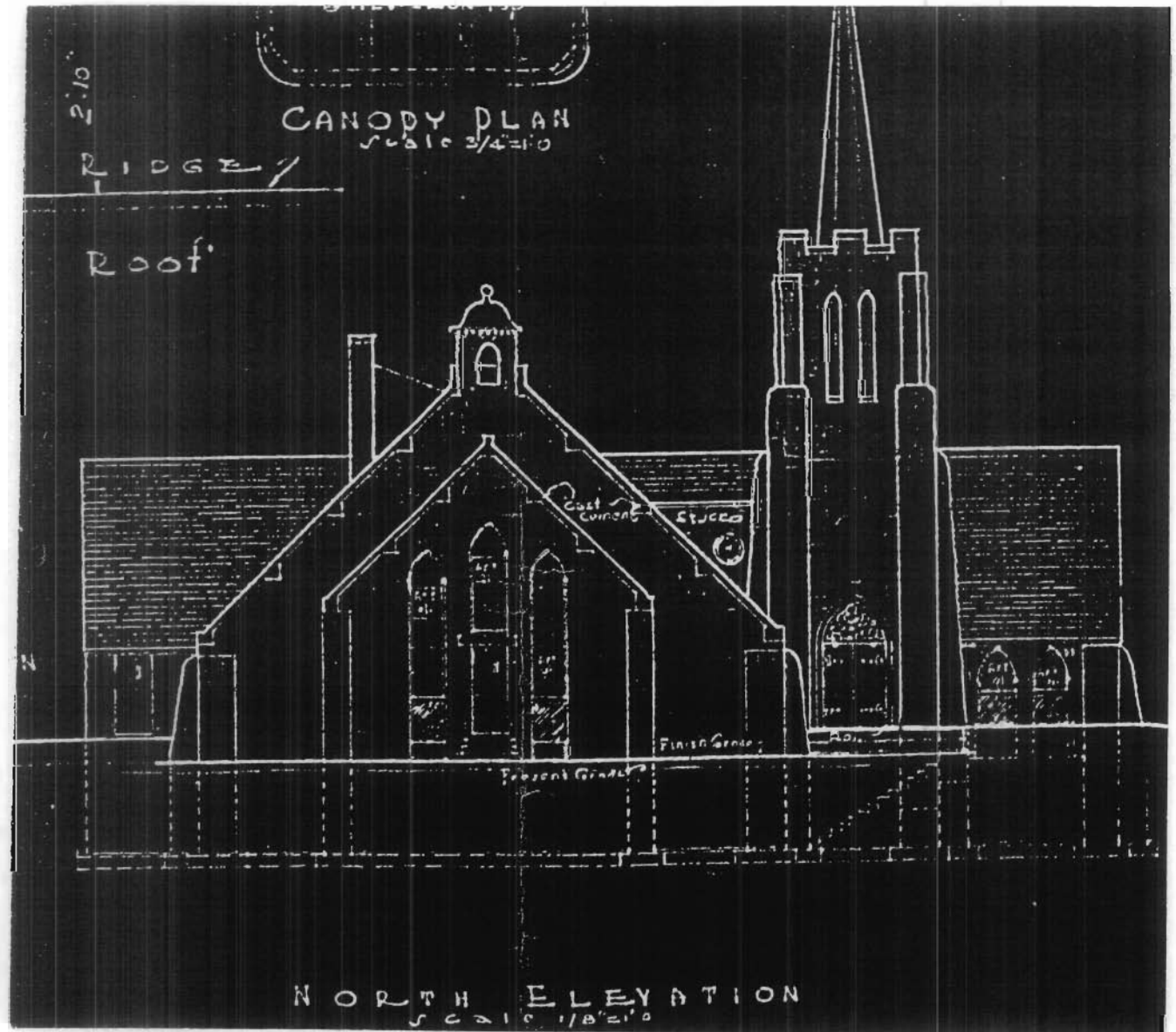
A SPECIALIST IN CHURCH
ARCHITECTURE IS DEAD... ROBIN
A. WALKER.

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First Methodist Church Clay County, MO

Illustration 8: Detail from blueprint of Central Christian Church, Kansas City, Missouri, on file at Western Missouri Historical Manuscripts, University of Missouri, Kansas City

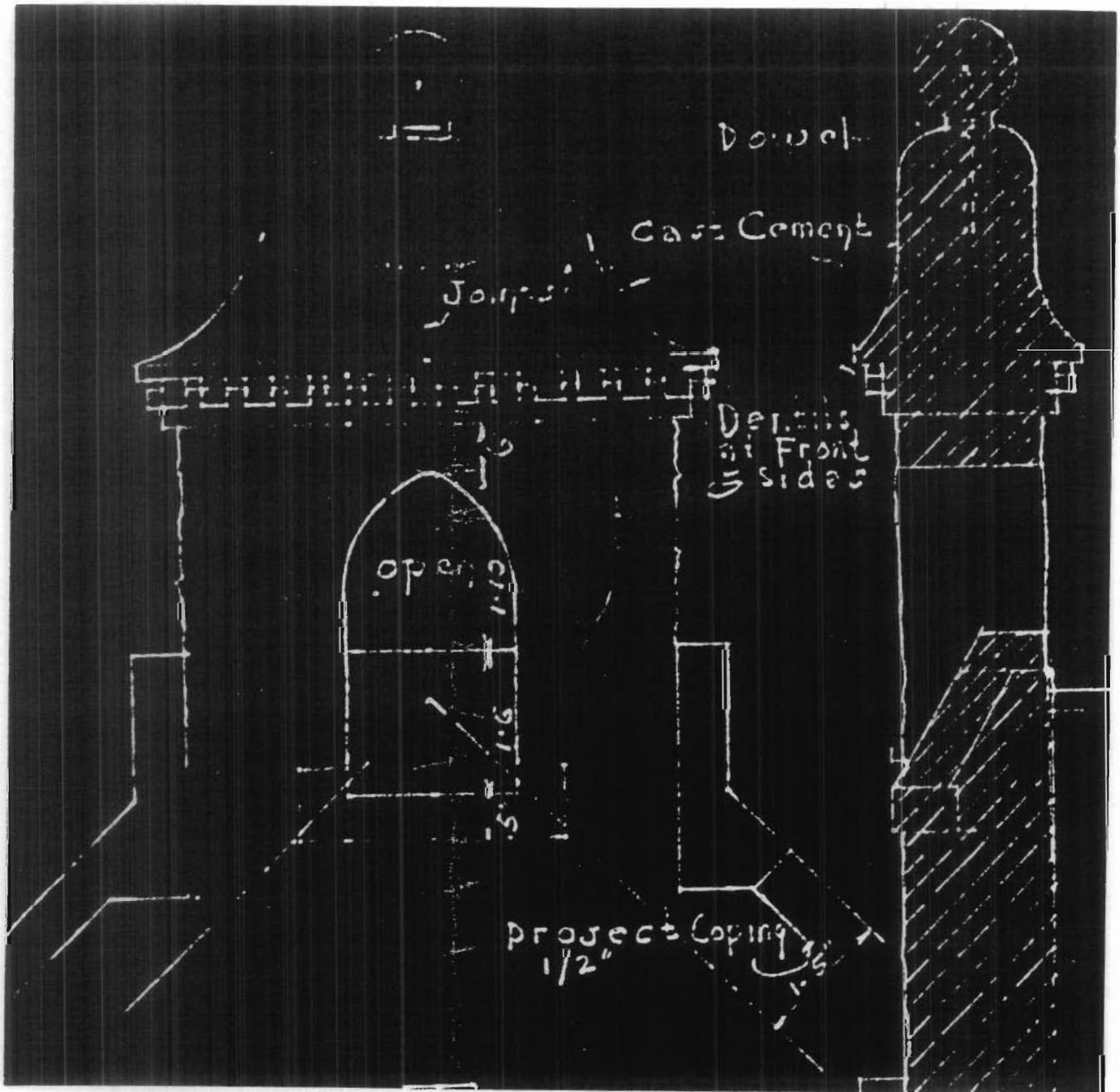


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Illustration 9: Detail from blueprint of Central Christian Church, Kansas City, Missouri, on file at Western Missouri Historical manuscripts, University of Missouri, Kansas City

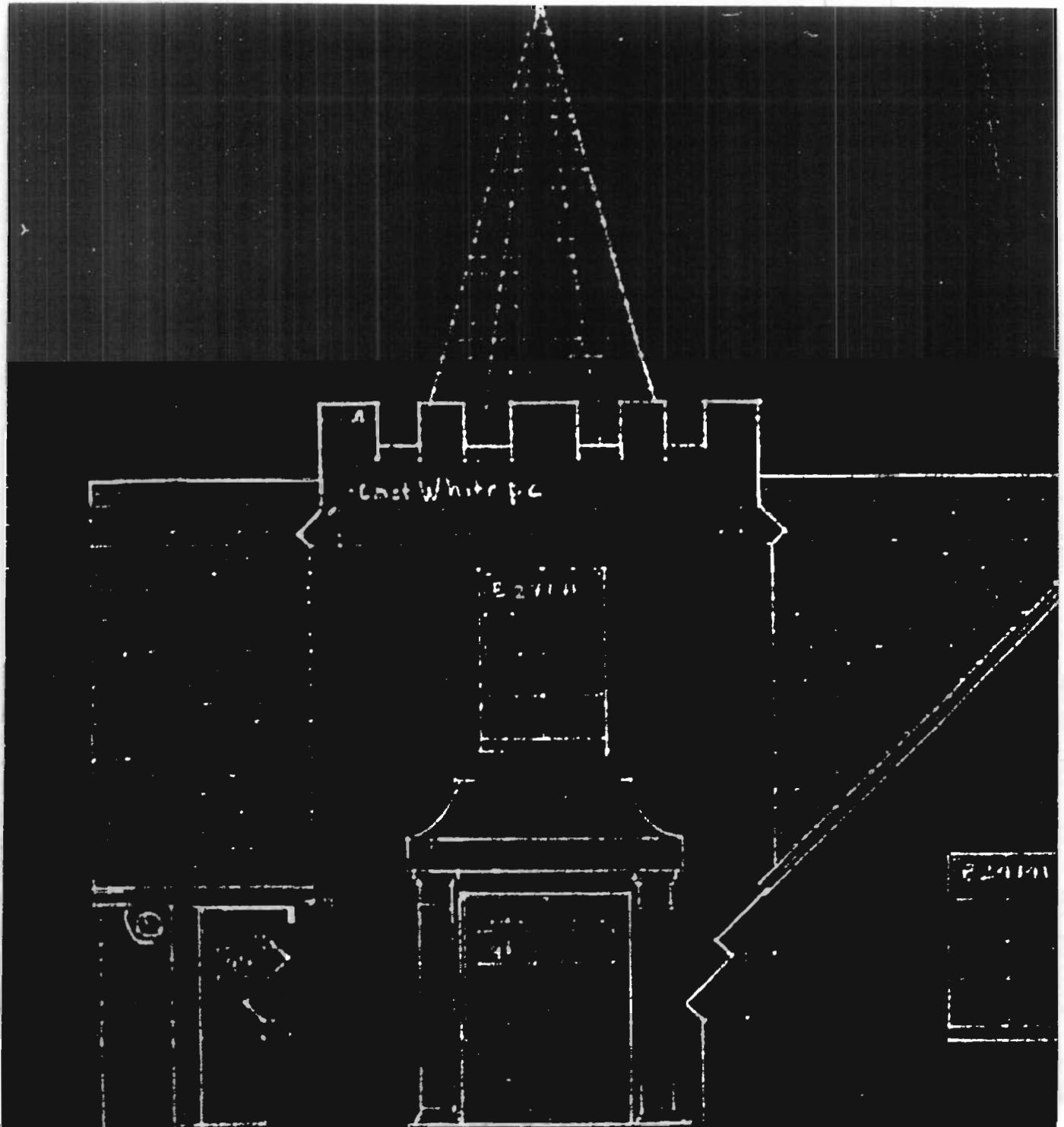


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Illustration 10: Detail from blueprint of Christian Science Church, Kansas City, Missouri, on file at Western Missouri Historical Manuscripts, University of Missouri, Kansas City

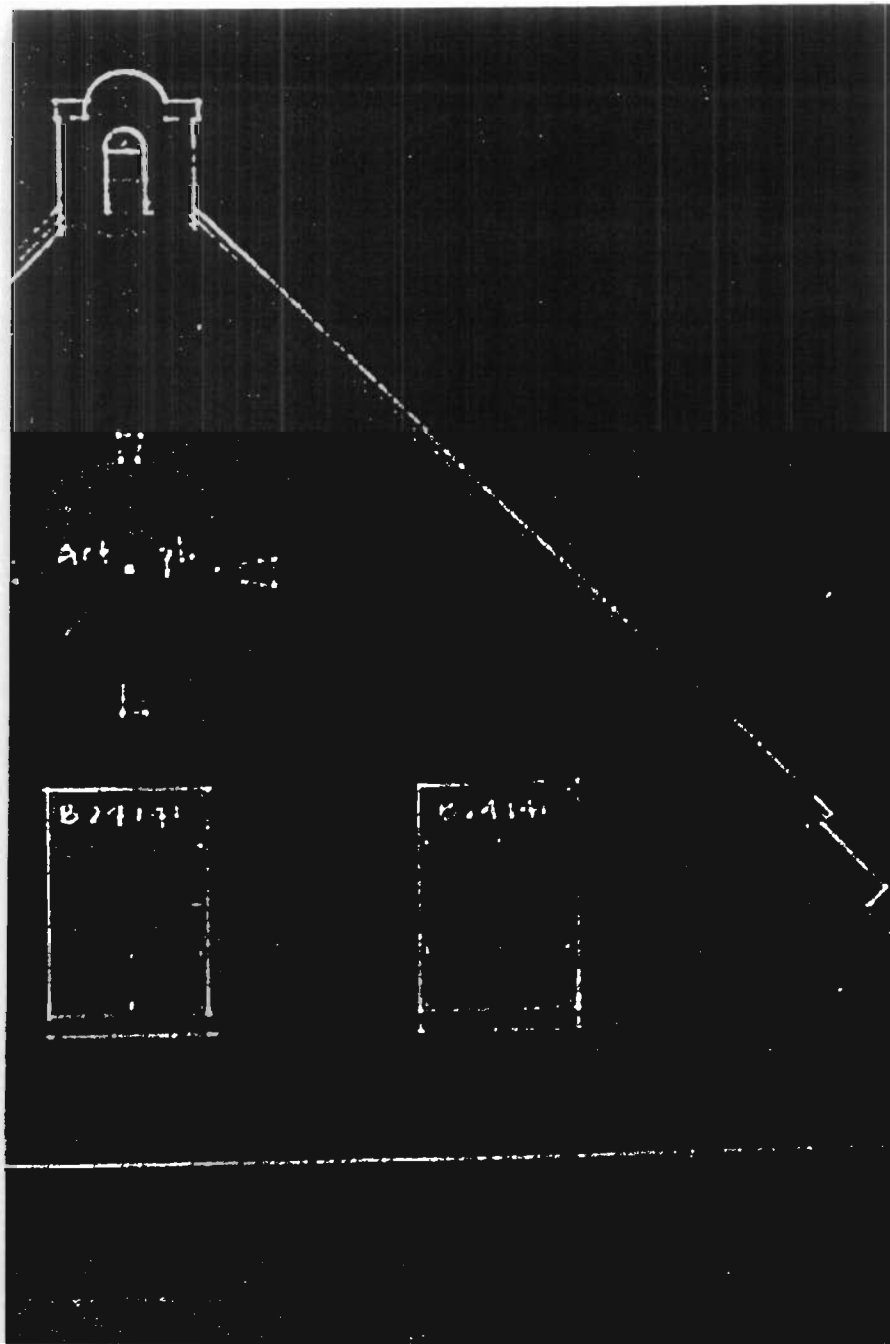


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Illustration 11: Detail from blueprint of Christina Science Church, Kansas City, Missouri, on file at Western Missouri Historical Manuscripts, University of Missouri, Kansas City

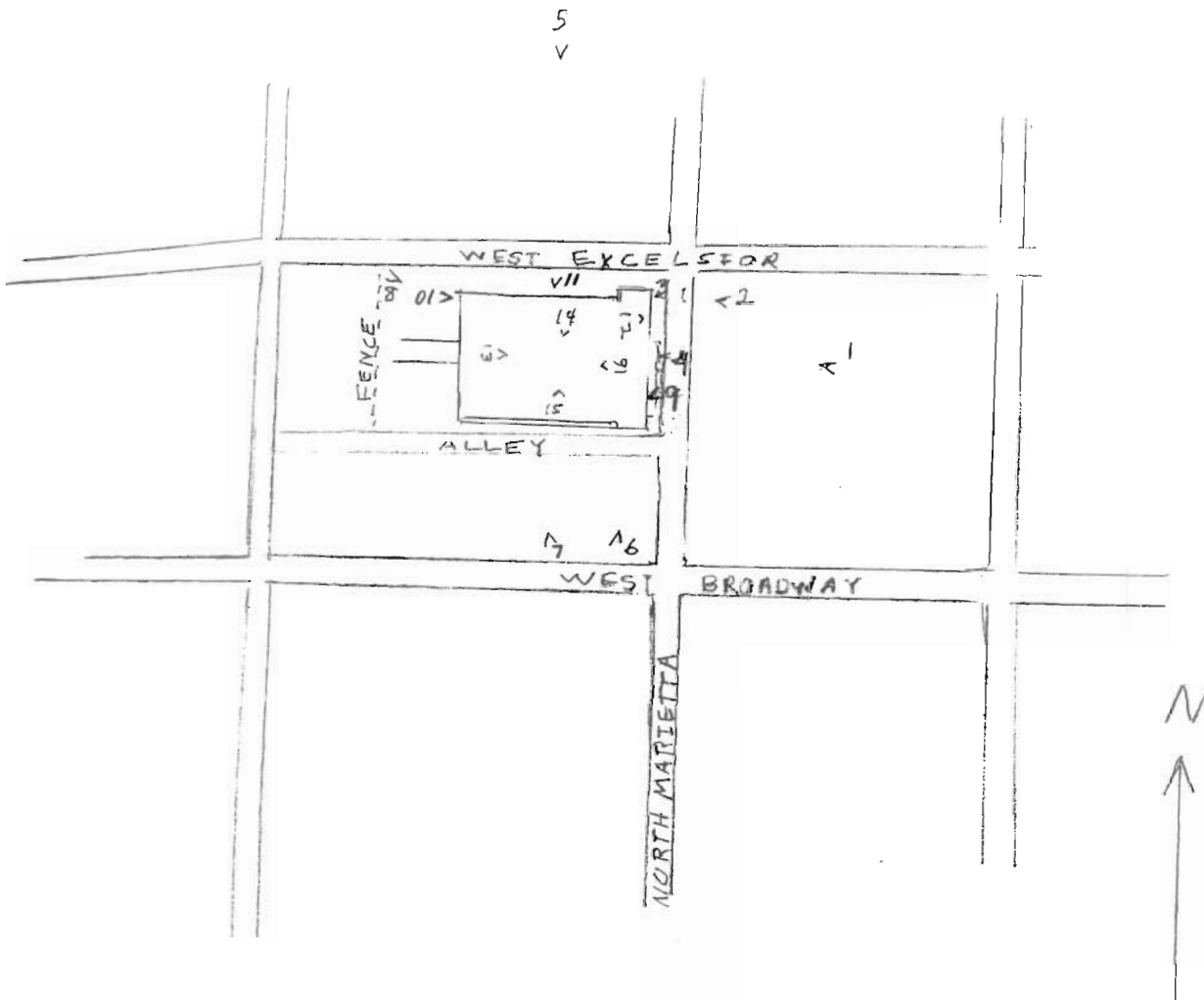


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First Methodist Church.
Clay County, MO

Site plan with key to photographs



NOT TO SCALE

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First
Methodist Church
Clay County
Missouri
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