

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *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 listed in 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 Downer Methodist Episcopal Church

other names/site number Downer United Methodist Church

2. Location

street & number 2226 Fries Mill Road  not for publication

city or town Monroe Township  vicinity

state New Jersey code NJ county Gloucester code 015 zip code 08094

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I 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.

Signature of certifying official [Signature] Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date 2/11/10

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 this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper Edson H. Beall Date of Action 10-14-10

**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	
One	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
One	_____	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**

Zero \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious Facility \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious Facility \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Sandstone \_\_\_\_\_  
 walls Sandstone \_\_\_\_\_  
 roof Slate \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 other \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

**8 Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1886-1900

**Significant Dates**

1886, 1900

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Primary location of additional data**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
Name of Property

Gloucester County, NJ  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 1

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18	495 490	4393 495	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

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

**Boundary Justification**

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

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Sheila K. Koehler, Senior Preservation Specialist (minor revisions by NJHPO, February 2010)  
organization Westfield Architects & Preservation Consultants date July, 2009  
street & number 425 White Horse Pike telephone 856-547-0465  
city or town Haddon Heights state NJ zip code 08035

**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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
street & number 2226 Fries Mill Road telephone 856-881-9420  
city or town Williamstown state NJ zip code 08094

**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 from 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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## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### Summary

The Downer Methodist Episcopal Church, built in 1886 and reconstructed in 1900 after sustaining heavy damage in a fire, is a rectangular, one-story, brownstone and frame Gothic Revival building with pointed arch windows, a steep gable roof, an articulated vestibule under a lower roof, a door hood over concrete steps with curved brownstone cheekwalls on the west elevation, and a three-sided bay on the east elevation. The north, west, and south walls are random-laid brownstone, with ribbon pointing, while the east wall is frame, finished with aluminum over the original clapboard. The eaves have exposed decorative rafter tails and the roof is finished with synthetic slate. The roofs of the front vestibule and door hood are steep gables matching the pitch of the main roof. The raking cornices of the vestibule and door hood have curved bargeboards forming a trefoil outline and bearing on curved brackets. (photograph 1) The rectangular bell tower, rising from the ridges over the sanctuary and vestibule at the west end of the building, is clad with aluminum siding and has two pointed arch openings on each side at the belfry. The bell tower is capped by a pyramidal roof. The interior of the building is finished with varnished wainscoting and plaster on the walls; the ceiling is open truss with modified king post trusses constructed of Virginia Pine. The church is oriented east-west on a level rectangular lot, facing west between the road in front and a cemetery behind, and is surrounded by mature evergreen and deciduous trees and bushes. (photograph 8) The surrounding area is rural and residential. (photograph 9) To the east and north of the church property is a large level lot with mature evergreen and deciduous trees and bushes. A field is located across the street to the west. Houses dot the road to the north and south, including the separate church social hall property, which is located to the south of the nominated church property. The property is in good condition and has undergone few alterations since the reconstruction in 1900.

### Exterior

The façade, which is the west elevation, consists of the west wall of the vestibule, the west wall of the sanctuary, and the bell tower. (photograph 1) The west elevation of the vestibule is one bay wide and one story high. The walls are rubble brownstone with painted, ribbon-pointed mortar joints. (photographs 2 and 6) A pair of modern double-leaf doors with applied square panel moldings is set into the original entrance at the center of the wall under a pointed-arch, stained glass transom that reads "Downer Methodist Church." The original doors were multi-panel doors with slightly raised panels and a reeded astragal covering the joint between the doors. The door trim is flat, with a half-bead at the transition to the stone surround. The stones that form the arch are cut and dressed, in contrast to the surrounding stone. Roughly rectangular stones form the jambs. Concrete steps in front of the door are set between slightly curved brownstone cheekwalls capped with standing stones forming a rough crenellation. Wrought iron railings set just inside the cheekwalls splay outward.

A gabled door hood above the entrance has curved bargeboards with a trefoil profile bearing on two curved brackets, exposed tongue-and-groove sheathing, exposed rafter tails with carved ends, and synthetic slate roofing. The bargeboards consist of a straight, unmolded board in front of and attached to the curved board. A cornice molding with an ovolo/cavetto profile runs along the upper edge. The straight board continues beyond the end of the curved board to match the length of the exposed rafter tails on the door hood eaves and is cut in a cyma reversa profile to match the rafter tails. The gable of the vestibule roof runs parallel to the sanctuary roof.

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The overlapping straight and curved bargeboards on the vestibule roof match those on the door hood, as do the brackets. These curved bargeboards, however are supported by four matching brackets, two at the low outside points and two at the middle points of the trefoil. A bed molding against the masonry wall covers the masonry/sheathing joint. Other eaves details, including the exposed sheathing, decoratively carved rafter tails, and synthetic slate roofing, match those on the door hood. (photograph 7) The sanctuary's exterior west wall, which is also rubble brownstone, is blank. The bargeboards on the sanctuary raking eaves consist of two boards overlapping and an ovolo/cavetto cornice molding, but the lower of the overlapped boards is not curved. The ends of the upper board, however, are cut in a cyma reversa profile to match the exposed rafter tails on the sanctuary's eaves. Like the vestibule raking eave, a bed molding is set against the masonry wall. While the main roof rafters and other wood elements are believed to date to the reconstruction in 1900, the decorative wood elements on the vestibule and door hood may date to the original construction in 1886.

The bell tower rises from the ridge of the vestibule, but is also partially engaged with the roof framing at the west end of the sanctuary. The tower, originally finished in clapboard, had two sections, a wider base with a molded cap and the belfry level, which had clapboarded half walls with cap molding beneath the pointed-arch openings. Each side had two openings with applied impost blocks. A molded cornice made the transition to the pyramidal roof. The tower has since been covered with aluminum, horizontally-applied on the base and half-wall and vertically around the openings, with louvers in the openings and aluminum trim over the cornice. Most of the original material remains in place beneath the aluminum. A plain cross was added to the top of the tower roof in the 1970s, replacing a small foliated cap.

The north elevation consists of two parts, the north wall of the main section and the north wall of the vestibule, which is recessed from the plane of the main wall at the west end. (photograph 5) The north wall of the main section is symmetrical, with three pointed-arch, stained-glass windows with cut stone jambs and squared stone sills spaced equally across the elevation. The original windows had one-over-one, double-hung wood sash. Protective glazing has been installed over the windows. The walls are rubble, random-laid brownstone. A basement window vent is located beneath the center window. The eaves are open rafter and the rafter ends are decoratively carved. The roof is a steeply pitched gable covered with synthetic slate. At the west end, the north vestibule wall is also constructed of rubble, random-laid brownstone. One pointed-arch, stained-glass window, which is narrower than those on the main section, is set in the center of the vestibule wall. The eaves of the vestibule are also open rafter with decoratively-carved rafter tails and the steep gable roof is clad with synthetic slate.

The east (rear) elevation is a frame gable end wall finished with aluminum siding over the original clapboard. At the center of the elevation, there is a three-sided bay with a three-slope, synthetic slate roof. (photograph 4) The bay stands on a stuccoed foundation. The outer two sides each contain a pointed-arch stained-glass window, while the center contains a round stained-glass window. A modern metal fire door under an open-gable door hood clad in aluminum is located to the south of the bay on this elevation, while a brick chimney is located to the north. A concrete ramp with wrought iron railings extends to the south from the metal fire door. The raking eaves match those on the west elevation.

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The south elevation is similar to the north elevation with the exception of an added weather vestibule covering the entrance to the basement. (photograph 3) The weather vestibule has a low-slope gable roof with the ridge extending perpendicular from the stone church wall. The vestibule is finished with aluminum siding, synthetic slate shingles and a board-and-batten door on the south side. The steps to the basement are concrete.

### Interior

The interior of the church consists of a vestibule and nave. The nave, or sanctuary, has a carpeted floor, pine vertical-beaded-board wainscoting, sandfloat plaster walls above, and an open truss ceiling. A two-level chancel is located at the east end of the room. (photograph 10) The lower level, where the communion table is located, is one step up from the floor and is separated from the main level by a communion rail with turned balusters and newel posts and a molded railing. The communion rail curves toward the east wall at either end, following the curve of the step. (photograph 18) Two additional sets of two steps provide access to the upper level, where the pulpit is located, from either side. The east elevation bay is behind the pulpit and is connected to the main space by a round opening that reveals the three-part, sloped ceiling of the bay, which is separated visually from the bay walls by a small wood molding. A center aisle separates two rows of pews. (photograph 12) Narrow outer aisles separate the pews from the north and south walls. An open space near the southeast corner houses a organ, while a space in front of the north row of pews houses the piano. The front pew in the north row is shorter than the other pews to make room for the piano. The pew endcaps have slanted scroll tops with rosettes. (photograph 20) The rounded hand rests have carved rosettes as well. The body of the endcap has a raised pointed-arch panel, while the front edge is carved in a trefoil profile, a second trefoil pattern is cut out of the bottom edge, and the back edge of the endcap is chamfered below the curved back.

The wainscoting, which is found on all four walls and in the bay, has no base molding. The cap molding has a cyma reversa/cavetto/fillet/cyma recta/fillet/cavetto profile from top to bottom, except in one area on the altar, where it has been replaced with a cyma reversa/cavetto/fillet half-bead profile from top to bottom. (photograph 17) The north and south walls each have three pointed-arch, stained glass windows with splayed plaster jambs, wood trim, and wood stools and aprons. (photographs 11, 13, and 16) The wood trim around the windows is flat with a shoe molding at the glass frame and a three-quarter bead at the transition to the plaster. The window sills are set well below the top of the wainscoting, so the windows have separate aprons. The apron profile from top to bottom is cyma reversa/fascia/ovolo/fascia/ovolo/fillet/cyma reversa. (photograph 17) There are two pointed-arch, stained glass windows in the outer walls of the bay on the east elevation as well. Since these windows are set into a frame wall rather than masonry, they lack the splayed jambs. The profile of the trim around the windows is fillet/ovolo/fascia/ovolo/fillet/cyma recta/fillet/fascia, which is very similar to that around the doors. The round window in the center wall of the bay has flat trim.

Two doors lead into the sanctuary; the east exterior door is a modern, metal, flush fire door with wood trim and the west entrance, from the vestibule, consists of double-leaf, six-panel doors. (photograph 12) The trim around the east door has a fillet/cyma recta/fascia/cyma recta profile. The west doors, which have slightly raised panels with ovolo/fillet panel molding, are surrounded by trim with a fillet/ovolo/fascia/ovolo/fillet/cyma recta/fillet profile.

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The open rafter ceiling is composed of two modified king post trusses, two false trusses applied to the east and west walls, purlins, common rafters, a ridge board, and tongue-and groove-sheathing. (photographs 10, 14, and 15) All have a stained and varnished finish. The modified king post trusses encompass a vertical Alpha and Omega design. The lower section of the truss also forms a trefoil profile, in keeping with the design theme. The structure is secured with bolts. The two bolts securing the lower curved member are secured through the wall. Star bolts can be seen on the exterior. Each of the upper curved members is two sections, each with two bolts into the straight members. Each member is chamfered, the impost blocks are carved, and acorn pendants hang from vertical points beneath the king post and at the lower points of the Omega. The horizontal member receiving the lower points of the Omega have a carved end with a thumb/scotia profile from top to bottom, while the carved piece beneath the lower points of the trefoil consists of a platform over receding curves that form the appearance of an impost block. Finally, the carving at the bottom of the vertical member receiving the upper truss members, which acts as an impost block, has a half bead/splay face/three-quarter bead profile.

Three lights hang from the ceiling, four wall sconces, turned shade down, are located on the east and west walls, and two four-blade ceiling fans have been installed at the ridge.

The vestibule, a small space located to the west of the sanctuary, has a carpeted floor, plaster walls with a sandfloat finish, and an open truss ceiling with exposed beaded-board sheathing. The room has a varnished baseboard with a sloped bead cap molding in lieu of wainscoting along the east and west walls. A built-in bench with storage space is located along the north wall and built-in cabinets of the same vintage are located along the south wall. This bench is not original to the space and most likely dates to the mid-twentieth century. Stained glass windows similar to those in the sanctuary, but narrower, pierce the north and south walls. The double-leaf doors in the east wall lead into the sanctuary. The paneling on the doors matches that on their reverse side, as does the door trim. The door jambs are wide due to the thickness of the masonry wall and consist of two boards with abutting double-bead edges. The modern, double-leaf exterior doors are centered on the west wall. The opening is in the form of a pointed arch, such that a triangular transom is located above the doors. This transom has stained glass with the words "Downer Methodist Church" worked into it. (photograph 19) The trim around the doors matches that around the doors to the sanctuary. A panel built into the east wall has the same trim as that around the doors and a beaded-board door, both with a varnished finish. The open truss ceiling consists of two simple king post trusses and two truss outlines applied to the east and west walls. The trusses and the tongue-and-groove sheathing are varnished.

The basement is a small area dug out beneath the church to house the boiler. The space is accessible only from the exterior via concrete steps on the south side of the sanctuary that are covered by a weather vestibule. The door into the space is a metal fire door installed in 1957. The floor is concrete, the walls are parged masonry, and the ceiling is plaster on metal lath. Openings in the masonry walls on the north and south sides are filled with modern vents. Rough openings have been made in the east and west walls to allow heating ducts to run into the crawlspaces beneath the rest of the building.

Alterations to the building have been limited. They include the historic replacement of the original windows with stained glass, the modern replacement of the front entrance doors, the application of aluminum siding to

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the east elevation and the tower, the application of protective glazing, the installation of a rear door and ramp, the installation of an exterior basement access, and the installation of built-in cabinets and a bench in the vestibule. While the original slate roof has been replaced with synthetic slate, the appearance of the building has not been substantially altered by the change.

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## NARRATIVE SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary

Downer Methodist Episcopal Church, constructed in 1886 and largely rebuilt in 1900, is significant in the area of architecture under National Register Criterion C, Criteria Consideration A, as an example of the Gothic Revival style in a small rural church, built with local wood and stone. Its period of significance is 1886 to 1900, encompassing the date of original construction and the date of the reconstruction of all wooden components of the building after a fire. The design incorporates Gothic Revival concepts and elements in a small rural church. The Gothic Revival style is reflected in the articulation of the interior spaces on the exterior of the building, the bell tower, the open-truss ceiling that represented the small church version of soaring cathedral ceilings, the steep gable roofs, the use of stone, the plain plaster walls, the lancet-arched windows and doors, the stained glass windows, the carved pew endcaps, the wainscoting, and the incorporation of two basic religious symbols into the architecture. Elements of a subset of the Gothic Revival style, known as Carpenter Gothic, are also referenced through the use of a steeply-gabled door hood, exposed decorative rafter tails at the eaves, and curved bargeboards. The Carpenter Gothic style was often associated with rural architecture. The rural, vernacular nature of the building was also expressed in the small size of the building and the use of materials commonly found in houses of the period, such as the paneled entrance doors with typical late nineteenth-century detailing, the one-over-one, double-hung sash windows, and tongue-and-groove wood flooring in lieu of tile, mosaic tile, or stone. The building is further distinctive for its use of three local materials, sandstone, two-leaf pine, and local sand, employed particularly to enhance the church's appearance.

### Historical Background

The history of Downer Methodist Episcopal Church is closely tied with the development of the area. The towns of Glassboro and Williamstown, located west and east of what would later become the village of Downer, began to grow in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, spurred on by the glassmaking industry in the case of Glassboro. Settlement around Squankum, renamed Whitneyville after Samuel Whitney, one of the founders of the Whitney Glass Works in Glassboro, remained sparse, however, until the arrival in 1858 of Arthur Downer and his wife, Mary.<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Downer was born February 23, 1829 in Drumcillion, Ireland. Downer emigrated to the United States in 1849, traveling aboard a packet ship named the *J.P. Whitney* from Liverpool, England and landing in Philadelphia on July 7, 1849. He initially settled in Harrisonville to farm. Downer became a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Harrisonville the following year and married Mary Smallwood Rulon on February 28, 1855. Soon after, the Downers purchased sixty acres from Samuel Whitney. Downer later wrote in his family bible, "We bought land, built, and moved, in 1858, to the place now called Downer, then a wilderness." Downer's son William later wrote that their neighbors lived in log cabins and "crude frame houses." The Downers were active in the Methodist Church, attending services in Williamstown and organizing and holding a Sunday School in their home in 1860.<sup>2</sup>

The Downers attended a camp meeting near Hurffville, New Jersey in 1866, where they experienced "entire sanctification," a term defined in Methodist theology as "perfect love for God and others." The Downers increased their religious activities after this experience, holding weekly "Class Meetings" that included prayers,

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singing, and members relating accounts of their discipleship over the past week. Class Meetings were typically a forerunner to the establishment of a new church. Downer was granted a License to Exhort so that he could run these meetings. In 1871, the group began holding meetings and Sunday School in a newly-built local schoolhouse, which Downer had been instrumental in having authorized and constructed. In 1872, he was granted a local preacher's license by the New Jersey Conference.<sup>3</sup>

Downer's original business was farming. Around 1875, sand found on Downer's property, reportedly by his son, was discovered to be suitable for glassmaking. Downer and other local property owners began to sell sand to the nearby glassworks, bringing some prosperity to the neighborhood. Through several purchases, Downer added acreage over time to his original 60 acre property, amassing over one thousand acres of land by 1900. The village of Downer continued to grow as well. In 1884, a railroad line began operation and a siding was placed on Fries Mill Road, enabling sand to be hauled by train to the glassworks. The name of the village was shortened to Whitney from Whitneyville. Downer was given charge of the station and then named post master of the post office that opened a year later. The name of the post office was then changed to Downer, as there was a concern that Whitney was too similar to Whittings, the name of another post office and rail junction. The change was reportedly suggested by Samuel Garwood, superintendent of the railroad. Downer opened a store as well, creating the nucleus of the village of Downer. Together these improvements contributed to the growth of the village.<sup>4</sup>

By 1886, the local Methodist religious society, which Downer was instrumental in starting and maintaining, had grown to the point where the construction of a church became necessary. Arthur and Mary Downer deeded land for the church on May 30, 1886. The deed was accepted by Arthur Downer, Edward Duncan, Richard G. Flexon, William A. Downer, and Joseph E. Lock, trustees of the newly organized Downer Methodist Episcopal Church.

In the New Jersey Conference Journal for 1886, the Superintendent of the Camden District, G.L. Dobbins, reported: "At Downer a lot has been donated by the Rev. Arthur Downer, and plans already adopted for a substantial stone church whose erection will be made possible by the liberal contribution of the Whitney Brothers of Glassboro." The Whitneys, influential local residents owning extensive land and businesses in the area, including the Whitney Glassworks (Whitney and Brothers), were responsible for the construction of Hollybush, a mansion in the Italianate Villa style, out of local sandstone in 1849. The design of Hollybush reflects the influence of noted mid-nineteenth century John Notman, who designed in both the Italianate and Gothic Revival styles. The design of Hollybush and the reportedly close relationship between Samuel Whitney and Arthur Downer may have played a role in the choice of sandstone for the construction of the church. The use of sandstone set this building apart from the other, generally frame construction, buildings in the village and surrounding rural area. Local sand also was reportedly used for the mortar. The pointing was decoratively painted white.

The construction was finished that same year and the church was dedicated free of debt in February 1887. Oral history relayed by a granddaughter of Trustee Richard Flexon recorded that her mother (daughter of Richard Flexon) recalled that the church as constructed in 1886 had a flat ceiling, a balcony across the back (west) wall

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of the sanctuary, decorative painting on the ceiling, and columns painted on either side of the altar area by Willie Flexon (brother of Richard).<sup>5</sup>

Little is known about the next dozen years of the church. Just before the turn of the century, however, the church burned after a fire started in a defective flue, leaving only the walls standing. This fire has been variously recorded as occurring in December 1898 (Church historical records, now lost), February 6, 1899 (Conference Journal), and December 1899 (Oral history and *The Methodist Trail in New Jersey*). Oral history, from members of the church who were alive at the time of the fire, indicate that it occurred in 1899, just after the Christmas program.<sup>6</sup>

The Conference Journal of 1901 recorded that the church had been rebuilt at a cost of \$2,800 and dedicated free of debt. Notes (author and date unknown) taken from the Church records (now lost) on March 3, 1972, make the following record of the reconstruction:

Late in 1898 the church burned, leaving only the grim stone walls partly standing, a painful sight to behold! On this site was erected one of the most beautiful and striking edifices to be found in Methodism, thanks to the Protestant Episcopal Architect, whose Gothic bent dictated the plan and specifications to the builder. The present building valued at upwards of \$10,000 was dedicated free of debt in 1900, and will, we trust, stand everlastingly as a visible and spiritual monument to Christianity and to the humble founder of the Society, a dynamic man of staunchest loyalty and devotion.<sup>7</sup>

Samuel W. Downer wrote about the reconstruction in his memoirs. His notes about the church were recorded by Evangeline Downer Myers in "A History of the Arthur Downer Branch of the Downers in America."

Father and Mother with little financial help built the church (Downer, New Jersey Methodist Episcopal) in 1886. It burned in 1898 and was rebuilt in 1899 by George E. and S.W. Downer with but little help financially from others.

The wood portion of the rebuilt church furnished by the brothers mentioned above, the finishing lumber included came from a native two-leaf pine, a rare tree in New Jersey. It is now extinct, and then, found only on the ridge marking the watershed between the streams that flow west to the Delaware River and Bay, and those flowing east and south to the ocean.

This church is adjudged by those former District Superintendents who are competent judges of architecture, as being one of the most beautiful in the interior of any in the New Jersey Conference!

However, originally erected – at the suggestion of a presiding Elder of this conference – from stone, with the rear of wood so as to render it easier to enlarge it later for Sunday School facilities and an enlarged congregation of worshippers, it is too short in depth for its width to look symmetrical.<sup>8</sup>

A book of Samuel Downer's old check stubs revealed that he had paid many invoices related to the reconstruction, including for cement, lime and brick, church hardware, sawing logs, stone, arch stones

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and door sill, church millwork, church supplies, church and street lamps, church chairs, a communion table and church seats (pews). Samuel Downer also owned a sawmill at that time that is reported to have provided the other lumber needed for the project.<sup>9</sup>

Church records prior to 1935 are not available, but Samuel Downer's memoirs again provide some illumination of the church's history during that period. He wrote:

For a few years I was away in the Southwest for reason of health during which time the recession came, in the early thirties. I returned to find the church closed! It had been turned over to the Bridgeton District from the Camden District and both District Superintendents were critical of me for the closing. I finally got things going.

It had been my fondest dream to complete that House of God that my immigrant Father and my Godly Mother had founded. I got consent to go ahead but a series of circumstances finally prevented me from completing the Church buildings at this time.<sup>10</sup>

The Church was incorporated on January 25, 1942, with Samuel Downer as one of the Trustees. Church financial records indicate a regular program of repairs and improvements over the following decades. Including the installation of stained glass windows to replace the clear glass, double-hung original windows in 1945, the replacement of the Church roof in 1952, steeple repairs in 1956-57, floor framing reinforcement in 1984, and other alterations, such as the installation of the rear (east) door in 1957, the installation of the cross on the bell tower in 1964, the installation of protective glazing in 1974, the replacement of the west elevation doors in 1975, and the ramp construction in 1989.<sup>11</sup>

### Historical and Architectural Context

The Gothic Revival style derives its elements from the great Gothic cathedrals constructed in Europe during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. These cathedrals evolved during a time of great social and economic change in Europe, allowing the style to disseminate across the continent as trade and political changes brought different countries in contact with one another. Over time, cathedral design evolved along separate paths in different countries, but common elements still tied them together. Important elements in the construction of Gothic cathedrals included rib vaults, pointed arches, columns in lieu of piers, flying buttresses, and the use of stained glass with elaborate tracery to introduce large amounts of light. Other design elements included the impression of great height and weightlessness, the practice of locating the apse under a lower roof than the nave, and the subordination (in later examples) of the transept to the overall design as part of a trend toward arranging spaces as needed and eliminating or adding elements as dictated by the individual needs of the parish.<sup>12</sup>

The Gothic Revival style began in Great Britain in the eighteenth century with pattern books of medieval details produced in 1742.<sup>13</sup> Popular interest in the style increased with Horace Walpole's country house "Strawberry Hill," constructed in 1750, which was designed with exterior medieval details used on the interior.<sup>14</sup> The Gothic Revival style was introduced into the United States in the early nineteenth century and gained widespread popularity in the 1840s, spurred on by the concurrent romantic movement in art and literature that was sweeping

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society, one facet of which was that many people shared a dissatisfaction with classical architecture. The popularity of the Gothic Revival style was further increased by its identification as the only appropriate style for church design by influential English architect Augustus W.N. Pugin and writer John Ruskin, because they believed it symbolized the spiritual and artistic values of the Medieval period. Pugin and others in the mid-nineteenth century ecclesiological movement in the Anglican Church, as part of its revival of interest in the liturgy, promoted archaeological accuracy in church architecture, with the medieval English country church as its model.<sup>15</sup>

The Gothic Revival style is characterized by a number of elements, including: asymmetrical facades, tall towers, steeply pitched gable roofs, pointed arch windows and doorways, buttresses, clustered columns, foliated ornamentation, stained glass with tracery, crenellation, carved bargeboards, and bay and oriel windows. Crenellation, carved bargeboards, and bay and oriel windows are generally more common on houses than churches. In addition to the elements listed above, church interpretations of the style also sometimes incorporated such original Gothic elements as the impression of great height, the impression of weightlessness, and common details such as a large east window, a rose window, an open truss ceiling (found in medieval country churches more than in cathedrals) and carved stone decoration. Stone was also felt to be the only appropriate construction material for churches.

The Gothic Revival style as applied to churches varies widely from the small church based on medieval English parish churches to larger churches that combine parish church characteristics with greater size and details more common to cathedrals, through to large cathedrals that serve as the seats of dioceses and are based almost entirely on the medieval cathedral model. The Gothic Revival style crossed denominations and was, along with the Romanesque style, the predominant church style from the mid-nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century.

Downer Methodist Episcopal Church is an unusual example of the Gothic Revival style, in that it incorporates basic defining elements of the style, but also exhibits the influence of both the Carpenter Gothic, an American subcategory of the Gothic Revival style usually executed in frame buildings, and its setting in a small rural village. The building lacks the architecturally rigorous imitation of the Gothic style found among many Episcopalian churches that were designed in keeping with the Ecclesiological movement of the Anglican Church. Gothic Revival elements in the design, however, include the use of stone for the walls, the articulation of the vestibule and chancel on the exterior, the pointed-arch windows and doorway, the steep gable roof of the sanctuary that is echoed by the roofs of the vestibule and door hood, the bell tower with pointed-arch openings at the belfry, the curved bargeboards, the open eaves with decoratively carved rafter tails, the crenellation on the cheekwalls of the front steps, the open truss ceiling with Alpha/Omega built into the design, and the plain plaster walls. The influence of the Carpenter Gothic style is seen in the steeply-gabled door hood and the curved bargeboards. The influence of the rural setting is seen in the use of vernacular materials, including paneled doors and clear glass double-hung windows typically found on late nineteenth century houses, along with common wainscoting and tongue-and-groove wood flooring.

One unique aspect to the construction of the church that increases its architectural and historical importance was the use of local stone, sand, and the wood from what is believed to be Virginia Pine (*pinus virginiana*) a two-

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needle pine that is rare in New Jersey. The building was constructed using local sandstone. The sandstone is generally rectangular and is laid in roughly ashlar fashion, with two significant exceptions. The stone that was chosen for use above the door hood on the vestibule, as well as the upper sections of the west nave wall, is not rectangular. The multi-sided stones with irregular shapes create an appearance that is reminiscent of a crazy quilt. The ashlar appearance of the nave walls and lower sections of the west nave and vestibule walls and the irregular patterns of the upper vestibule and west nave walls are sharply highlighted by the use of ribbon pointing that was painted white. This white painting on the pointing is visible in the earliest known photograph of the church (1912). The combination of the unusual stone with the deliberate emphasis introduced by the painted joints, creates a unique impression that is not matched by any buildings in the local area.

The Virginia pine, which is believed to be the two-leaf pine referred to in Samuel Downer's personal notes, is native to the east coast (New York to Alabama) and grows well in full sun. The tree, which grows up to 70 feet tall, adapts to most soil conditions, growing particularly well in the clay and sandy loam found around Downer, and will grow in poor sites. It is known for taking over abandoned land for a period of about 75 years before other species take over. Stands of this tree were likely located on abandoned sites in the area of Downer affected by bog iron production during the early nineteenth century or forest fires and thus would have been available for harvesting for the church's reconstruction. Samuel Downer owned a saw mill and is believed to have provided most of the wood for the church reconstruction. The wood is believed to have been used for the millwork as well as structural elements. The interior woodwork, including the millwork, trusses, and other roof framing elements, all remain exposed under a varnish finish. The sand, of which both a white glassmaking type and a yellow type later used in steel production were found in the area, was the final local material used in the construction of the building.

During a period of time when the standardization of building materials and styles was becoming increasingly common, the use of local materials in a distinctive manner sets the Downer Methodist Episcopal Church apart, occupying a unique place on the spectrum of Gothic Revival style churches in New Jersey.

One of the most noted Gothic Revival churches in New Jersey is the new St. Mary's Church in Burlington, designed by architect Richard Upjohn and constructed between 1846 and 1854. (supplemental photographs 1 and 2) This church is constructed of ashlar-laid sandstone and has many architectural characteristics of the medieval English parish church model: pointed-arch windows with hood molds, tracery, and stained glass; stone buttresses; steep, gabled roofs with stone parapets; a tower; and, on the interior, an open truss ceiling, plain plaster walls, and painting on the chancel ceiling. Although it is also based on the parish church prototype, St. Mary's has a full transept crossing the nave and chancel, and a stone tower and spire located at the crossing. While this building has a few elements in common with Downer, such as the use of stone, steeply-pitched roofs, an open truss ceiling plan, and plain plaster walls, the greater level of detail and the more complex design sets it much closer to the strict interpretation of the Gothic Revival style.

Another example in the medieval parish church tradition located close to Downer is St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Glassboro, built about 1846, attributed to architect John Notman, which is a simple gable form with a small tower at the west end and a half-octagon apse at the other. (supplemental photographs 3 and 4) Both the apse and the adjacent sacristy are believed to be later additions. This small church, only three bays wide on its

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long elevations, is constructed of brownstone, although not ashlar-laid like St. Mary's, and has pointed-arch windows with tracery and stained glass (but no hood molds), buttresses, and a tower but no spire. The interior is very simply finished, but has an open truss ceiling with pointed arches applied on the plaster between the trusses. In this case, the full tower provides a narthex (vestibule), but it still also provides a belfry. At Downer, the vestibule is its own section upon which the bell tower partially rests. This rusticated church bridges the gap between St. Mary's and Downer. It bears some of the archaeologically correct detailing of St. Mary's, but is closer in scale and overall execution to Downer.

An example with a completely different exterior expression of the Gothic Revival style is St. Luke's Episcopal Church, constructed in 1865 in Metuchen. (Supplemental photographs 5 and 6) This building shares the simple layout of Downer, but is executed as a frame building with board-and-batten siding and decorated with carpenter's lace. Instead of a bell tower, the spire rises from the steep gable roof. The use of the steep gables, repeated on the main roof and door hood are similar on the two buildings. Downer's curved bargeboards and open eaves are similar in concept, though much simpler in execution, to the details found on St. Luke's. On the interior, it shares the open-truss ceiling of Downer as well as the plain plaster walls and the arch dividing the nave and chancel.

Downer Methodist Episcopal Church was constructed later than many of the churches in the surrounding area. The building reflects the circumstances of its construction. It is not an urban or town church; it was built to alleviate the need for rural villagers to travel to the larger towns for church services. It was built on a scale appropriate to these circumstances; it is small in size and simple but elegant in design. The purpose of the building is recognized in the adoption of the Gothic Revival style as an appropriate one for a church. The style is expressed on both the exterior and interior without attempting to fully model the English country church, as might be done for an Episcopalian church, a choice that follows the practical path laid by other area churches earlier in the nineteenth century. The church falls within the wide spectrum of Gothic Revival churches in New Jersey as an unusual rural example that incorporates traditional elements of the style, as well as elements of the Carpenter Gothic style, and was constructed of unique local materials in a distinctive manner and on a scale in keeping with the surrounding rural community.

### ENDNOTES

1. Esther M. Davis, comp., *A History of Monroe Township, 1859-1976, Updated and Revised 2002* (Williamstown, NJ: Monroe Township Historical Society, 2002), 2-3.
2. Borsos, Reverend Alex, Jr, "A History of the Downer United Methodist Church" (N.p., 1986), 1-2.
3. *Ibid.*, 3.
4. *Ibid.*; *A Biographical, Genealogical and Descriptive History of the First Congressional District of New Jersey vol. I and II* (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1900); "Downer Supplies Sand for Steel Production" *The Camden Courier-Post*, May 14, 1964.
5. "A History of the Downer United Methodist Church," 4; *A History of Monroe Township*, 79.
6. "A History of the Downer United Methodist Church," 5; *A History of Monroe Township*, 79.
7. "A History of the Downer United Methodist Church," 6.
8. Downer Methodist Episcopal Church Records. Notes taken March 3, 1972; Evangeline Downer Meyers, "A History of the Arthur Downer Branch of the Downers in America" (N.p., 1976), 6.

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9. "A History of the Arthur Downer Branch of the Downers in America," 6.
10. Ibid.
11. Downer United Methodist Church records.
12. Robert Branner, *Gothic Architecture* (New York: Braziller, 1961), 10-12; Carol Davidson Grago, "Abbeys and Cathedrals," 2002, 26 September 2002 <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ljchurchljcathedral\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ljchurchljcathedral_01.shtml)>.
13. Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 109-110.
14. David Ross, "Gothic Revival Architecture," 2001, 12 July 2002 <<http://www.britainexpress.com/architecture/gothic-revival.html>>.
15. Phoebe Stanton, *The Gothic Revival & American Architecture: An Episode in Taste, 1840-1856* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 3-4.

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<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ljchurchljcathedral\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ljchurchljcathedral_01.shtml)>.
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<<http://www.britainexpress.com/architecture/gothic-revival.html>>.
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### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Block 14101, Lot 2 in the Township of Monroe, Gloucester County, New Jersey.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This is the property currently associated with the church.

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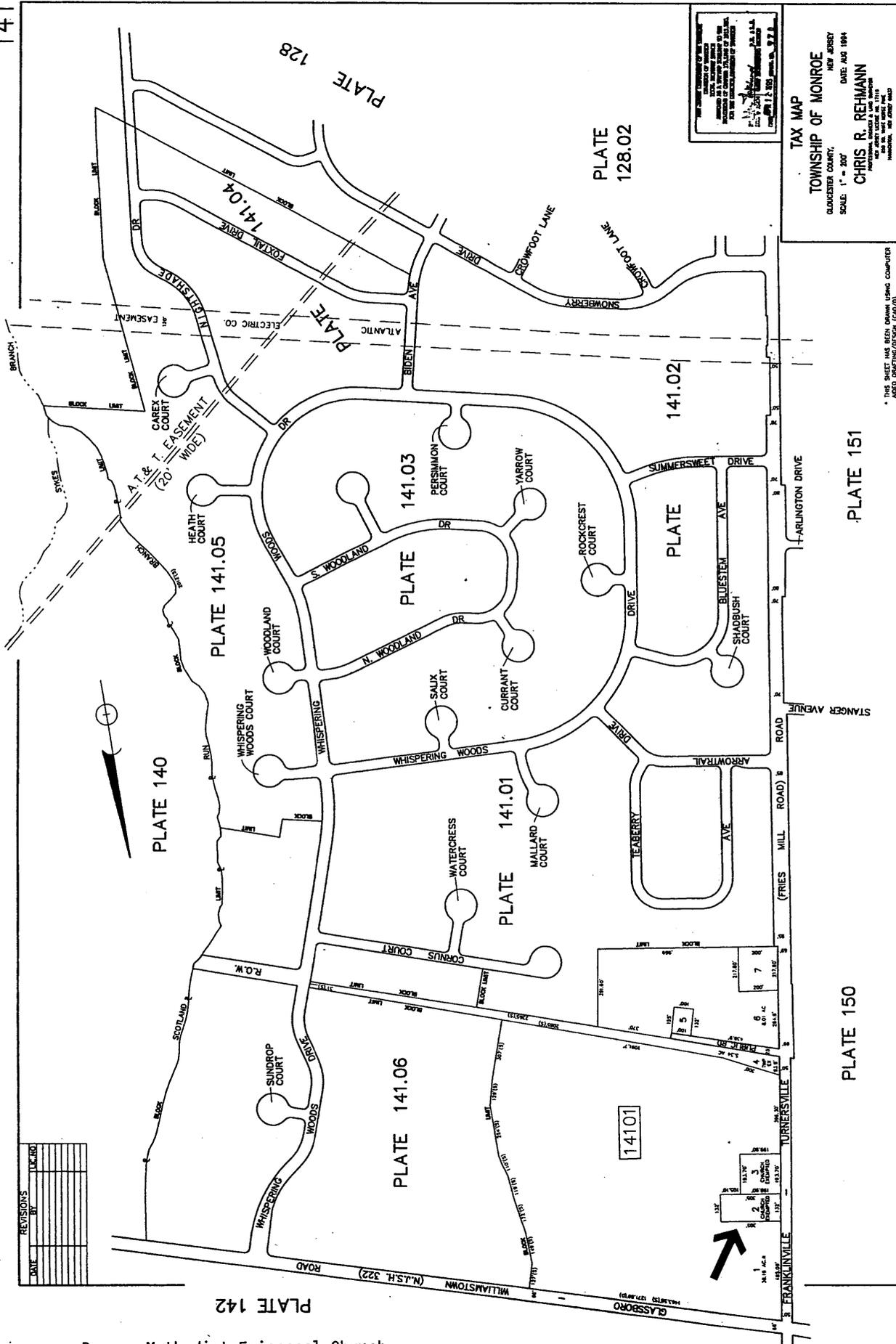
### PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information applies to all photographs:

1. Downer Methodist Episcopal Church
2. Gloucester County, New Jersey
3. Sheila Koehler
4. May 7, 2009
5. Westfield Architects & Preservation Consultants  
425 White Horse Pike  
Haddon Heights, New Jersey 08035  
(856) 547-0465

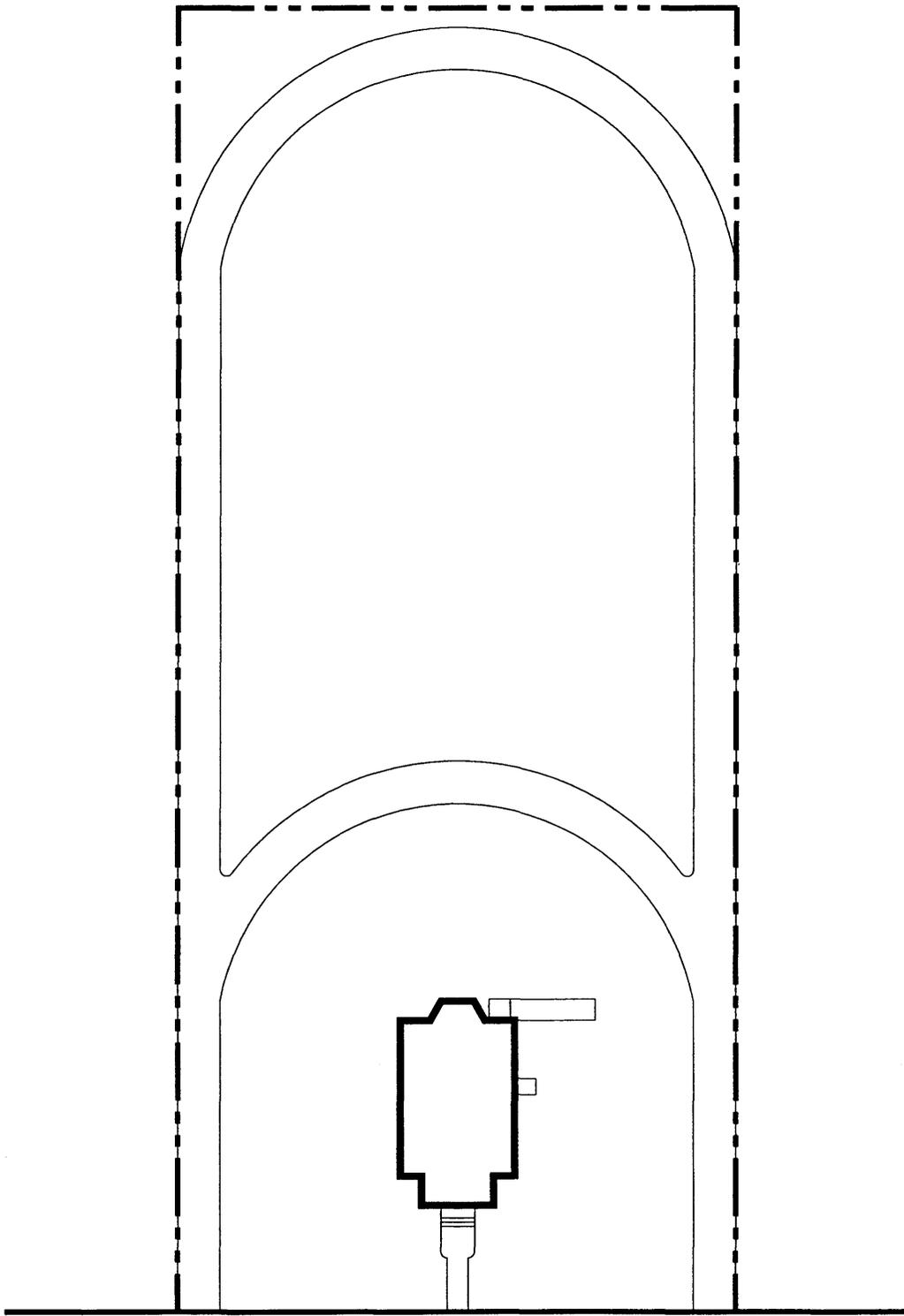
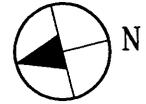
### LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1 of 19 View of the west elevation facing Fries Mill Road.
- 2 of 19 View of the west and south elevations showing the vestibule and tower.
- 3 of 19 View of the south elevation showing mature evergreen and deciduous trees.
- 4 of 19 View of the east elevation from the cemetery.
- 5 of 19 View of the north elevation showing the pointed-arch windows with cut stone arches.
- 6 of 19 Detail showing the front entrance with curved steps and the door hood.
- 7 of 19 Detail showing the curved bargeboards, brackets, and exposed rafter tails on the eaves.
- 8 of 19 View of the cemetery facing east from Fries Mill Road.
- 9 of 19 View looking north along Fries Mill Road.
- 10 of 19 View of the east wall of the sanctuary showing the chancel with the rear bay.
- 11 of 19 View of the north wall of the sanctuary showing three stained glass windows and typical wainscoting.
- 12 of 19 View of the west wall of the sanctuary showing the doors to the vestibule.
- 13 of 19 Detail showing a typical pointed-arch window in a masonry wall.
- 14 of 19 Detail showing a pointed-arch window in the east frame wall.
- 15 of 19 Detail showing the doors to the vestibule.
- 16 of 19 Detail showing truss elements.
- 17 of 19 Detail showing the turned balusters, newel post, and handrail of the communion rail.
- 18 of 19 Detail showing the trusses in the vestibule.
- 19 of 19 Detail showing the stained glass transom over the front entrance taken from the interior.



DATE	BY	REVISIONS

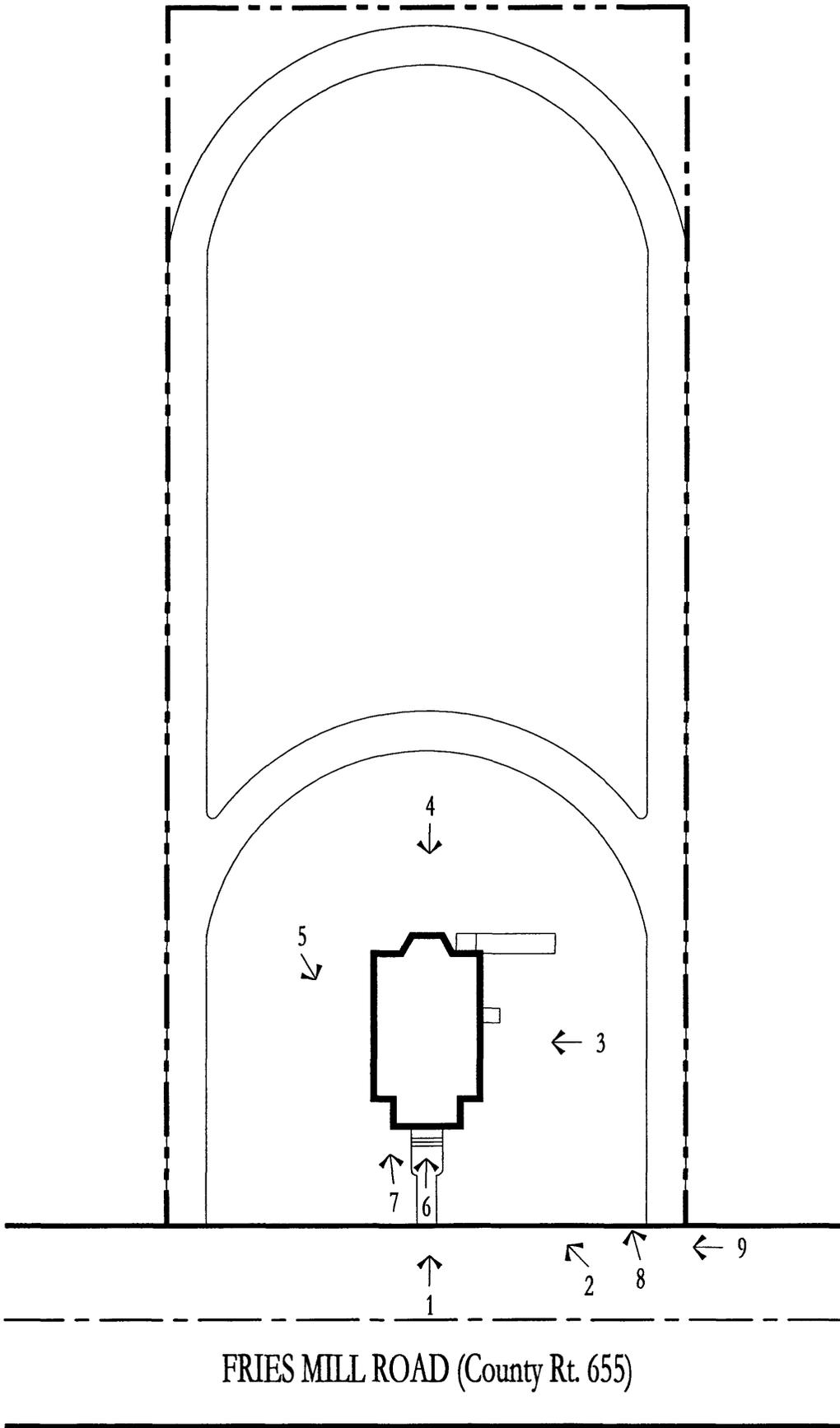
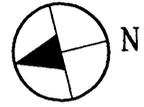
Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
 Gloucester County, New Jersey



FRIES MILL ROAD (County Rt. 655)

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Gloucester County, New Jersey

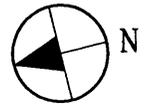
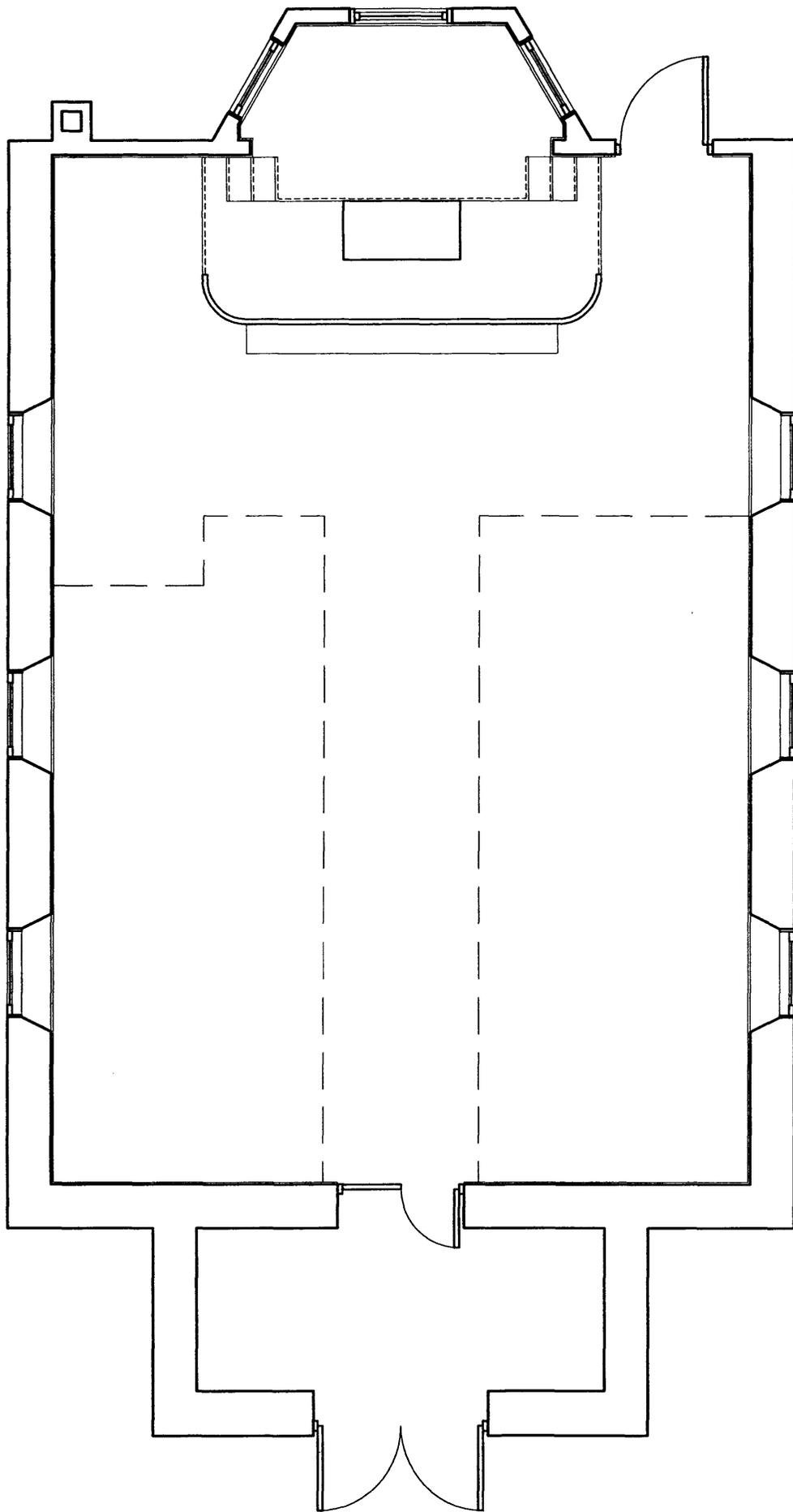
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FRIES MILL ROAD (County Rt. 655)

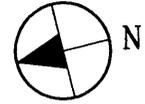
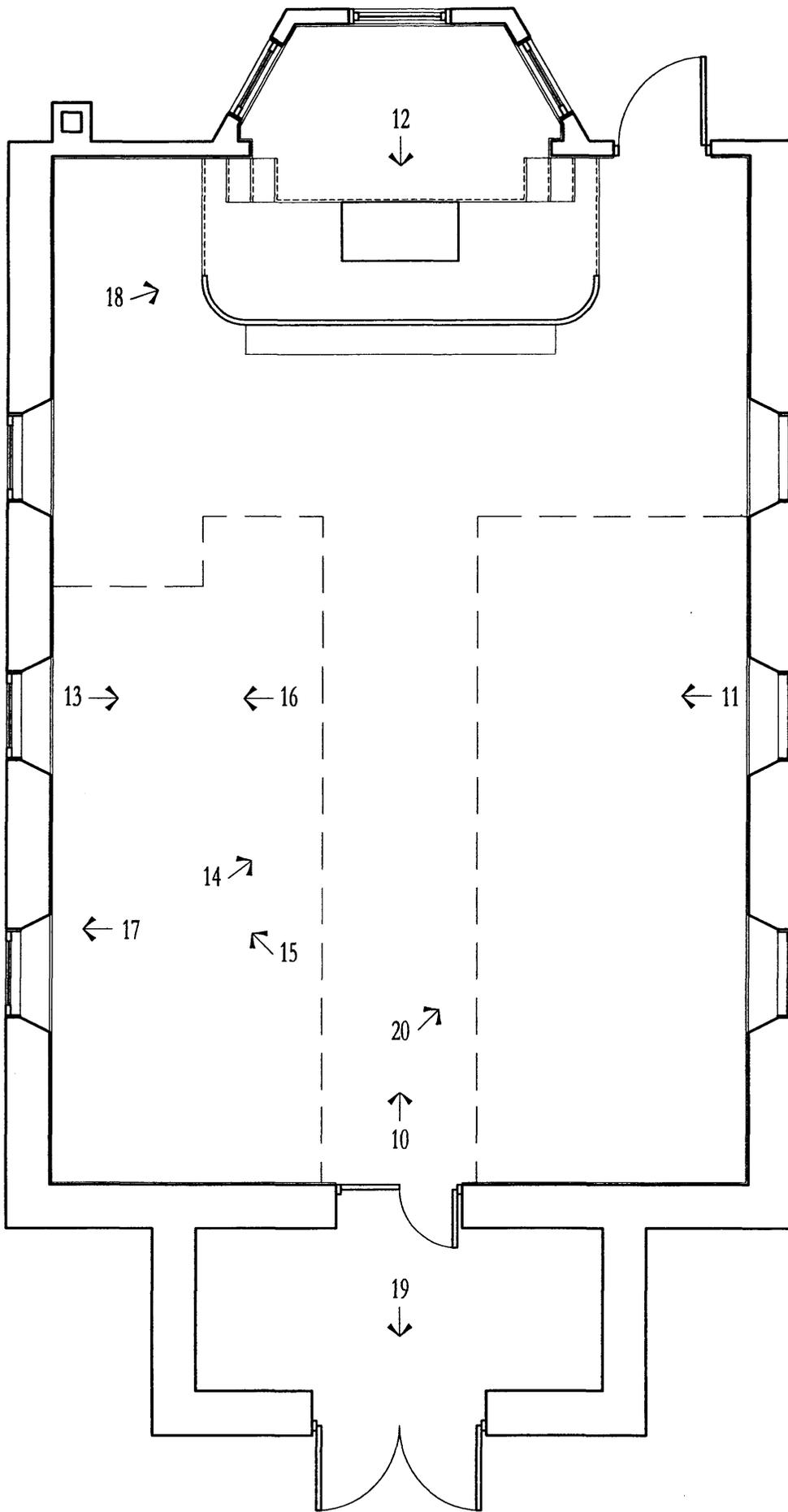
Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
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Annotated Site Plan  
Scale: 1" = 40'-0"



Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
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First Floor Plan  
Scale:  $\frac{3}{16}$ " = 1'-0"



Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
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Annotated First Floor Plan

Scale:  $\frac{3}{16}$ " = 1'-0"



"Old Folks' Day", Downer, N.J.

Mrs White

Rev White

Arthur

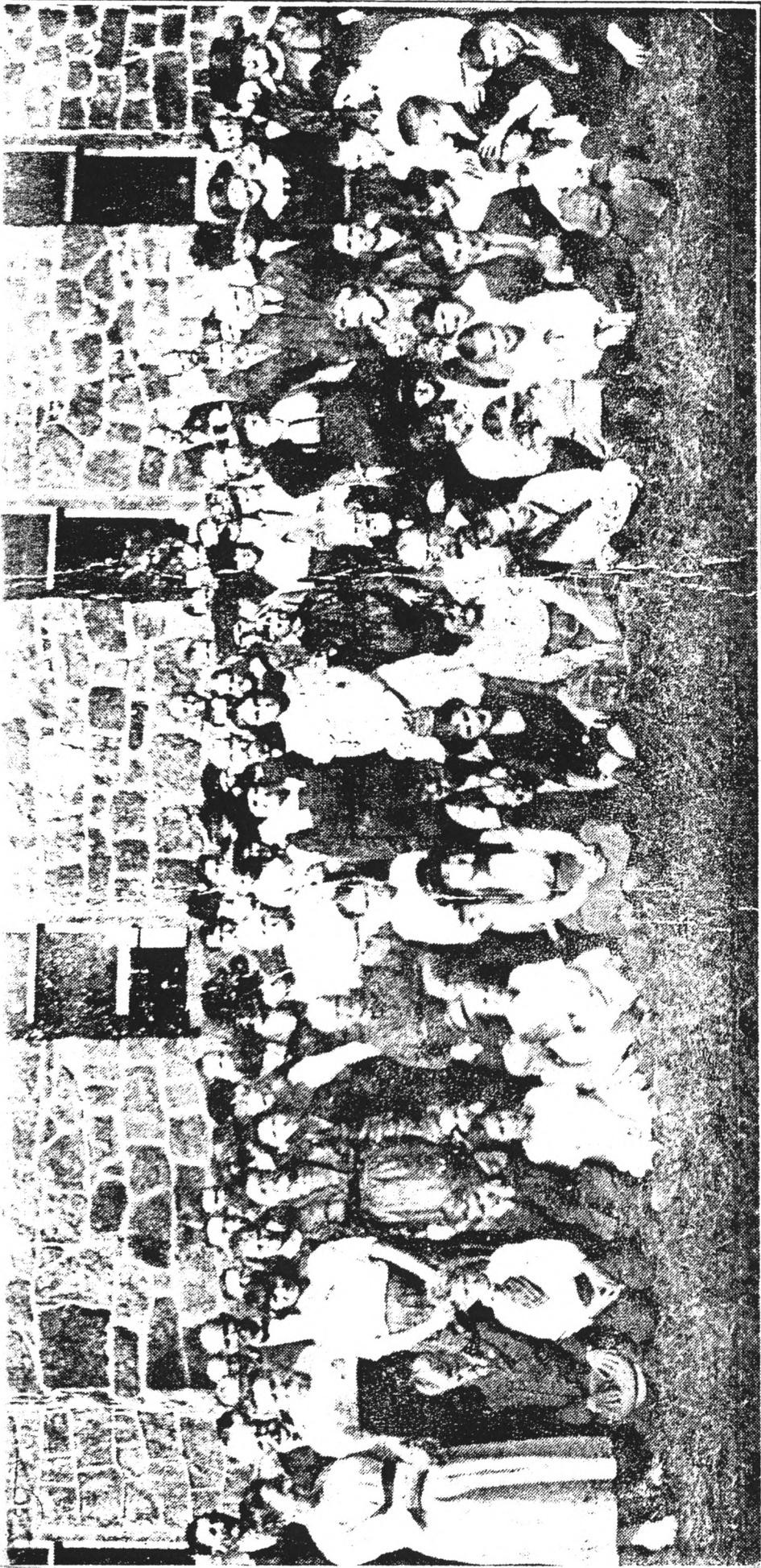
Downer

Abigail Gant Flexon -  
1836 - 1916

Maybe 1911  
1912

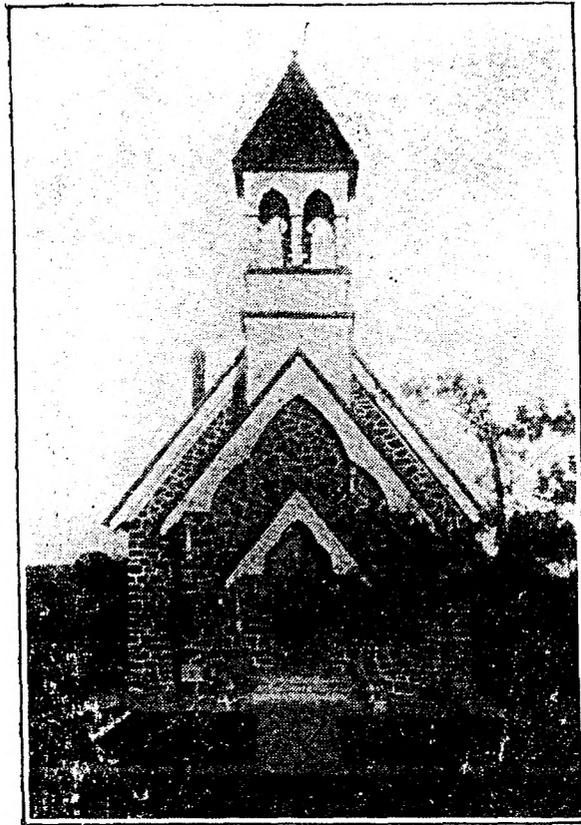
Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
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1912 - compare group photo



OLD HOME DAY—1921

Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
Gloucester County, New Jersey



*The Downer Methodist Episcopal Church*



*Rev. John D. Merwin, Pastor*



*Rev. Arthur Downer, Founder*

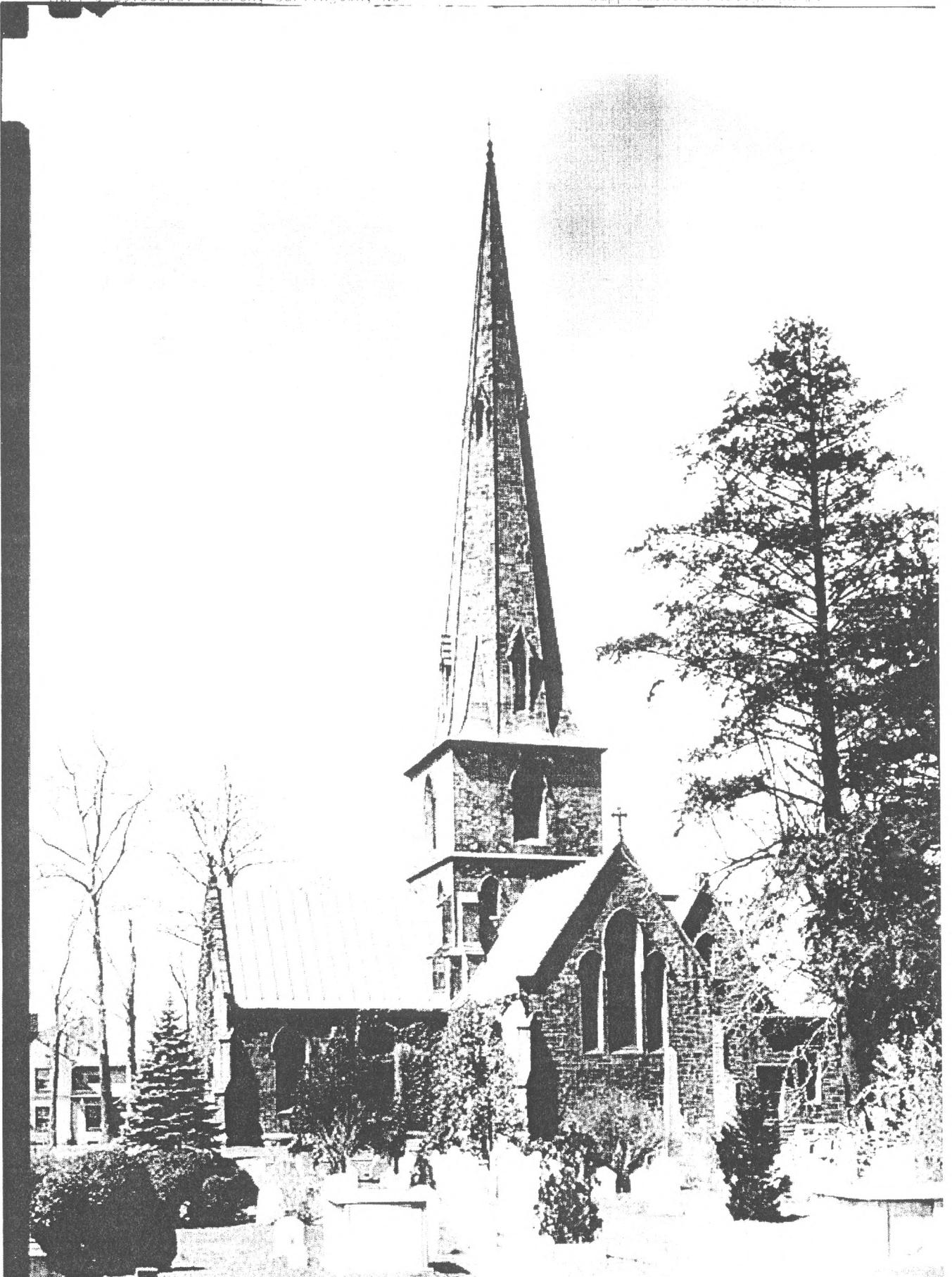
Downer Methodist Episcopal Church  
Gloucester County, New Jersey

50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY - OCT 11-13, 1936

Downer ME Church, Gloucester Co., NJ

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Burlington, NJ

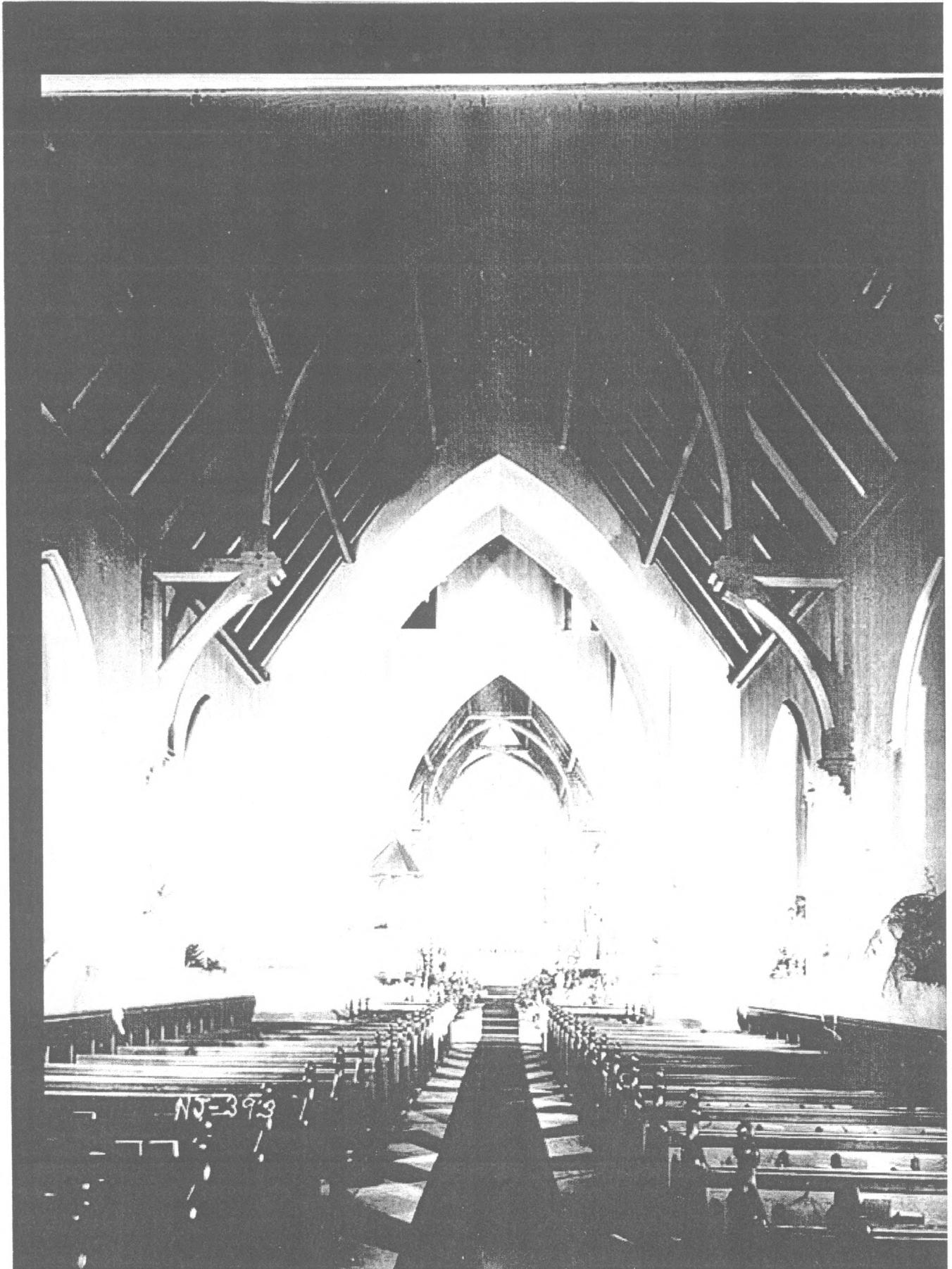
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Downer ME Church, Gloucester Co., NJ

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Burlington, NJ

Supplemental Photograph #2

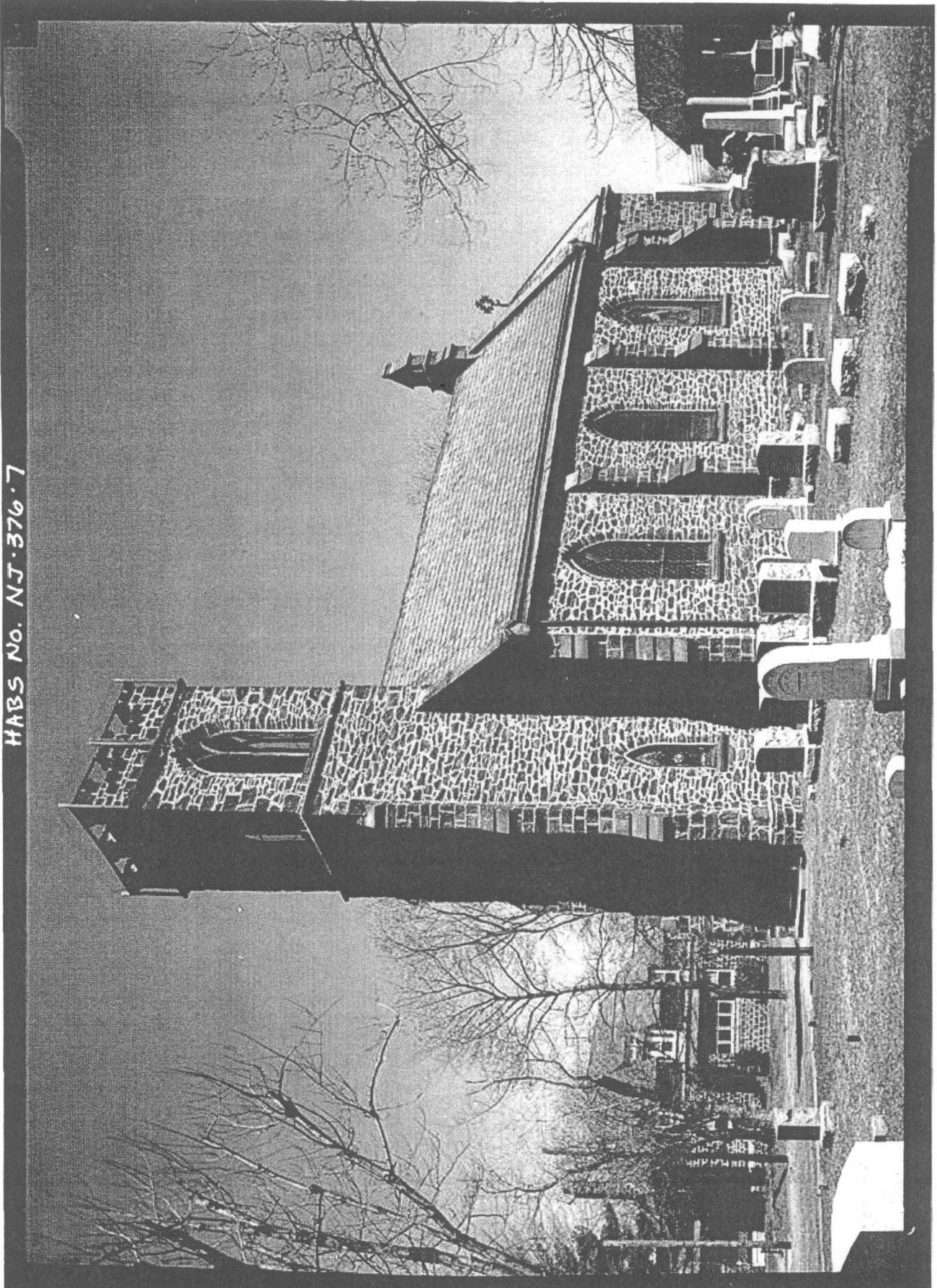


Downer ME Church, Gloucester Co., NJ

St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Glassboro, NJ

Supplemental Photograph #3

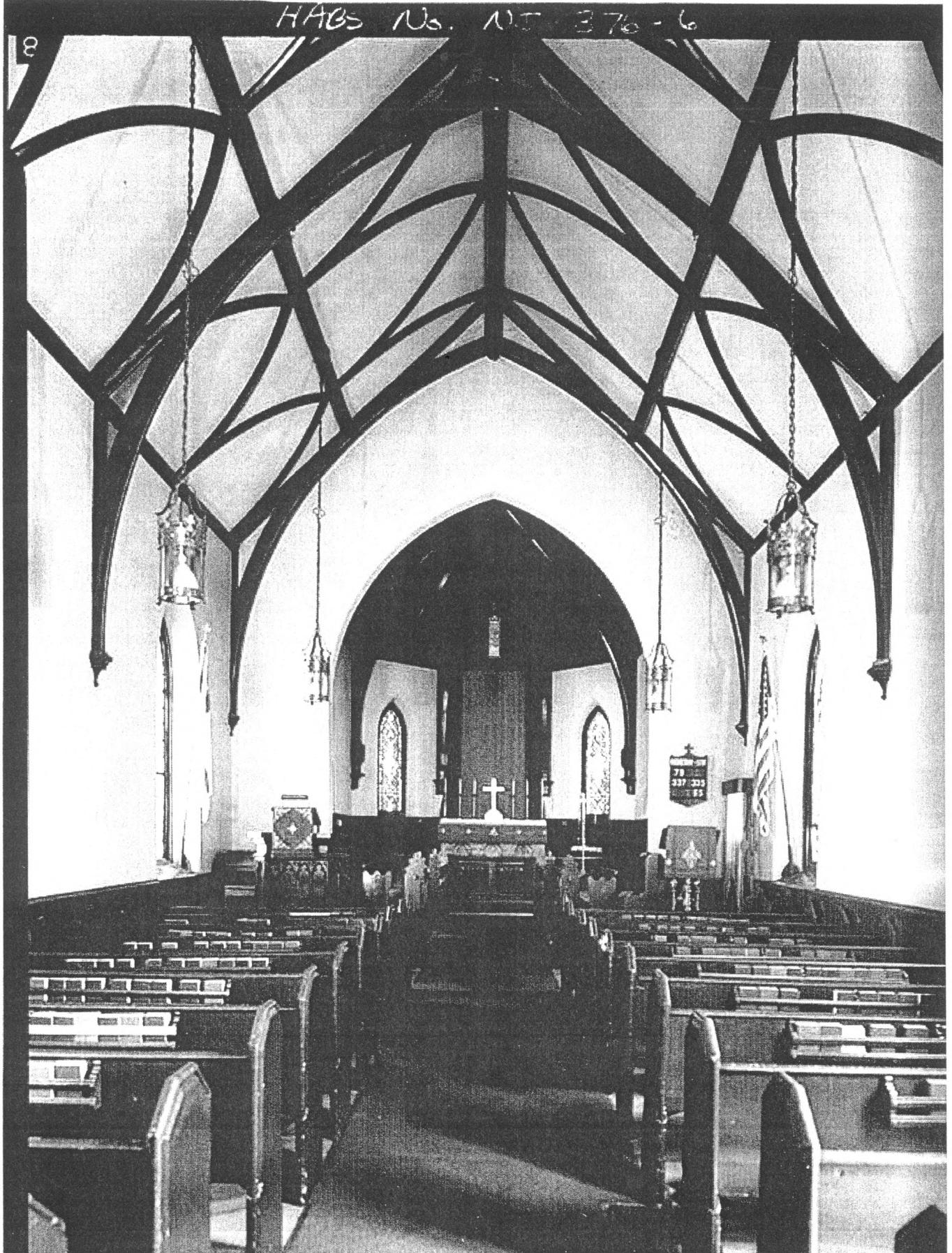
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Downer ME Church, Gloucester Co., NJ

St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Glassboro, NJ

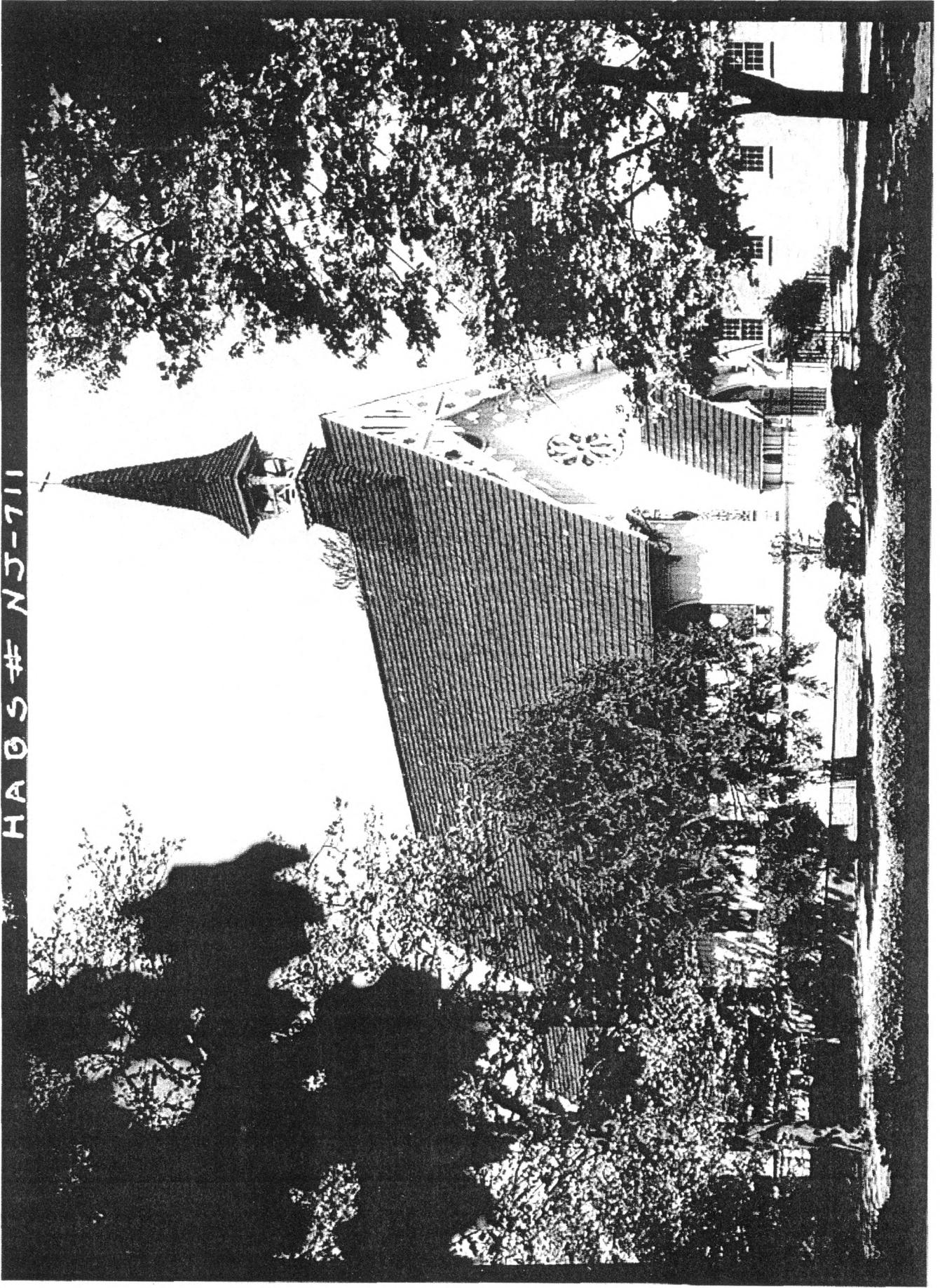
Supplemental Photograph #4



Downer ME Church, Gloucester Co., NJ

St. Luke Episcopal Church, Metuchen, NJ

Supplemental Photograph #5



HAS # NJ-711

Downer ME Church, Gloucester Co. NJ

St. Luke Episcopal Church, Metuchen, NJ

Supplemental Photograph #6



MABS EP. NJ-711