

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received DEC 30 1986

date entered

JAN 29 1987

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and Cemetery

and/or common Stepstone Church

2. Location

street & number Stepstone Road, Pendleton County n/a not for publication

city, town x vicinity of Peach Grove

state Kentucky code county Pendleton code 191

3. Classification

| Category  | Ownership                                   | Status  | Present Use                            |   |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district               | <input type="checkbox"/> public             | <input type="checkbox"/> occupied                   | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture   | <input type="checkbox"/> museum               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied      | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial    | <input type="checkbox"/> park                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure              | <input type="checkbox"/> both               | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress           | <input type="checkbox"/> educational   | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site                   | <b>Public Acquisition</b>                   | <b>Accessible</b>                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object                 | n/a in process                              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government    | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific           |
|   | n/a being considered                        | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted          | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial    | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation       |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> no                         | <input type="checkbox"/> military      | <input type="checkbox"/> other:               |

4. Owner of Property

name Most Reverend William A. Hughes, Bishop of the Diocese of Covington

street & number 1140 Madison Ave.

city, town Covington vicinity of n/a state Kentucky

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pendleton County Courthouse

street & number Highway 27

city, town Falmouth state Kentucky

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978-1979  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Kentucky Heritage Council

city, town Frankfort state Kentucky

## 7. Description

|  |                                       |   |   |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Condition</b>                         |                                       | <b>Check one</b>                            | <b>Check one</b>                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent       | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good            | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>n/a</u>    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed    |   |   |

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

#### Section 7a. Summary.

Virtually unaltered since construction, the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church presents a rare example of a mid-nineteenth century rural house of worship. The interior of the small, vernacular frame church retains its original handmade furnishings, and is embellished with stenciling, frescoes, and wood graining. The well-preserved adjacent Cemetery includes the graves of parishioners buried there from the 1850's to 1971.

#### Section 7b. Description.

The Immaculate Conception Church is located in an isolated rural valley in northern Pendleton Co., Kentucky, near the Ohio River. The church and its adjacent cemetery are sited on a rectangular three-acre sloping lot on the east side of Stepstone Road, which runs parallel to Stepstone Creek. The church property is defined on the west by a stone wall facing Stepstone Road; an old fence marks the north, south, and east boundaries of the property, which is surrounded by woods. (See photos 1, 6, 7, and 8.) Within the nominated boundary are the church building, the cemetery, and one contributing outbuilding; an old outhouse.

The church building, built in 1861, is a small, one-story clapboard structure of vernacular design. Its structural fabric consists of log joists and rough-cut boards. The building rests on a raised fieldstone foundation, and has a steeply-pitched, front-gabled roof of corrugated metal. (Photos 1, 4.) A wrought-iron staircase of simple design leads to the main doorway, which features a pair of paneled wooden doors without glazing or elaboration. (Photo 2.) The church's facade is surmounted by a rectangular wooden cupola with louvered vent, and crowned by an iron ball and cross. (Photo 3.) A secondary entrance is housed in a small one-story addition on the south elevation. (Photo 5.) Window treatment consists of four regularly-spaced bays on the north and south elevations. All feature multi-pane, double-hung sash windows with original clear glass. (Photo 4.)

The interior of the church follows a modified nave plan. A narrow central aisle, flanked by two sets of handmade pews, faces the main altar. This altar rests on a slightly raised dias and is surrounded by a Communion rail, in the manner of Catholic churches built according to old liturgical practices in use before the Second Vatican Council of the 1960's. Secondary altars, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, are located on either side. (Photos 14, 15.) A choir loft extends across the rear of the sanctuary.

The walls and ceiling of the church are finished in smooth plaster that, although faded, appears to have originally been tinted or glazed. (According to long-time parishioners, the church's ceiling was originally open to the rafters but was lowered at an undetermined date.) A plaster wainscot extends to just below the windows and is tinted in a darker, contrasting shade. (Photo 14.) Flooring is of simple pine planks and is covered for the most part in 1920's-vintage linoleum rugs. The Stations of the Cross are depicted on small wooden plaques, arrayed around the perimeter of the room.

The interior of the Immaculate Conception Church contains a wealth of decorative

# 8. Significance

| Period  | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below    |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric          | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric  | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning     | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499            | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic     | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation           | <input type="checkbox"/> law                    | <input type="checkbox"/> science         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599            | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> economics              | <input type="checkbox"/> literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education              | <input type="checkbox"/> military               | <input type="checkbox"/> social/         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799            | <input type="checkbox"/> art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> music                  | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy             | <input type="checkbox"/> theater         |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-     | <input type="checkbox"/> communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government    | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation  |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> invention              |   | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |

**Specific dates** 1860 - 1910      **Builder/Architect** Michael Faulhaber

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

### Section 8a. Significance.

The Immaculate Conception Church, built in 1860, is one of the oldest churches in Northern Kentucky. More significantly, is the only Catholic house of worship in the area to escape major alterations due to the liturgical changes enacted by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's. Its adjacent cemetery, also included in the nomination, is one of the area's best-preserved small burial grounds, and has been spared much of the vandalism and damage that have troubled other cemeteries of its type. The Immaculate Conception Church was designated a Kentucky Landmark in 1986. Its period of significance extends from 1860 to 1910, when it ceased to be actively used.

### Section 8b. History.

The history of the Immaculate Conception Church, a German Catholic parish, dates to the pre-Civil War era. The small community known as "Stepstone," named for the valley of the Stepstone Creek, was one of the early German Catholic settlements in the northern Pendleton-Campbell county area, near the Ohio River. At an undetermined date prior to the Civil War (probably in the mid-1850's) a boatload of German immigrants from Cincinnati arrived at Stepstone to farm. The area's rich farmland, reputed to be good for viniculture, and proximity to a steamboat landing (at the mouth of Stepstone Creek) made this location a desirable one for settlement.

In 1858 Rev. Leonard Spitzelberger, a priest from the predominantly German settlement of Twelve Mile in Campbell County, began to offer Mass once a month to the eight Catholic families of Stepstone. A year later, the community decided to build its own church. Three acres of land on Stepstone Road, parallel to the creek, were donated by parishioner Michael Faulhaber, whose farmstead still stands nearby. Since Faulhaber was a carpenter, he also offered to supervise construction of the church. Work on the Church of the Immaculate Conception was begun in January of 1860, and was completed by October of that year. A one-room log school was also constructed nearby, and a small cemetery established on the steep hill behind. The new church was dedicated on October 21st.

The small congregation gradually grew in size, and eventually came to number 25 families. Cemetery records indicate that the vast majority of parishioners continued to be of German extraction, with such surnames as Rust, Borgerding, Dittleberger, etc. recurring. A very small number of Irish families were also included in its membership, with names like Crowley, Rooney, and Garvey.

After the turn of the century, church membership began to dwindle. The school building, no longer needed, was town down. Eventually the Immaculate Conception became a mission of Saints Peter and Paul Church at nearby Gubser's Mill.

For the past three-quarters of a century, the Immaculate Conception church has been

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 3

Quadrangle name Butler

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

|      |   |   |         |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
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| 1    | 6 | 7 | 3       | 7 | 4 | 4 | 0        | 4 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 0 |
| Zone |   |   | Easting |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

B 

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F 

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| Zone |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

G 

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|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

H 

|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state n/a code county n/a code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Margaret Warminski, Architectural Historian

organization

date May, 1986

street & number 236 East Fourth Street

telephone (606) 291-1242

city or town Newport

state Kentucky

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*David L. Morgan*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date December 23, 1986

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*entered in the*  
**National Register**

date

1-29-87

*J. Pelores Byes*  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

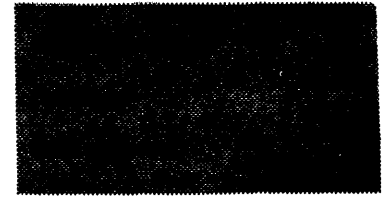
date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
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Continuation sheet Item number

7

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embellishment. The coffered ceiling and wall dadoes feature polychrome stenciling of stylized design. (Photo 16.) Large frescoes of seraphim flank the main altar. (Photo 14.) Small cartouches with the legends "AM" (Ave Maria) and "SJ" (Saint Joseph) are centered over the side altars. Pews, interior doors and woodwork are grained to resemble oak.

The main altar of the church is hand-carved and of elaborate design. In contrast to the muted palette of the rest of the sanctuary, the altar is painted white with gilt accents. It is adorned with small quatrefoils, colonnettes and scrolls, and is surmounted by a cross. Its most unique feature is its revolving tabernacle, which can be turned to reveal one of three different settings. The most ornate of these features a gilt triptych embellished with figures of the wheat and grapes; emblems of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. (Photo 15.)

The church's original organ remains in place in the choir loft. It was built by the J. Estey Co. of Brattleboro, Vermont, and is of ornately-carved walnut in the Renaissance Revival style. Since mice long ago gnawed through its bellows, it is no longer used. (Photo 17.)

The small anteroom located on the south elevation includes built-in storage cupboards and a tiny confessional. Its walls are lined with tongue-in-groove wooden paneling; all furnishings are handmade. Stored in the anteroom are all the church's original altar linens and vestments, as well as old censers, statues, and Missals printed in German. (Photo 18.)

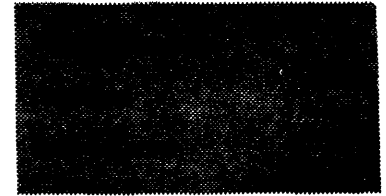
The Immaculate Conception Cemetery is located on the steep hillside directly behind the church. It includes the graves of parishioners dating from the 1860's to 1971. (Photos 9, 10.) Although most graves are marked by flat stone markers of simple design, two elaborate monuments commemorate daughters who died young. The grave of Anna Maria E. Rust (1886-1908) is a rectangular limestone pillar surmounted by a kneeling angel, gazing heavenward. (Photo 11.) Emma, the two-month old infant daughter of Mathous and Emma Schmidt (June 6, 1900-August 7, 1900), is commemorated by a tapered shaft of polished granite. (Photo 12.) Unlike most old graveyards in Northern Kentucky, the Immaculate Conception Cemetery has been well-maintained and has been little troubled by vandalism.

Alterations to the Immaculate Conception Church have been minimal. As stated previously, the small south anteroom appears to have been added shortly after the building's completion. The steeple was shortened at an undetermined date; it originally was ten feet higher. Minor masonry repairs have also been attempted. A sag in the foundation's northwest corner was repaired with concrete blocks. A concrete skim coat was rather inexpertly applied over the stone retaining wall along Stepstone Road. In addition, a door on the rear (east) elevation has been boarded over. (See photos 1, 8, 7.)

The structural fabric of the church building has remained intact, since no modern utilities (electricity, central heat, or plumbing) have been introduced. Furthermore, its wood siding has remained in remarkably good condition. This fine state of preservation is

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Immaculate Conception Church & Cemetery

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due in part to the church's protected site, sheltered from the prevailing west winds by a steep hill. Careful attention by descendants of the small congregation has also preserved the building for the past 125 years.

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REFERENCES

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Inventory of Immaculate Conception Cemetery (unpublished). Compiled by Kenneth A. Reis, Campbell County Historical Center, no date. Available at Campbell County Historical Center, Grant's Lick, Kentucky.

Kentucky Historic Resources Inventory Form, Immaculate Conception Church. Prepared by Kenneth A. Reis, December 1985. Available at Kentucky Heritage Council, Frankfort.

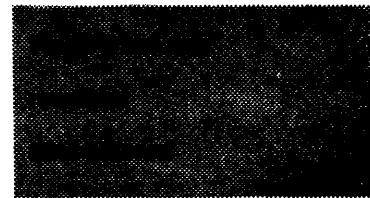
Ryan, Father Joseph. HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE OF COVINGTON. Covington, Kentucky: Diocese of Covington, 1954.

Interview with Mr. Clarence Record of Peach Grove, Kentucky, historian of the Immaculate Conception parish, March 22, 1986.

Lake, D. J. ATLAS OF PENDLETON COUNTY. Philadelphia: D. J. Lake and Co., 1883.

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maintained by descendants of the original parishioners, with help from the Catholic Order of Foresters and Saints Peter and Paul Parish. Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Record, descendants of Michael Faulhaber, have served as its custodians and unofficial historians. A priest visits the old church and cemetery for a benediction each year on the third Sunday of October; the anniversary of their dedication.

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**BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CEMETERY**

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Beginning at a point in the east line of Stepstone Road, at its point of intersection with a fence that marks the north line of the church property;

then proceeding east, at right angles to Stepstone Road, along said north fence line to its northeast corner, this being its point of intersection with the east fence line of the property;

then proceeding south, parallel to Stepstone Road, along said east fence line, to its point of intersection with the south fence line of the church property;

then proceeding west along said south fence line, at right angles to Stepstone Road, to the point of intersection of said line with the west fence line of the church property (this line being marked by a stone retaining wall, and running parallel with the east line of Stepstone Road);

then proceeding north along said west line to the place of beginning.

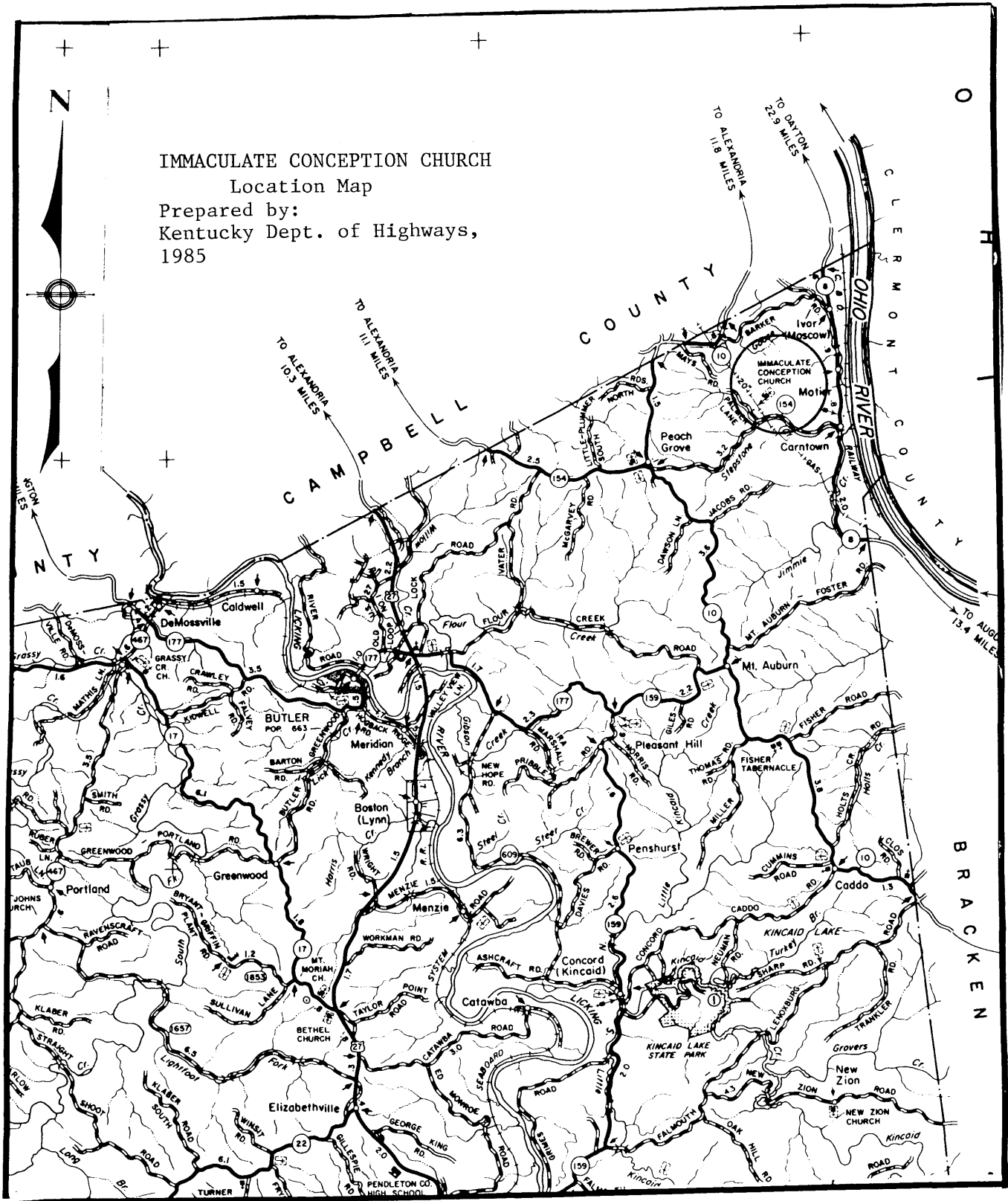
This boundary was drawn to include the property associated with the church since its founding in 1860. The lot, rectangular in shape, includes three acres. Included within this boundary are the church building, the cemetery, and one contributing outbuilding.

The nominated area includes two contributing buildings and one contributing site.

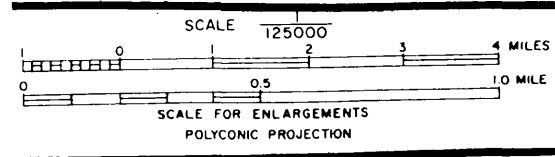
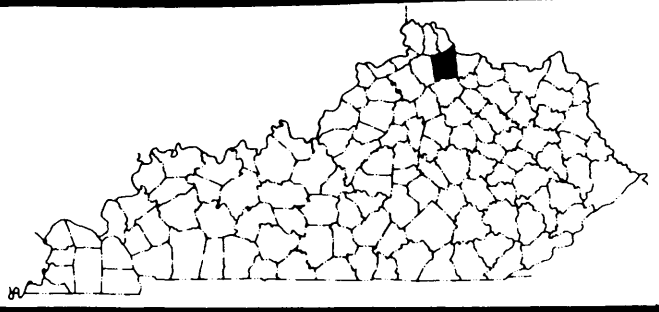
# IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH

## Location Map

Prepared by:  
Kentucky Dept. of Highways,  
1985



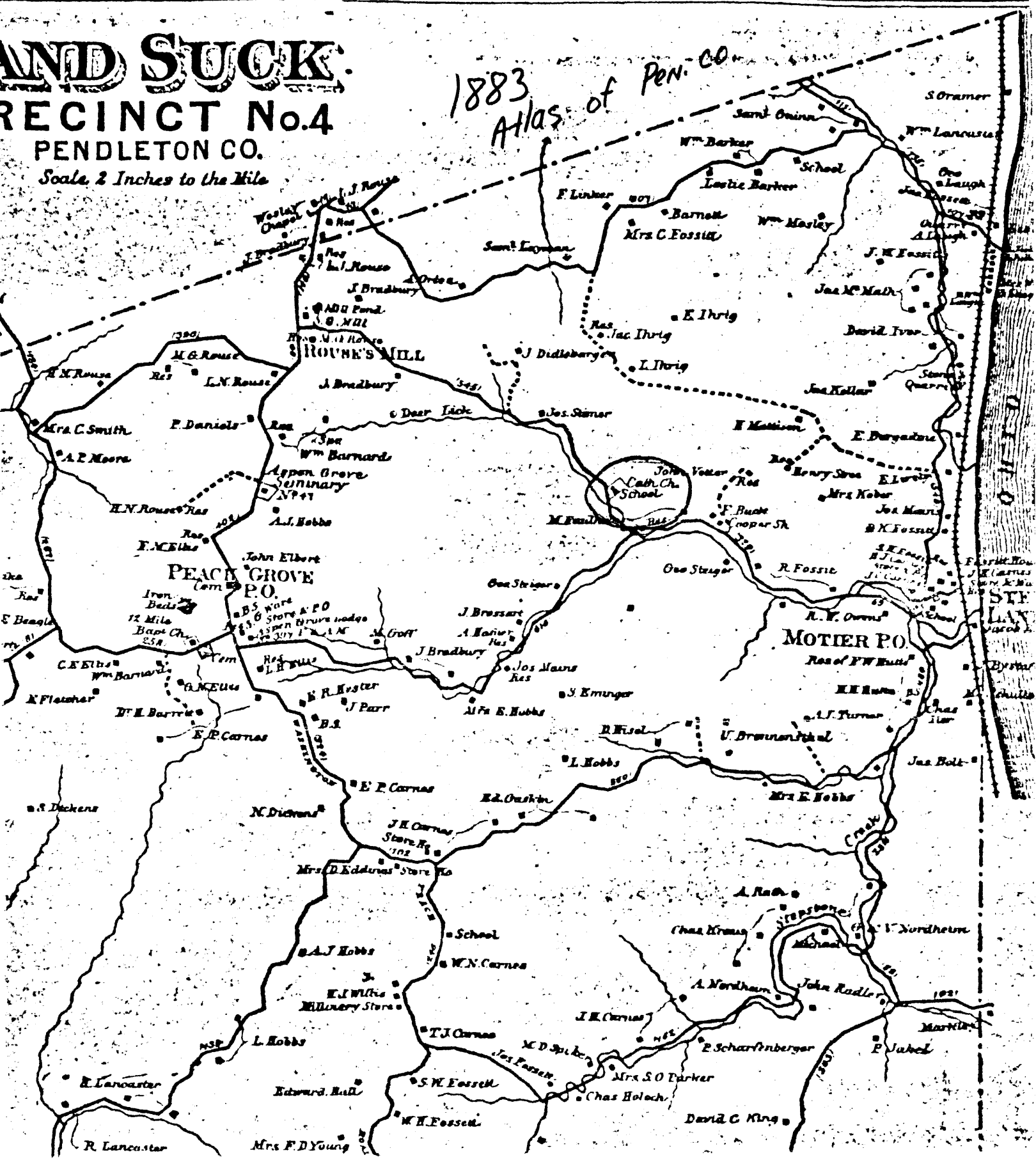
### GENERAL HIGHWAY MAP PENDLETON COUNTY KENTUCKY





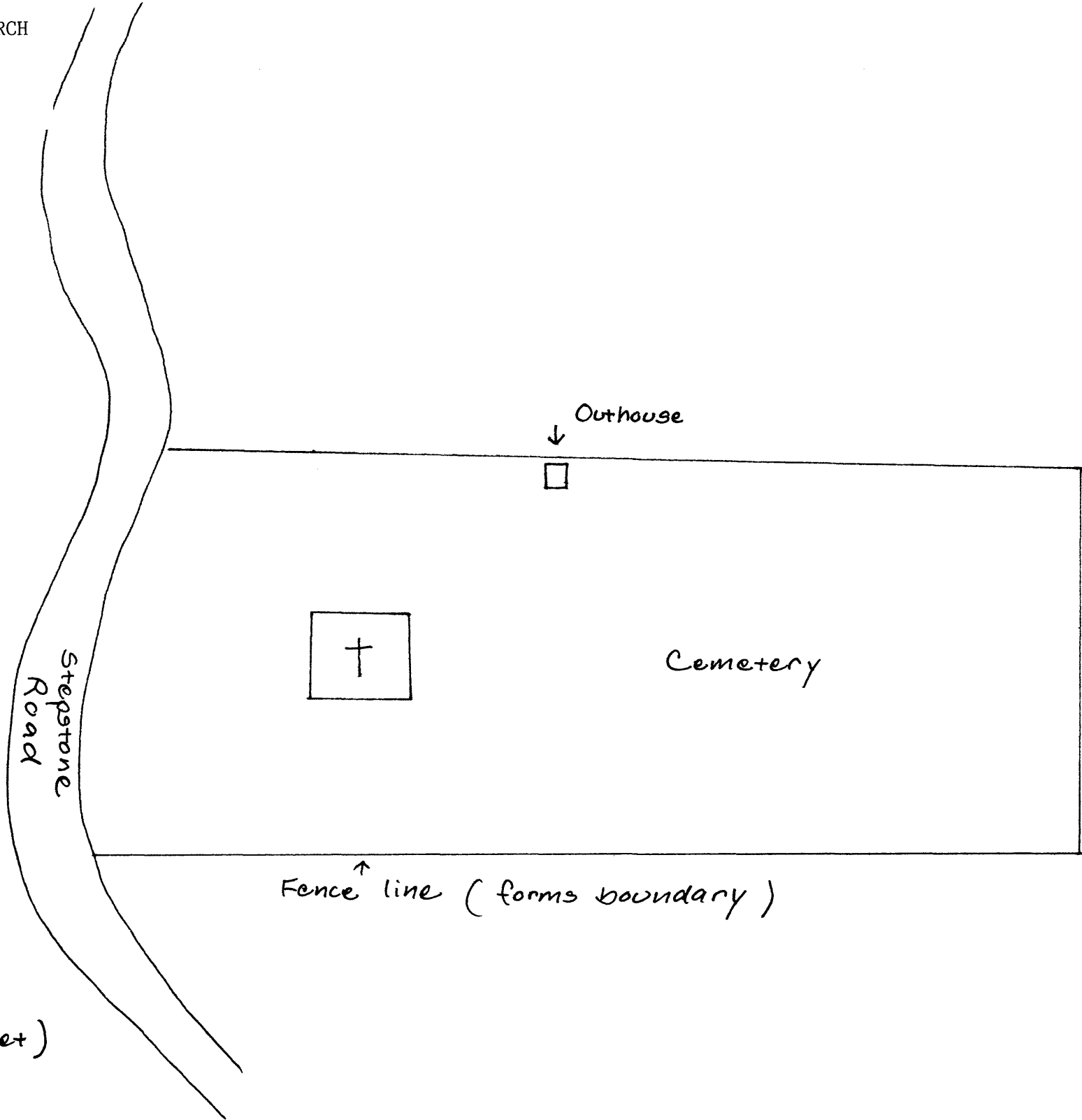
# AND SUCK PRECINCT No. 4 PENDLETON CO. Scale 2 Inches to the Mile

1883  
Atlas of Pen. Co.

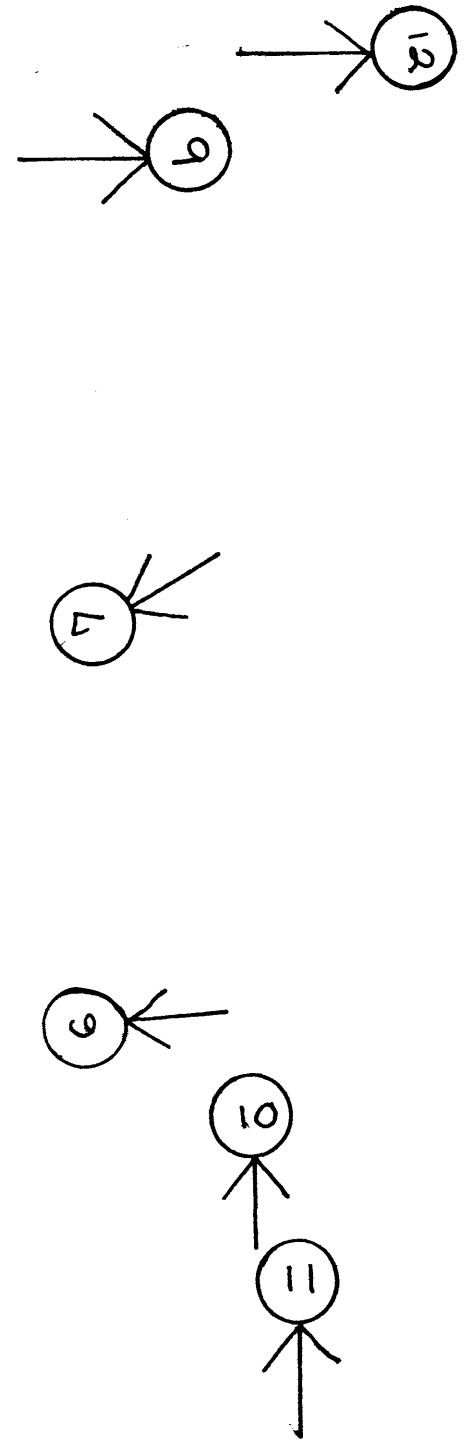
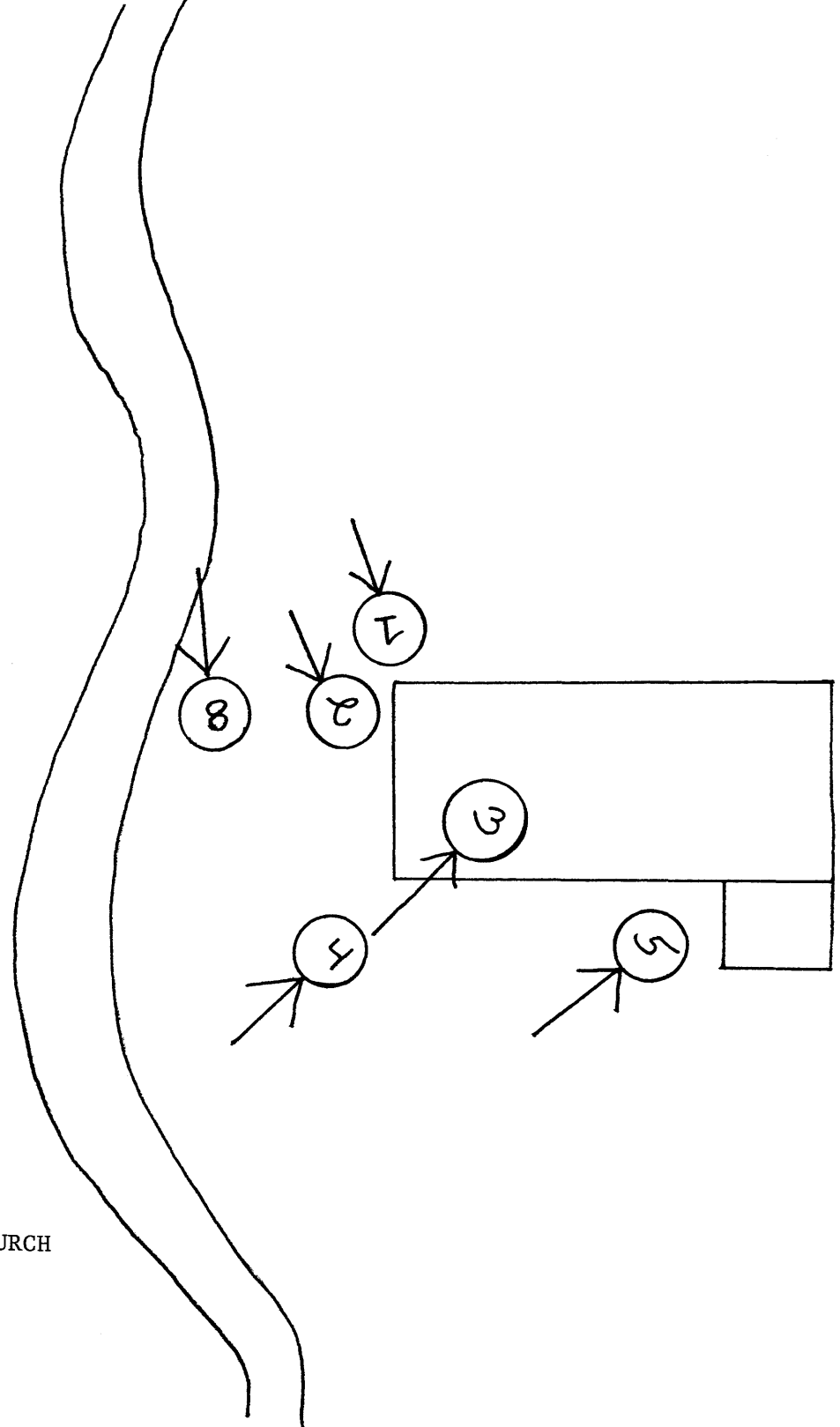


IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH

Sketch Map



(1 inch = approx 50 feet)



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH

Photo Key Map