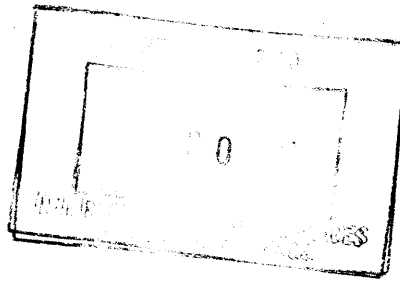


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church and Pleasant Hill Cemetery

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Beaumont Avenue & 200th Street not for publication

city or town Yale vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Dallas code 049 zip code 50277

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.)

Rowell J. Soike August 26, 2004
 Signature of certifying official Title Date
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 Signature of commenting official/Title Date

 State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall 10/12/04
 Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Name of Property Pleasant Hill Cemetery

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

- building(s), district, site, structure, object

Table with columns: Contributing, Noncontributing, buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total. Values: Contributing 1, Noncontributing 1, Total 2.

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

n/a

n/a

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility, FUNERARY/cemetery, DOMESTIC/secondary structure

RELIGION/religious facility, FUNERARY/cemetery, DOMESTIC/secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Open Country Church

foundation CERAMIC TILE, walls METAL/aluminum, walls WOOD, roof ASPHALT, other GLASS, foundation CONCRETE

Narrative Description

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

Name of Property Pleasant Hill Cemetery

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1881-1954

Significant Dates

1881

1910

1925

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church and Pleasant Hill Cemetery
Name of Property

Dallas County, Iowa
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 7 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

| | | | |
|---|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | 15 | 396020 | 4622100 |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 2 | | | |

| | | | |
|---|------|---------|----------|
| 3 | | | |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 4 | | | |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Bennett

organization _____ date March 2004

street & number 1107 Muscatine Avenue telephone 319-354-2315

city or town Iowa City state Iowa zip code 52240

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church and Pleasant Hill Cemetery

street & number 1125 210th St. (c/o Elizabeth Lundberg) telephone 515-755-2268

city or town Linden state Iowa zip code 50146

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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

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 Keeper, National Register of Historic Places, 1849 "C" Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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7. Description

Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church and nearby Pleasant Hill Cemetery are both situated in a tranquil setting of cedars and deciduous trees, surrounded by open country. The property site is located in an exclusively rural township, Lincoln Township, in northwest Dallas County, Iowa. For nearly 125 years, the church and cemetery have served farm families in the area as well as the residents of nearby villages like Yale, Panora, Linden, and Jamaica. These seven acres are a tiny pocket of Iowa's heritage, a place where the state's identity and values were defined. Together, these pastoral sites have survived relatively unaltered, thus preserving the memories of those associated with Prairie Center Church and their place in our shared cultural history.

According to the county history, pioneer settlers banded together to form a congregation in 1866,¹ and church records indicate the first services were held in two country schoolhouses, first the Powell School and later at Pleasant Valley. Prairie Center Church, an archetypical open country church, was built on a acre of land in 1880 and dedicated in January 1881.² As with most vernacular architecture in America, the church underwent transformations through the years but has remained in essentially the same architectural configuration since 1925. Now, at the end of the building's life as a church and social hub for the community, it deserves consideration for preservation and adaptive re-use. The last official service was held on December 28, 2003.

Pleasant Hill Cemetery, the burial ground long associated with the church, stands across the road and encompasses six acres. The earliest land surveyors in 1849 described the distinctive features on an otherwise treeless prairie as "surface rolling, soil 2nd rate, scattering maple, elm, willow on creek, balance prairie."³ The *Andreas Atlas* map from 1875 indicates something notable at this location, perhaps a meadow.⁴ In fact, the cemetery predates the church and will probably persist long after the church building itself. A few of the individuals, mostly infants and children who died in the 1860s (two graves) and 1870s (twelve graves), were re-interred at this location from burial sites elsewhere in Dallas County. One hundred years later, over 500 burials have taken place and approximately 200 or so plots remain available.⁵

Prairie Center Church, 1880-1909 period

Simple in design and construction, the original church was a one-room frame building with a rectangle shape, measuring approximately 28 feet wide at the front and back and 50 feet deep. There was no basement or information about the foundation if there was one. The front gable faces west toward the cemetery, and the exterior was clad with horizontal clapboard siding and pilaster corner boards. Pedimented lintels decorate the side windows and double door entry. On the

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interior, the pulpit was situated on the east end, and the pews faced east. Wooden floors and woodwork combined with plaster walls to finish the interior.⁶

Carpenters and artisans crafted the wooden structure using traditional methods and locally available materials. Although the builders might have consulted pattern books or literature of the day, it is unlikely they used the designs of a professional architect. Instead, following familiar examples like the one-room schoolhouse or home, they utilized a tried and true method with light frame construction and a simple pitch roof and open eaves.

One of the outstanding elements still intact is the double door front entry with a glass transom over the doors and topped by a low-pitch pediment. The doorway frame measures 72 inches wide and 84 inches tall, and each wooden door (30 inches by 84 inches) has recessed vertical panels as shown in the photographs. Each of the four windowpanes in the fixed transom above the doors measures approximately 16 inches square. An old metal latch secures the doors. Sturdy screen doors, decorated by turned spindles and brackets, hang on the interior side.

One might guess that such impressive front doors – somewhat oversized for their present location – might have been placed on the front gable end of the building, in the center of the west side. When the double doors are opened on the current structure, there is not sufficient space for the door on the left side to lie flat in a symmetrical manner as originally designed (only 23 inches of wall space on the left side and 27 inches on the right). This may hint that the Greek Revival-style pediment and double doors once graced the front of the church and were moved and adapted for use on the southeast corner when the tower entrance was constructed in 1909.

The east and west sides, with gable roof peaks towering up to about 28 or 30 feet, now feature large Gothic-style windows of colored glass. These pointed arch or lancet windows are 11 feet high and 6 feet 10 inches wide. The north and south sides of the building are adorned with rectangular double-hung windows of colored glass, now totaling six in number. Three of the remaining side windows are 84 inches high by 39 inches wide, while the three windows on the south side are shorter in height (66 inches). All of the side windows were designed to match the rose-colored glass borders on the main arched windows, with interior glass pieces patterned in frosted or speckled transparent glass. Each section of the double-hung window has two panes over two panes, framed by the colored border.

Although no historical evidence exists as to the date of the windows, given the simplicity of their design one might suggest they were purchased from a lumber dealer or manufacturer's trade catalogue. The windows are not of exquisite beauty, complex design, or multi-colored. Instead, their style represents a standard pattern, probably relatively low-cost and so widely available as to be

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common to small churches throughout America. Again, it is possible the windows were part of the original church when it was constructed in 1880, or the windows could have been purchased and added as a fancy embellishment in the 1910 remodeling. Since records do indicate the entrance was moved to the southeast corner, it is still unclear where the doors were originally located. If the entrance were placed on the west side, the symmetrical placement of the large lancet windows would not have been possible in such a configuration.

Prairie Center Church, 1910-1924 period

Adapting to change and growth in the congregation, the original Prairie Center Church underwent a major remodeling in 1910 to create a more spacious sanctuary and to increase the visual prominence of the church by adding a tower to the modest structure. The new chancel on the north side was achieved by adding a transept or gable roof end to the existing structure. By extending a portion of the north wall by 8 feet, an enlarged altar area was created with room for chairs or a choir.⁷ The 18-foot-wide alcove was a raised platform, with two steps down to the main floor and an altar rail on the top step.⁸ The original pew arrangement was reconfigured so worshippers faced north where the pulpit and altar were placed. A photograph reveals that a window was placed on the east wall of this alcove (although it was later lost to fire).⁹ A chimney may have been added at this time, for use with a coal-fired furnace.

Church records mention an entrance was built on the southwest corner at this time, but there is no indication where it was located prior to this. Situated on the top of a gradual rise in the landscape, Prairie Center Church had always stood out on the open prairie, but a tower mounted on a mansard roof base gave a new, grander appearance to the old church. The tower and entrance were added to the southeast corner of the building, with a mansard roof with straight sides forming the base, an open belfry, and a tent roof-shaped turret. A Latin cross decorated the top.¹⁰ It is not known conclusively when the top of the tower was removed, but it does not appear in photographs dating from 1955. An outdoor light fixture dated at least post-1930 still hangs on the corner of the mansard roof tower base.

As mentioned before, it is possible the large Gothic windows were added during this phase of the church building's life. A larger congregation and a continuous period of prosperity in agriculture probably meant the church had larger coffers in 1910 than in 1880. Their desire to improve their church building was matched with the availability of enough money to afford a few minor luxuries. The mass-produced colored glass windows were relatively inexpensive in 1910, even compared to 1880, and therefore were a more feasible purchase for small congregations wishing to upgrade their buildings.

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One more adaptation of Gothic design is the use of a hexagon plaque or roundel, in place of a wheel window. Placed directly above the front lancet window, this hand-painted sign provides the name of the church, date of construction, and date of remodeling. Church members were not concerned with adhering to formal design considerations, and they considered the lancet windows and new tower as complementary elements. As often happens with traditional rural architecture and the use of eclectic elements, they simply recycled the entrance doors and did not worry whether the doors matched, or were consistent with, prevailing architectural styles. Practicality and frugality ruled the day.

Prairie Center Church, 1925-present period

In 1925, church parishioners temporarily elevated the building and excavated a basement underneath.¹¹ A red, hollow clay tile foundation with a concrete stucco finish raised the level of the main floor of the church and allowed for eight basement windows and one 37 1/2 inch wide covered opening, presumably for a coal chute. Each double-hung basement window measures 33 inches wide by 41 inches high except for the north-side basement windows, which are 33 inches wide by 22 inches high. The windowsills for the basement windows are 6 1/2 inches deep. A cellar door (56 inches by 84 inches) was located on the northeast corner of the building. A concrete slab, of undetermined date, extends along the north side of the chancel addition, measuring 18 feet 4 inches across from east to west.

An entrance and stair hall on the southeast side of the building provided a second entry to the church with one set of stairs leading to the sanctuary, while another set of stairs led to the basement. Directly to the west of the new entrance and stairways, a small room with two windows was built to serve as a Sunday school room and nursery.¹² It has doors that lead into the sanctuary of the church and into the vestibule area under the tower entrance. A lean-to or shed roof covered this addition and integrated it into the existing structure. Three of the windows on the south side (the vestibule under the tower and the Sunday school room) may have been on the original south wall and were adapted for use in the remodeling effort.

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Illustration #1. Historical photograph of Prairie Center Church exterior with tower and belfry, southwest façade, ca. 1930. (From photograph on souvenir china plate, original loaned by Hope Robinson).

None of the historical photographs of Prairie Center Church found during this investigation date earlier than 1925 when a basement and foundation were added.¹³ A souvenir plate, possibly issued around the 50th anniversary of the church in 1930, features a photo of the church with the tower and basement. The trim is painted a dark color in contrast to the white siding (see illustration #1).

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Rural electrification brought indoor and outdoor lighting to the church in the fall of 1930,¹⁴ but church members did not install modern amenities like indoor plumbing or toilet facilities because they had never dug a well for a water supply. A floor drain was placed in the kitchen area in the basement, but church members often reminisce about having to bring water to social events and carrying it down the steep stairs to the basement. By the 1950s, a range and refrigerator had been added to the kitchen area in the basement. Members recall using curtains to divide the large basement room into separate areas for Sunday school classes.¹⁵ A new propane gas furnace was purchased in October 1950 for \$900.¹⁶

New hardwood flooring was installed in the sanctuary at the end of 1955, no doubt in honor of the 75th anniversary of the church. According to a scrapbook compiled at the time:

December 18, 1955 (Sunday)

And now we have another important entry to make: A new hardwood floor has been laid, sanded, varnished and two coats of varnish, and waxed, in the sanctuary and front vestibule. Work on same took about two weeks. No services were held December 11, 1955, owing to all seats being in the basement, and could not be put upstairs yet, but the work was completed about December 15th, replacements of furniture made, and Friday morning, Dec. 16th, a group went up to the church, dusted, and finished final arrangements for regular services Sunday, December 18, 1955.¹⁷

The church building remained the same on the inside and out from 1925 until October 1977 when a fire broke out on the north end and brought changes to the original structure. The chancel area in the north extension was badly burned, and the walls were rebuilt and one window was permanently removed. The glass in several windows cracked due to the intensity of the heat, but many of the windows remain intact even if damaged. The plaster walls, woodwork, and interior furnishings were damaged by smoke and soot. Wood paneling now masks the original interior, and the height of the ceiling was dropped to accommodate suspended acoustical panels. The concave ceiling design was retained, but rectangular fluorescent light fixtures replaced hanging lamps. The floor, woodwork, pews, and furniture were all sanded and refinished by church members, but the piano, organ, and altar furniture needed to be replaced.¹⁸

Despite the need for repairs to the north end and missing turret for the mansard-roofed tower, the exterior of the church still retains the same appearance it did in 1925. Some might argue much of the character and historical integrity of the interior space was lost, but the exterior and overall sense of space have been preserved, and the interior rehabilitation work could be undone or re-done by serious preservationists. Most of the original structure is intact under the post-fire refinishing,

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although some permanent and irreversible changes were probably introduced. There has been no discussion of restoring the tent-shaped turret, belfry, and Latin cross to the top of the tower, but photographic evidence could help in the re-creation if needed.

Admittedly, the most serious offense, in terms of preserving the original integrity of the building exterior, was the siding added to the building façade in 1988. As membership dwindled and caretakers aged, it seemed wise to eliminate the need for painting the old wooden church.¹⁹ Again, it appears that this siding could be removed and that the original clapboard siding that is still underneath could be repaired and restored. The workers who applied the siding may have inflicted little damage on the window and door pediments. Aluminum storm windows would also have to be removed at some point to bring the original church building back to life. Finally, a wooden ramp added for handicapped access in the 1990s covers part of the three concrete steps leading up to the front entrance.

Prairie Center Church is not in perfect condition, but it still represents material evidence about the character and beliefs of many Iowans during the last century. The context for overall site relies on unity between the church, the cemetery, and the landscape, and hopefully all the vistas can be preserved and protected. The church property is approximately 250 feet (north to south) and 150 feet (east to west). Besides Prairie Center Church itself, there is one non-contributing structure, an outhouse, which was probably constructed in the 1960s or 1970s. An older concrete slab to the north of the present outhouse, and back along the fence line, indicates the site of an earlier outhouse. Also on the north side of the property stands a propane gas tank and a black metal sign with the name of the church and announcements. The landscaping around the church includes three cedar trees and some aging deciduous trees.

The utter simplicity of the building reminds us that these people created their small church from scratch, without embellishments or a large capital investment. The practical and somewhat frugal nature of the farming community meant they could forego any complicated or costly features and need not invest in modern amenities, like a well for water or indoor restroom facilities. These rural folk had their own standards for a place of worship and gathering, and open country churches are comparatively different from those built by churchgoers in small towns or larger cities in Iowa, where brick or stone buildings of monumental proportions are common. Their reliance on one another and their ability to get by with only basic necessities can be seen in this uncomplicated edifice. The people associated with Prairie Center Church represented the strength and permanence of the church, not some grand building.

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Illustration #2. Pleasant Hill Cemetery entrance sign across the road to the west of the church and slightly south on Beaumont Avenue, looking SSW. Photographed in 2003.

Pleasant Hill Cemetery

The pastoral surroundings include remarkable intact view-scapes in all four directions preserving a classic portrait of Iowa's natural and agricultural beauty. Of particular note is the Pleasant Hill Cemetery directly across the road to the west, which is connected historically and spatially to the church and adds character and feeling to the setting. Scattered remnants of native prairie grasses including big bluestem crop up next to the oldest gravestones in the middle of summer (see illustrations # 3, #4, and #5, or color slides #1 and #2). There is no sexton, but the Lincoln Township trustees keep records and maintain the cemetery. Visitors appear with great regularity, welcomed by familiar surroundings and drawn to their ancestral heritage.

There are over 500 individual grave markers laid out in straight rows and all face the same direction, following the belief that "the deceased would then rise up facing east at the Second Coming of

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Christ.^{19,20} Names on the headstones are usually carved on the west vertical façade of the stone. The monolith marking the Davis family plot is a remarkably large and rustic-looking boulder (no doubt pulled from the surrounding fields where large glacial boulders are naturally found). It commemorates a pioneer family, and two Davis children, born in 1858 and 1859, who were “killed by Indians” in 1882 according to the epitaph.²¹



Illustration #3. Symbolic art graces these two stones and others in Pleasant Hill Cemetery, here representing an open book or scroll on the left and a lamb on the right. The naturalistic Davis family marker, mentioned in the text, is visible to the left of the tallest tree on the right. This view looks toward the east in this 2003 photograph.

The oldest gravestones in the cemetery tend to be in rows nearest the main entrance driveway and farther to the south. Some of the more recent markers are clustered in rows towards the northwest and northern sections of the cemetery. Generally the cemetery is filled with small- to medium-sized standing tablet gravestones, columns, and block headstones. Variations in form include square and segmented tops on tablet gravestones, often with chisel-incised lettering and bas relief sculpture. Some are carved in elaborate shapes with lavish floral ornamentation or symbolic representations, such as weeping willow trees, draperies, or vines of ivy. As Coleen L. Nutty pointed out in her study of prairie pioneer cemeteries in Story County, Iowa, the “peak occurrence for the column type of

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gravestone was concentrated in the 1880s and 1890s, and carried over into the early 1900s.²² Pleasant Hill Cemetery certainly bears this out given the number of square, gabled, gabled finial, and obelisk columns present. Older stele monuments show some deterioration around their decorative carvings, and some lettering is obscured.

Large family monuments on bases are common, often honoring the patriarch and matriarch of a family clan and surrounded by smaller stones for family members. In the twentieth century, modern stones featuring lettering formed by sandblasting and polishing became prevalent. Popular forms include upright thick blocks of stone with no capital, horizontal single blocks with a flat surface for lettering, or beveled blocks.²³ Changes in kinship references vary over time as do the vital statistics recorded. The date of birth is not given as often in the 1850s through the 1870s, although the age of the person is often noted. From the 1880s on, it became common practice to provide both the birth and death dates but not the age of the individual.



Illustration #4. View of typical markers and remnant of bluestem prairie grass at Pleasant Hill Cemetery looking east, taken in 2003.

Pleasant Hill Cemetery's value as a resource stems from the natural beauty of the landscape, a meadowlike topography layered with historical monuments illustrative of "attitudes towards death

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and commemoration, aesthetic and spiritual values, material culture and changing technology.²²⁴ This rural cemetery, accented by the picturesque church, appears spacious and romantic with the broad open sky above. However, given its relative simplicity, modest size, and gridlike layout, it does not entirely fit the model of the carefully designed landscape of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Massachusetts, a National Historic Landmark. Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded in 1831 and originally intended as a respite from crowded urban cemeteries, became the standard for American cemeteries. Unlike the embellishments found at larger cemeteries, there is no gatehouse, winding path, family plots with iron fences, mausoleum, pond, or formalized landscaping with stones facing different directions at Pleasant Hill Cemetery. Everything is laid out neatly in rows like the crops in the fields.



Illustration #5. A view towards the southwest section of Pleasant Hill Cemetery, taken in 2003.

At one time a small wooden shed with a gable roof stood along the western edge of the cemetery, but the township trustees burned down this old building in July 2000. Bordering the cemetery is a rectangular wire fence topped with regular barbed wire typically used around farms. There is one metal sign overhead the main entrance on the east side on Beaumont Avenue (see illustration #2) and two informal entrances or driveways to facilitate access. Some native plants exist, while conifer trees, deciduous trees, and shrubs were apparently planted to enhance the landscaping. The ground slopes gently downward from the east towards Mosquito Creek in the west. The overall feeling of stumbling back in time is further enhanced by the brook-like sounds from the small rapids in Mosquito Creek, adding serenity to this enduring scene. The strong sense of place and a feeling of connection to timeless forces exist in this undisturbed world, of which Prairie Center Church is the centerpiece.

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¹ R. F. Wood, *Past and Present of Dallas County, Iowa* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1907), p. 165.

² Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands), p. 23.

³ Iowa, Land Office, [Field notes of the survey of townships and township boundaries in Iowa], 1836-1858, Vol. 13, Townships 67-100, Range 29-33. Also Iowa, Secretary of State, Land Survey Records, 1836-1858, Original Surveyor's Field Notes for Township 80 North, Range Number 29 West of 5th Meridian, November 1849. Microfilm available in Library, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

⁴ *A. T. Andreas Historical and Illustrated Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago: Andreas Atlas Company, 1875).

⁵ Dallas County, Iowa Pleasant Hill Cemetery (Pleasant Hill-Prairie Center, Section 17, Lincoln Township), Transcriptions copied June 9, 1980, by Robert L. Smiley, June Smiley, and Alfred W. Whitacre.

⁶ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands), p. 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸ Interview with Prairie Center Methodist Church members Neva Clark, Myrtle McClatchey, Elizabeth Lundberg, and Zelma Motsick, at the church in Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa, May 26, 2003.

⁹ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, 1966-1978. (Original volume in private hands.)

¹⁰ Historical photograph of Prairie Center Church exterior with tower and belfry, facing southwest side, ca. 1930. (From photograph on souvenir china plate, original loaned by Hope Robinson.)

¹¹ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands), p. 25.

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¹² Ibid., includes History of the Prairie Center Methodist Church, Diamond anniversary, October 16, 1955, booklet, p. 3.

¹³ A survey of over 200 photographs of Methodist church exteriors in turn-of-the-century Iowa revealed common patterns of simple design and construction methods, unembellished by costly ornamentation or grandeur. Of particular note among the photographs in Special Collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City were views of the Hawkeye Methodist Church in Huron Township, Clayton County, and a Methodist church in Prescott, Jackson County. Both churches share characteristics with Prairie Center Church and show structures with low foundations of stone or virtually no foundation.

¹⁴ Prairie Center Methodist Church Financial Record, 1923-1953. (Original volume in private hands), p. 100.

¹⁵ Interview with Prairie Center Methodist Church members Neva Clark, Myrtle McClatchey, Elizabeth Lundberg, and Zelma Motsick, at the church in Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa, May 26, 2003.

¹⁶ Prairie Center Methodist Church Financial Record, 1923-1953. (Original volume in private hands), p. 284.

¹⁷ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands), p. 42.

¹⁸ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, 1966-1978. (Original volume in private hands.)

¹⁹ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, 1978-1992. (Original volume in private hands.) Over forty people contributed money to a fund for the siding.

²⁰ Loren N. Horton, "Messages in Stone: Symbolism in Victorian Grave Markers," *The Palimpsest*, Summer 1989, p. 63.

²¹ Dallas County, Iowa Pleasant Hill Cemetery (Pleasant Hill-Prairie Center, Section 17, Lincoln Township), Transcriptions copied June 9, 1980, by Robert L. Smiley, June Smiley, and Alfred W. Whitacre. The details about where and how the young men died are missing. Descriptions of relations between American Indians and those who settled in the area in the 1870s do not mention specific conflicts. However, as Huldah Lamp Kinney remembered, "there was timber along the

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creek [Mosquito Creek] and the Indians had their tents here, and they trapped along the wooded area." *Yale's 100 Yesteryears, 1882-1982* (Yale: Yale Centennial Committee, 1982), p. 17, Yale history section. Another woman told of a time around 1882 when Indians approached their farm but left after looking in the windows. She thought that was the "last time they had seen Indians in that area." *Ibid.*, p. 77, Family history section.

²² Coleen L. Nutty, "Cemetery Symbolism of Prairie Pioneers: Gravestone Art and Social Change in Story County, Iowa," *Journal of the Iowa Archeological Society* 31 (1984): p. 107.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 53-59.

²⁴ Mount Auburn Cemetery National Historic Landmark Nomination and National Register of Historic Places registration form, May 27, 2003, p. 4. Accessed at <http://www.mountauburn.org>, August 11, 2004.

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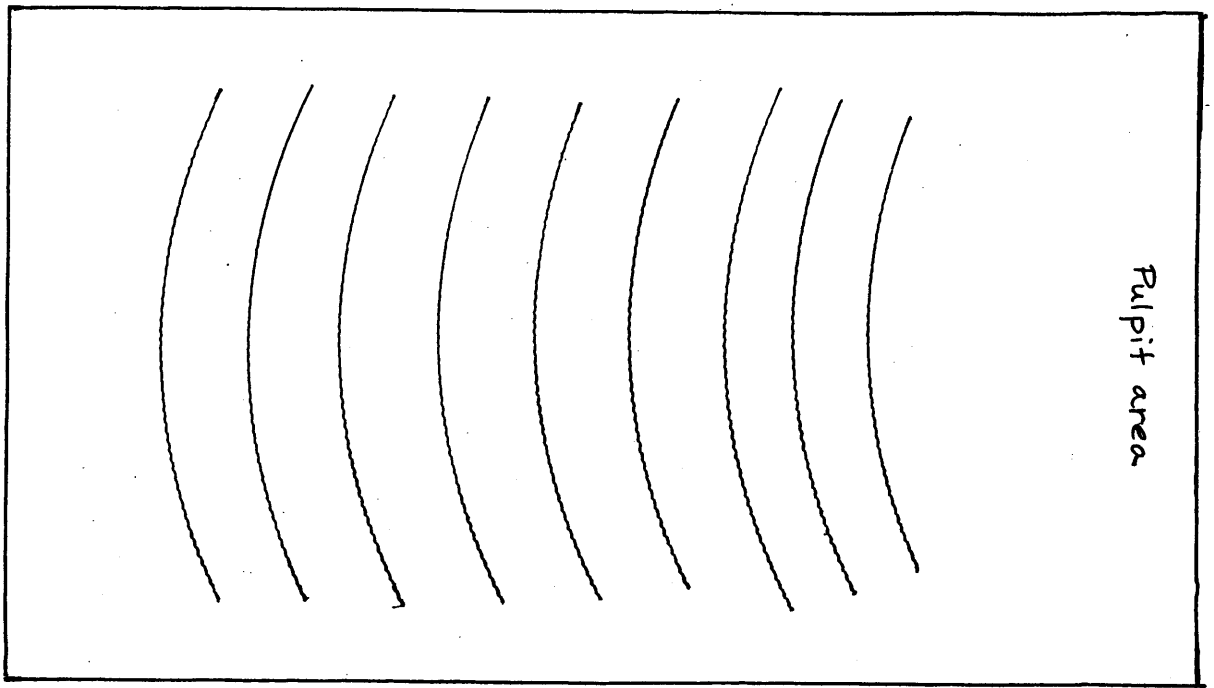
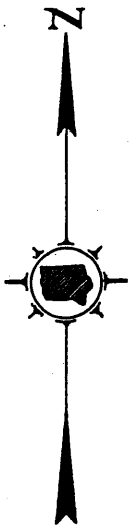
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FLOOR PLAN, 1880-1909



0 ft. 5 ft.
scale

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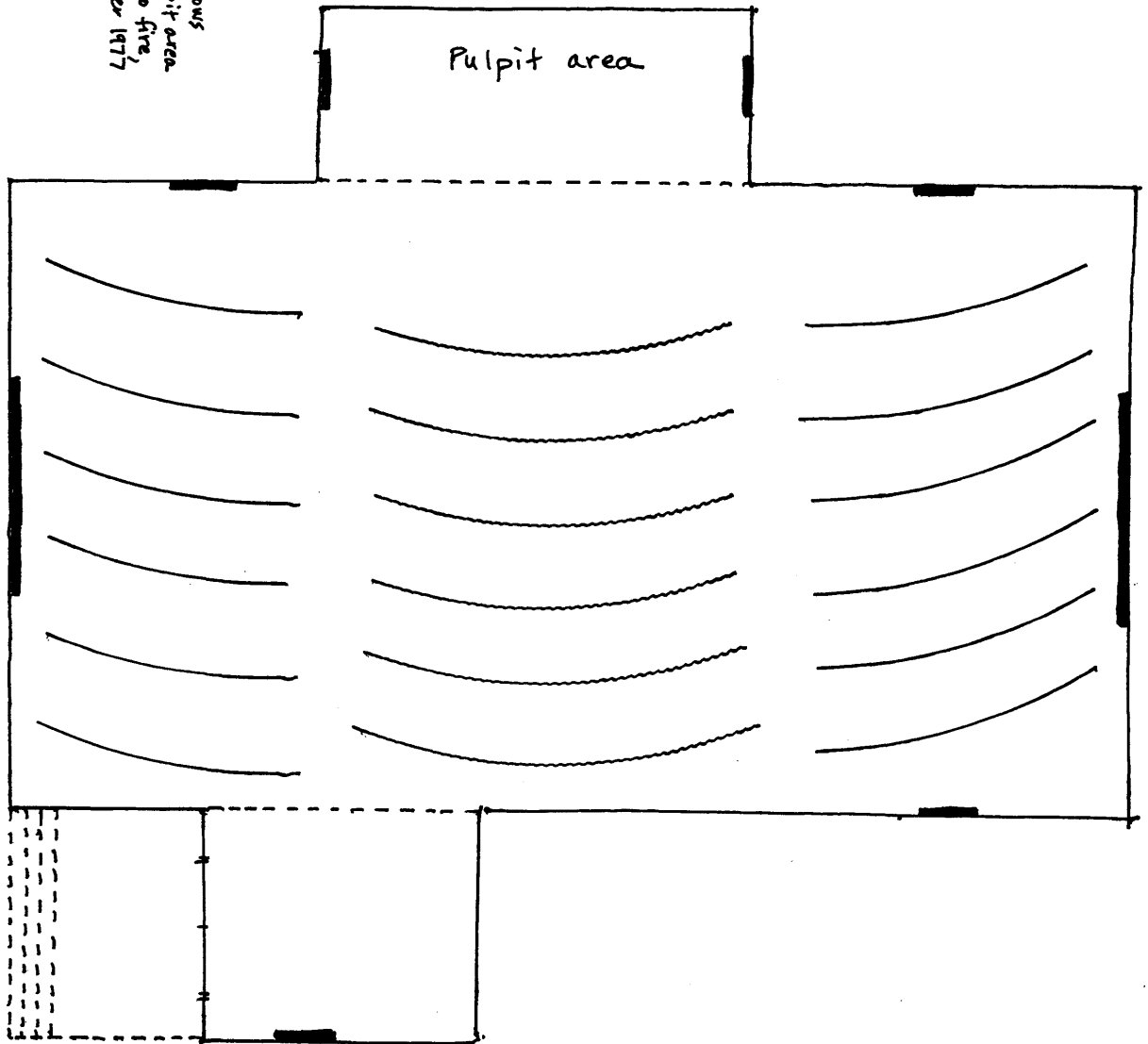
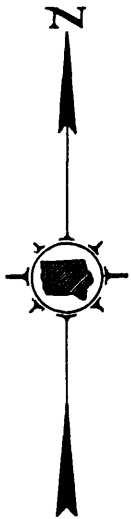
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FLOOR PLAN, 1910-1924

2 windows
in pulpit area
lost to fire,
October 1977

Pulpit area



0 ft. 5 ft.
scale

seating capacity =
130-150 people

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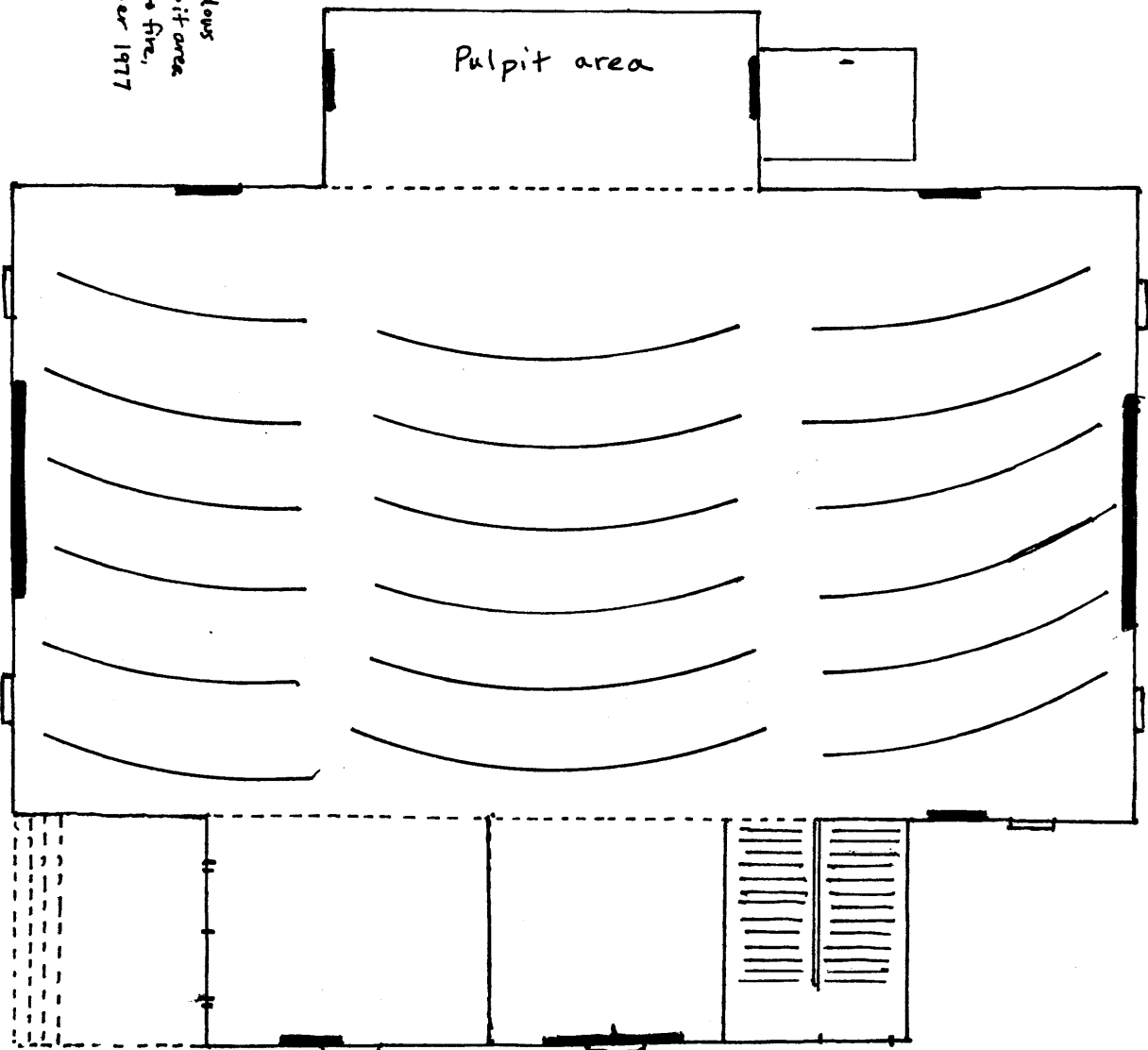
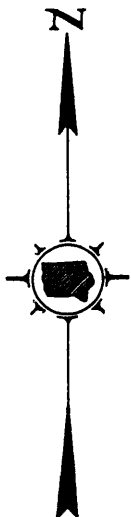
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FLOOR PLAN, 1925-present

2 windows
in pulpit area
lost to fire,
October 1977

Pulpit area



0 ft. 5 ft.
scale
seating capacity =
130 - 150 people

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8. Statement of Significance

Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church is locally significant under Criterion A as an example of social and cultural history of Lincoln Township during the open country church era. The story of Prairie Center Church is part of the history of the Protestant and Methodist church establishment in the early stages of Dallas County settlement. As a survivor of a once prominent cultural phenomenon, the church building and surrounding setting epitomize the history of community building and vernacular architectural representations created by Iowa's rural inhabitants. Moreover, this building was a key part of a once cohesive intellectual and social community and serves as a reminder of a richly textured social history.

Open country churches along with their companion cemeteries once dotted Iowa's countryside, scattered among the farmsteads and as ubiquitous as the rural schoolhouses. The cultural significance of these structures should not be underestimated, for both church and school were social institutions established to foster stability and harmony by promoting prescribed social standards and educational objectives. Although multiple church and denominational histories exist, few church buildings (and relatively few open country churches) in Iowa enjoy National Register status, and thus these properties are lacking an overall context statement on religious history for interpretive purposes.

Yet there is no doubt the development of the Midwest and the complementary ethics often associated with the region are derived from the religious heritage the first settlers brought with them and their desire to foster social welfare. Unfortunately, with the convergence of an aging rural population, a decline in church membership, and profound changes in the economic and political life in Dallas County, it appears an old country church like Prairie Center is indeed a relic of a bygone era and now worthy of consideration as a significant place in Iowa history.

Visitors to the acre of land near Prairie Center Church, where time stood still for so many years, can easily use their imaginations to get in touch with the past. This remnant of a once thriving part of Iowa's rural culture can be appreciated as a living legacy of those who defined the character of our state. Many descendants of Prairie Center's congregation remain connected to the church building and adjoining cemetery, beckoned to this home of memories and sentiment. The picturesque site reinforces the notion that subtle, peaceful settings where traditional rural culture thrived can persist in our fast-paced and amnesiac society.

Equally significant to the history of the church is Pleasant Hill Cemetery, which is a contributing site located directly west, across the road from the church. In this burial ground for early pioneers and

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former members of the church, gravestones date as far back as the 1860s and 1870s, prior to the building of the church. The cemetery - through location, design, age, tradition, and symbolic value - adds immeasurably to the historical significance of the site when considering National Register criteria. As a scholar W. Lloyd Warner observed, "cemeteries lose their sacred quality in time and become objects of historical significance."¹ Pleasant Hill Cemetery documents changing cultural values and the local history of a rural neighborhood, while kinship networks between generations of church members can be traced through the names prominent in this cemetery: Burchfield, Dorris, Eveland, McClatchey, Robinson, and Summerson to name a few.² The permanence of this site and the natural beauty of the nearby watershed of Mosquito Creek to the west serve as important elements in the visual and historical integrity of the Prairie Center Church's surroundings.

Historical and Environmental Context

The Dallas County of 2003 can be described as one of the fastest-growing areas of Iowa, with rural areas rapidly subsumed by industrial and suburban sprawl, especially in the southern and eastern portions. But going back to the period of pioneer settlement of Dallas County gives a different picture of expansionism, when homesteaders focused on farming as a primary activity.

Dallas County was organized in 1846, but the original deed entries indicate that absentee landowners acquired most of the land around 1855 to 1856, although a few records date from 1854.³ Lincoln Township, where Prairie Center Church was established, was originally part of Buena Vista Township, later Sugar Grove, and finally Dallas Township. Lincoln Township was "the last township to be settled, and for many years much of the land was held by speculators and capitalists." James R. Powell, who is believed to be the first white settler, along with William Mosier and Isaac Smith chose the name Lincoln in honor of Abraham Lincoln.⁴

William Mosier came to the township in February 1865 when only two other families were living there, and he stated "no schoolhouse had been built and there were but three houses between his place and Adel."⁵ The first township election was held in October 1867 when there were seven or eight voters (or male heads of households) in the township.⁶ Among the early settlers were Isaac Smith, H.A. Eveland, and John Coleman who organized the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1866, meeting first at the Powell School and later at the schoolhouse at Pleasant Valley for two years. Prairie Center's congregation was first linked with the Panora Circuit, and it is possible G. Abraham served as pastor to the congregation in 1867. J.W. Adair was pastor in 1868, followed by at least six others prior to Rev. L. W. Archer, who was the last to lead religious services in a schoolhouse.⁷

Under the pastorate of Rev. Archer, the Prairie Center Church was built in 1880 - a one-room building with no basement or additions. The simple construction, probably not unlike the methods

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employed when building a schoolhouse or small frame house, was probably undertaken by local carpenters and artisans using locally available materials. Although purely speculative – for the lack of historical records – it might be suggested that the front gable church had double front doors and symmetrically placed side windows, as it is known the pulpit was in the east end and the entrance was changed to the southeast side in later years.

The new building was dedicated by Rev. Stevenson in January 1881. According to the church deed dated August 31, 1880, the church paid \$5.00 for the land where the church is located – about one acre.⁸ There was a cemetery located across the road west of the church, and although some graves predate the church, they were reportedly moved to Pleasant Hill Cemetery from other locations in the township.⁹ In a little valley to the west, scenic and wooded Mosquito Creek flows by, and the waters have formed a high cut bank into the soil.

The aptly named Prairie Center Church was an open country church from the start, situated in the middle of an exclusively rural township, and it remains so today. One of the pioneers who witnessed this early period provides the following description:

When I came to Dallas County in the spring of 1876, I settled in the north part of Lincoln township. The country was very new then. The houses were small and unpainted. The barns were mostly stables made of wild hay. There were no fences. People had to hire a boy to herd their cows. The roads wound any way, as to keep out of the ponds that were very numerous in those days. There were no churches, and the meetings were held in schoolhouses. The schoolhouses were only two miles apart.¹⁰

The 1875 Dallas County map from the *Andreas Atlas* illustrates the patterns of settlement in this era by showing the location of mills, blacksmiths, cemeteries, schools, churches, and residences.¹¹ The rich farmland, readily available timber, and abundant water supply with the Raccoon River and tributaries, along with lakes and prairie potholes, attracted agriculturalists and entrepreneurs. The population census records for Lincoln Township show a preponderance of farmers, settlers from eastern states, and few foreigners. The steady growth of the township over the decade of the 1870s can be seen in the following population figures:¹²

| | |
|------|-----|
| 1869 | 112 |
| 1870 | 213 |
| 1873 | 346 |
| 1875 | 467 |
| 1880 | 691 |

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A post office and store were established at Brough, at one time only one and a half miles east of Prairie Center Church, although the Brough post office later moved another mile and a half farther east.¹³

From the beginning, rural inhabitants of Lincoln Township were interconnected with residents of the surrounding area, including those who lived on neighboring farms or in nearby villages or towns. Common interests and close associations, often strengthened by kinship ties, created strong bonds between those who lived in rural Dallas County and people in Linden, Yale, Jamaica, Bagley, Panora, Dawson, Minburn, Perry, and other towns. Since Lincoln Township was in such close proximity to the county line, it was not unusual for rural residents to consider Panora or Yale in Guthrie County as a community base. Farm families relied on local markets for selling and purchasing goods; but town and country residents were also linked by social alliances such as those in schools and churches,¹⁴ or in cooperative grain elevator and shipping associations.

Prosperous towns like Adel, the county seat, and Redfield offered a variety of services and were even linked to Panora by a narrow gauge railroad as early as 1879. By 1881, the mainline of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and Pacific Railroad had reached Dawson north of Lincoln Township, and an influx of coal miners and their families entered the area.¹⁵ The economic opportunities and environmental factors combined to make Lincoln Township and Dallas County a very stable place for several generations of residents to raise their families. The building of the new Prairie Center Church was part of a larger wave of expansion and growth, as these Iowans built many schools, churches, homes, and businesses in this burgeoning era, often referred to as the Golden Age of Agriculture.

Although Lincoln Township offered the best farmland around and the economy remained healthy, there was a steady decrease in population after the turn of the century and still no towns:¹⁶

| | |
|------|-----|
| 1900 | 785 |
| 1910 | 721 |
| 1920 | 686 |

However, Prairie Center Church attracted members from all over Dallas County and from Guthrie County to the west. Generally, Iowa's population slowly began to shift from rural to urban during this period, but this area was relatively stable and church membership did not diminish. Whether members of the church or not, local residents continually refer to the "Prairie Center neighborhood" or the "Prairie Center community."¹⁷

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The associations formed around Prairie Center Church extended beyond religious beliefs, as these people's lives were intertwined in many ways. Several members of the congregation were active in the Knights of Pythias, a popular fraternal organization in Yale.¹⁸ The telephone exchange at Panora served residents of the surrounding towns and countryside, connecting their personal and business lives in a most intimate way.¹⁹ Young people received their early education at one-room country schools and had the choice of going to the high school in Yale or the Guthrie County high school in Panora. Eventually, school consolidation led to the establishment of Yale-Jamaica-Bagley school district, another example of how these small towns and villages were linked by social activities.²⁰

Search for Order and Ties That Bind

The history of the Methodist Church in Iowa can be traced using a variety of sources including Ruth Gallaher's assertion that a circuit preacher reached Dubuque by November 1833 and a log church was built by the summer of 1834.²¹ W. H. Betz tells us the Methodist Protestant church first appeared in Iowa City in 1840 and that "by 1846, there were scattered preaching places from Dubuque and Jones counties on the north, to points as far south as Missouri, and west to Des Moines and Winterset." Initially part of the Northern Illinois Conference, the Methodists held the first meeting of the Iowa Conference in 1846. Besides deacons and elders in the church, pastors or preachers were circuit riders covering separate regions in Iowa: Tipton, Iowa City, Winterset, Dubuque, Oskaloosa, and later Des Moines. As Betz writes, the preachers went about "on horseback fording streams and boarding about often a week at a place, then off on their way, perhaps for another month. Of necessity many of them had to farm or do other manual labor, as they could, to sustain themselves and families."

By 1854, there were 20 circuits and missions, and by 1858, the conference was divided into the Iowa Conference and the North Iowa Conference, only to reunite in 1875. The Methodist churches were to prosper and grow during the period when Prairie Center Church was established (1866) and built (1880) and continued to do so for several decades. However, as Betz noted in 1941, "the process of fewer but stronger churches [was] in full swing. Many weak rural churches were not able to withstand war conditions and the years of depression that followed." By 1936, the Iowa-Missouri Conference was formed. Prairie Center Church, which shared ministers with a church in Yale, Iowa, eventually became part of the United Methodist Church and came under the Hope Methodist Parish.²²

Historian Tom Morain, in his book *Prairie Grass Roots*, analyzes trends and commonalities in Iowa's small towns and rural areas. Although he writes specifically about residents in the county north of Dallas County, he emphasizes that "churches filled an important social function for they brought people together on a regular basis," and "early churches played a strong role in fostering order."²³

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Like their Protestant counterparts, the congregation of Prairie Center Church existed for the "spiritual and moral uplift of the community,"²⁴ while at the same time it set the moral standards by which personal and public conduct was judged.

Admittedly, not all Iowans were churchgoers; some historians have estimated as few as a third were actually members of a church. But for those who did practice organized religion, the church served both an educational and inspirational purpose. In many respects, women and children formed the closest association with the church, and for some women, the church and women's auxiliary might be the only organizations they belonged to outside the home. Women often assumed responsibility for the upbringing of children and therefore formed the nucleus of church activities whether as Sunday school teachers, as members of the Ladies Aid or Women's Society of Christian Service, or as mainstays when it came to food preparation or hosting events. When asked about his family's activities in the church, one man recalled, "My dad never went too much. Only when we first got our car [1917] he thought he had to drive it and so one time we had a minister he liked quite well."²⁵

Prairie Center Church represents a time when some rural folk believed in the immutable forces of nature and an unyielding higher power. As farm families living in an environment closely tied to the rhythms of nature and the seasons, they shared the religious beliefs and traditions firmly ingrained in daily habits. The dominant social and cultural values espoused by the members of Prairie Center Church and surrounding Dallas County were based on a conservative religious, political, and economic perspective on the community.²⁶ Moreover, the church was the centerpiece of the rural community and the place where people gathered to practice weekly rituals and to mark rites of passage in life. Gender roles were reinforced, and family stability was encouraged among churchgoers. Baptisms, weddings, memorial services for the dead, and celebrations of wedding anniversaries were common events.²⁷ The residents seemed relatively homogeneous and yet socially tolerant, and there is no evidence of any Ku Klux Klan activity or harassment of German neighbors during World War I.

A survey of election returns reveals the strength of the Republican Party in Lincoln Township and Dallas County. Whether conservative or progressive in their political beliefs, the residents repeatedly voted for Republican Party candidates for the U.S. presidency or Iowa governor. When a prohibition candidate ran for governor in 1912, he garnered only 3 votes in Lincoln Township and 144 total in Dallas County, compared to the 2,703 who voted for the Republican candidate, Clarke. This may indicate social tolerance for drinking alcohol or just offer further proof this was a Republican stronghold. In 1924, some progressive voters chose third-party candidate Robert M. LaFollette (2,959 votes) over the ultimate winner, Calvin Coolidge (6,359 votes). The Democratic Party candidate had only 933 votes in Dallas County in the 1924 election.

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In 1928, Herbert Hoover beat Al Smith by 140 to 88 in Lincoln Township and 7,294 to 3,108 in Dallas County. The Democratic Party landslide in the 1932 election represented an aberration rather than a constant in Dallas County politics, for Roosevelt beat Hoover 92 to 49 in Lincoln Township but much closer in Dallas County overall: 4887 for FDR and 4516 for Hoover. A Democratic candidate for Iowa governor, Herring, also prevailed in the election in Lincoln Township but lost to the Republican in Dallas County's final tally (5,084 to 3,934).²⁸

Who were these people? By scanning the membership rolls dating from 1902 to present, it is obvious farming dominates as the livelihood for most members, perhaps as many as 80 percent. However, the husbands, wives, sons, daughters, widows, children, neighbors, business associates, and clients who formed this tight group also included folks from Yale, Bagley, Linden, Dawson, Perry, and other nearby villages. Among the occupations listed in the rolls for the first half of the twentieth century were: farming, hardware and undertaking, store clerk, mechanic, banking, superintendent of schools, trucker, storekeeper, tank wagon, hired hand or farmhand, hairdresser, rural carrier, teacher, railroad agent, grocer, clerical work, laborer, and retired.²⁹

As Ghormley points out in his 1923 thesis, open country churches were located within close proximity to one another, in part due to the limits of the transportation system. With the reliance on horse-drawn transportation and dirt roads, churchgoers could reasonably travel 3 to 5 miles to church. Although the church was a strong unifying force in the community, changes in transportation and communication would also influence Prairie Center Church in direct and indirect ways. The telephone allowed neighbors to communicate more easily and frequently without leaving their homes. Initially, some reported that the automobile increased church attendance. Nonetheless, church members wanted to keep up-to-date and decided to adapt their wooden structure to meet their current needs.³⁰

Under the pastorate of Rev. E. S. MacCartney, a remodeling project was undertaken in 1910, perhaps in response to increased attendance. The changes to the original one-room structure included a new tower and entrance on the building's southeast corner and the addition of an alcove on the north side. The pulpit was moved to the north, and the pews were rearranged to face north instead of east. The church had been transferred to the Yale circuit in 1902, and another sign of the church's stability and relative financial security can be seen in the building of a parsonage in Yale in 1903.³¹ Sunday school records from 1901 to 1907 show as many as 45 to 75 regular attendees.³² The Ghormley thesis indicates there were 70 members in 1913, down to 40 in 1918, but back up to 80 in 1923.³³

Responding to an increase in membership and the demands of the congregation for improved facilities, the church excavated a basement in 1925. A stair hall, with stairs up to the sanctuary and

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down to the basement, and a small room were added east of the tower, housed under a lean-to or shed roof. Double hung windows and deep window wells added light to the basement area, and a kitchen area with countertops and cupboards was added. The large basement room was often divided into sections for Sunday school classes by hanging curtains. Separate spaces were created for adult men, adult women, young married couples, and youth. A nursery or Sunday school classroom for the youngest children was added to the east of the vestibule area.³⁴



Illustration #6: Historical photograph of Prairie Center Church congregation with southwest corner of church in background, 1932. Over half of the people pictured are related to one another through inter-marriages and direct bloodlines. From an original photograph loaned by Hope Robinson.

The remarkable hold that Prairie Center Church had on its membership did not diminish throughout the economic downturn brought by the collapse of land values in the 1920s or in the Great Depression of the 1930s. Even as change elsewhere was to undercut the churches' preeminence in community life, Prairie Center remained strong and healthy, standing as a bellwether

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of how the citizens of Lincoln Township viewed the world and their position in it. The shifting climate of opinion elsewhere in Iowa and the nation – as rural residents continued to stream into urban areas or migrated out of the state – could hardly be gauged in this part of Dallas County until well after World War II, when subsequent generations began to seek jobs away from the farm.

In 1930, Prairie Center had an active membership of more than 120, comprised of a community linked by kinship and mutual association over several generations. The group photo taken on May 8, 1932, by the Owen Gray Studio of Perry, Iowa, shows the church in the background along with the families whose descendents comprise the church now. Certainly in its heyday at this time, the church and its members had survived fifty years of existence, bound together by geography and rural life, generational connections, shared cultural values, and a commitment to the "spiritual and moral uplift of the community."

This group picture, evidence of a vital community, shows a mix of young and old – people whose relatives still belong to the church today. Unlike many rural churches whose members and facilities succumbed to the economic hardships of the times, the parishioners must have enjoyed sufficient stability to continue supporting their church. Yearly pledge drives brought in notable donations from the more prosperous farm families, so presumably the church was not at risk.³⁵ However, later changes in farming practices and markets, increased mobility among younger members, technological changes like electricity, and new consumer items like the radio and film would transform rural lives and expand the interests of churchgoers. This transformation was gradual and yet permanent, thus marking the end of an era when Prairie Center could thrive as the center of the township community.

In 1955, when Prairie Center Church observed its 75th anniversary, over 150 people attended the celebration, offering testament to the longevity and vibrancy of the church. Church members, particularly the Women's Society of Christian Service (WSCS), demonstrated their commitment to the church in numerous ways. Activities have included drama and musical events, ice cream socials, congregational suppers and potlucks, father-son and mother-daughter banquets, auctions, and bazaars. The WSCS scrapbooks reveal more: coffees, basket dinners, turkey suppers at Thanksgiving, annual Christmas dinners, bridal showers, open houses, musical programs at the county home, and family night (often slide shows of travels, with treats distributed by the teenagers to younger children). The "sunshine jar" served to cheer those who needed a boost.³⁶

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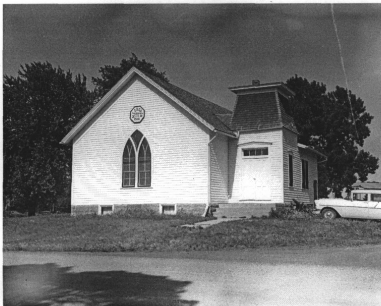


Illustration #7: Historical photograph of Prairie Center Church exterior with tower, southwest façade, ca. 1955. From church scrapbook.

Elderly members of the church enjoyed lifelong friendships and mutually dependent relationships that sometimes crossed lines of class or gender. These people were bound by inter-generational connections, geography, and shared interests. Serving as role models to younger members of the community, the adults in the congregation helped to take care of one another by encouraging each other to work together cooperatively and productively. Still, change was inevitable, and by 1978 there were only about 54 active members (mainly older couples) and 36 "constituents" listed on the membership rolls.³⁷ A local landmark, the church garners interest from many who were never members of the church or directly associated with it, simply because the building has stood there so long and people remember attending funerals, weddings, and other social events there. Today, in 2003, fewer than 200 people live in Lincoln Township, but Prairie Center Church is appreciated beyond those borders.

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The close-knit local community surrounding Prairie Center Church ultimately has all but died out at the beginning of the 21st century, the by-product of changing farming practices, increased mobilization, the suburban flight of later generations, and the disintegration of rural society that comes with the passage of time and the disappearance of a culture. Yet a building like Prairie Center Church symbolizes the struggles and aspirations of Iowans who sought to establish orderly and cohesive communities even in the absence of a village or town center. The importance of religion to these families was demonstrated in the building and sustenance of a church for nearly 125 years. This dedication to one another and to the practice of religion led to long-term survival in a world that was rapidly transforming into a globally and technologically oriented society.

Pleasant Hill Cemetery

Pleasant Hill Cemetery was placed "amidst the quiet vendure of the field, under the broad and cheerful light of heaven,"³⁸ as was fashionable in the 19th century and quite practical for country dwellers. In many respects, it continues to serve as a public park and remains a center for socializing and convening with lost loved ones. It provides a secluded retreat from the busy world in much the same spirit as the rural cemetery movement spawned by the ideas behind Mount Auburn Cemetery. As one scholar has noted, attitudes about cemeteries show "Americans were concerned about understanding the history of their communities and nation, strengthening the family, maintaining the virtue of rural life, and encouraging respect for the dead."³⁹

The burials have been evenly distributed over the years, averaging about fifty per decade since the 1880s. The demographic information and epitaphs carved on the gravestones tell the story of men and women who brought their families west, parents who lost their infants and children at young ages, or soldiers who served in the Civil War, the two World Wars, and the Vietnam War.⁴⁰ The messages and symbols convey a sense of development and maturity of several generations over a long period in our state's history and offer clues as to the cultural and social life experienced by these rural dwellers. Pleasant Hill Cemetery is an open book offering clarity and a human dimension to the tales of the Prairie Center Church neighborhood. Like literary sources, the cemetery documents folk traditions while offering collective representations of sentiments about sorrow, love, memory, and immortality.

As suggested, "an old cemetery is a remarkably sensitive record of change, representing successive generations, each with its own distinctive set of values and ways of perceiving the environment."⁴¹ People will continue to utilize the Pleasant Hill Cemetery not only for pleasure and recreation but to commemorate the lives of ancestors, or for the internment of family members in one of the 200 empty lots. If Prairie Center Church survives, some may even follow in the footsteps of previous generations who moved in ceremonial procession from the church to the burial ground. Together,

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these properties document shared characteristics and patterns for open country churches and their companion cemeteries while offering evidence of the mutual assumptions, beliefs, and values that guided this rural society.

Challenges for Future Preservation

In 2004, Pleasant Hill Cemetery's future is probably secure but Prairie Center Church is at a crossroads in its existence. With fewer than twenty members regularly attending Sunday services and only eight or so truly active members, the congregation has, regrettably, disbanded. Although as many as fifty people from the local area attended a reunion in the fall of 2002, there simply is not enough financial support to sustain the salary of a minister and continue maintenance of the building. Many of the same families are still involved in determining the future of the church and have formed a non-profit organization to seek solutions to current challenges. The last official service was held on December 28, 2003, and over 150 people attended the gathering.

A non-profit corporation, Friends of Prairie Center Church, Inc., was formed in 2003 to preserve and protect the historic church building. This group serves as caretaker for the church until more permanent arrangements can be made. Dallas County Conservation Commission and the Forrest Park Museum staff have expressed interest in preserving this artifact of Iowa history. Efforts to transfer the one-acre tract of land to the Lincoln Township trustees are under way, and it is hoped the land can be annexed to the adjoining Pleasant Hill Cemetery, long associated with Prairie Center Church. Prairie Center Church embodies the value of long-term social institutions for community building. Strong memories surround the structure and site, and there is potential for further documentation of the role the church played in the lives of Dallas County residents.

¹ Coleen L Nutty. "Cemetery Symbolism of Prairie Pioneers: Gravestone Art and Social Change in Story County, Iowa," *Journal of the Iowa Archeological Society* 31 (1984): p. 11.

² Mary Alice (Jessup) Burchfield, *The Burchfield Chronicles in America and Their Connections to the Young, Criswell, & Hawley Families*, ca. 1987; and *Yale's 100 Yesteryears, 1882-1982* (Yale: Yale Centennial Committee, 1982): p. 21, 23-25, 52-53, 57, 59-60, 64, 98, 110-112, 155. The neighborhood and congregation were predominately of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant origins, composed of second- and third-generation Americans who had migrated from the East. For example, this branch of the McClatchey family originated in Scotland but had settled in Pennsylvania by the 1760s. In 1872, William McClatchey's son James came to Dallas County to purchase land and was soon followed by a sister and a younger brother named Fremont who came in 1881. Fremont bought 176 acres of land in Lincoln Township for six dollars an acre. A. D. Robinson, of Irish descent, moved from

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Ohio in 1879 with his infant daughter, Vivian, and his wife, Melissa, who had inherited land from her father. The Robinson family became pillars of the church, and Vivian Robinson Summerson and her son Charlie were always mainstays of the church. The Burchfield clan came as pioneers from Indiana in the fall of 1869 and through inter-marriage became connected to numerous families in the area, including the Summerson, Borst, Dwinell, Fagen, and Wernli families. Almost 10 percent of the graves in Pleasant Hill Cemetery belong to the Burchfields and allied families.

³ Howard E. Snedden, and Barbara A. Snedden. *Iowa: Dallas County Records Vol. I*, (Des Moines: Snedden, 1971). Includes original entries of land for Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa, p. 151-153.

⁴ Eugene N. Hastie, *Hastie's History of Dallas County, Iowa*, (Des Moines: Wallace-Homestead Company, 1938), p. 55.

⁵ R. F. Wood. *Past and Present of Dallas County, Iowa*, (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1907), p. 165.

⁶ Hastie, p. 55.

⁷ Wood, p. 165; Hastie, p. 55; Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands).

⁸ The deed is dated August 31, 1880, indicating when construction may have begun on the church. According to the document, the warranty deed was filed March 17, 1881, in Book 36, page 613. (Original in private hands).

⁹ Interview with Prairie Center Methodist Church members Neva Clark, Myrtle McClatchey, Elizabeth Lundberg, and Zelma Motsick, at the church in Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa, May 26, 2003.

¹⁰ Wood, p. 165.

¹¹ *A. T. Andreas Historical and Illustrated Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago: Andreas Atlas Company, 1875). This map notes the location of two places where members of Prairie Center Church met from 1866 to 1880 when the church building was built. Note the location of the Pleasant Valley school house to the north of Pleasant Hill Cemetery and the Powell school house to the south, near the James R. Powell homestead on Mosquito Creek.

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¹² *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census*, 1880, Statistics for Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa.

¹³ Hastie, p. 55.

¹⁴ Conversations with Charlie Summerson and Sylvia Wright Burchfield Summerson, Prairie Center Church members now deceased, Lincoln Township, Dallas County, and Panora, Iowa, 1976-1991; Mary Alice (Jessup) Burchfield, *The Burchfield Chronicles in America and Their Connections to the Young, Criswell, & Hawley Families*, ca. 1987; *Yale's 100 Yesteryears, 1882-1982* (Yale: Yale Centennial Committee, 1982); Eugene N. Hastie, *Hastie's History of Dallas County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Wallace-Homestead Company, 1938).

¹⁵ Hastie, p. 162, 180-181.

¹⁶ Hugh W. Ghormley, "The Rural Churches of Dallas County, Iowa," Master's thesis, Drake University, 1923.

¹⁷ *Yale's 100 Yesteryears, 1882-1982* (Yale: Yale Centennial Committee, 1982), p. 52, 98, 110-111, Family history section.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3, Organizations section. At one time, membership in the Knights of Pythias lodge in Yale reached 175 out of a town of 300 residents. Raymond McClatchey, for example, was a member of the Knights of Pythias lodge in Yale for 46 years, and it is noted that members belonged from communities as far as 25 miles away. *Ibid.*, p. 21, Family history section.

¹⁹ "History of Panora Cooperative Telephone Association, Inc.," from *Lines Between the Rivers: A History of Telephony in Iowa* (West Des Moines, Iowa: Iowa Telephone Association, 1991).

²⁰ Conversations with Charlie Summerson and Sylvia Wright Burchfield Summerson.

²¹ Ruth Gallaher, "The Methodists in Iowa," *Palimpsest* 32 (1951): p. 57-120; and William Howard Betz. "One Hundred Years of the Methodist Protestant Church in Iowa," January 1941, 25 p. history in Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City (original at Iowa Wesleyan College, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa).

²² *Ibid.*

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²³ Thomas J. Morain, *Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), p. 14, 147-151.

²⁴ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands.)

²⁵ Morain, p. 77-78; Oral history interview with Charlie Summerson conducted by Mary Bennett, Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa, April 8, 1977, Original in Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, p. 16; and Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, 1955-1967. 32 pages of newspaper clippings, photo, and historical information with emphasis on activities of Woman's Society of Christian Service (W.S.C.S.), (Original volume in private hands.)

²⁶ Morain, p. 171-173.

²⁷ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, 1955-1967, Woman's Society of Christian Service (W.S.C.S.) (Original volume in private hands.)

²⁸ *Iowa Official Register* (Des Moines: State Printer, 1911-1912; 1913-1914; 1929-30; 1933-34; and 1952). Election returns for Lincoln Township and Dallas County for presidential and gubernatorial elections.

²⁹ Prairie Center Methodist Church Membership Roll, 1902-1955. Record book provides family names, head of household, occupation, address, transfers and removals, baptisms, and some dates for birthdays, deaths, and marriages. (Original volume in private hands); Prairie Center Methodist Church Membership Roll, 1959-2003. Record book provides family names, head of household, occupation, address, transfers and removals, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. (Original volume in private hands.)

³⁰ Ghormley, p. 150, 167.

³¹ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands.)

³² Prairie Center Methodist Church Sabbath School Record book, 1901-1907. Includes record of attendance and collections as well as minutes of meetings, (Original volume in private hands.)

³³ Ghormley, p. 154-155.

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³⁴ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands.)

³⁵ Prairie Center Methodist Church Financial Record, 1923-1953. 301 pages. (Original volume in private hands.)

³⁶ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, compiled for 75th anniversary, October 16, 1955. (Original volume in private hands); Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, 1955-1967, Woman's Society of Christian Service (W.S.C.S.). (Original volume in private hands.)

³⁷ Prairie Center Methodist Church Scrapbook, 1978-1992. 27 pages of photos, newsclippings, and historical information compiled by Minnie Marriott, historian. (Original volume in private hands.)

³⁸ Mount Auburn Cemetery: A New American Landscape," Teaching with Historic Places Lesson Plans, National Park Service, quote from speech by Jacob Bigelow, 1831. Accessed at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/84mountauburn/84mountauburn.htm>, August 11, 2004.

³⁹ David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 56.

⁴⁰ Dallas County, Iowa Pleasant Hill Cemetery (Pleasant Hill-Prairie Center, Section 17, Lincoln Township), Transcriptions copied June 9, 1980, by Robert L. Smiley, June Smiley, and Alfred W. Whitacre.

⁴¹ Nutty, p. 12.

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Map of Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa. Rockford, Illinois: Stacy Map Company, 1939.

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Prairie Center Methodist Church Membership Roll, 1959-2003. Record book provides family names, head of household, occupation, address, transfers and removals, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. Original volume in private hands.

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Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church property is defined as Lot 904 or approximately one acre at the southeast corner of Beaumont Avenue and 200th Street in Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa, 80 N 29 W Section 17 NE Quarter of NW Quarter.

The Pleasant Hill Cemetery is approximately six acres at the southwest corner of Beaumont Avenue and 200th Street in Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa, 80 N 29 W Section 17 NE Quarter of NW Quarter.

Boundary Justification

The nomination property includes the entire parcel historically associated with Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church and Pleasant Hill Cemetery.

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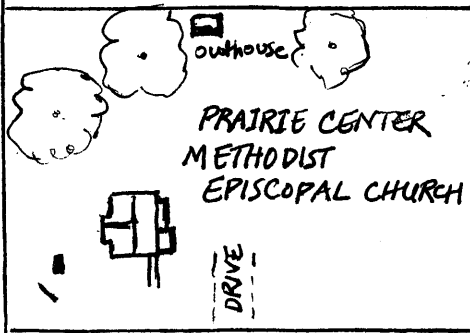
Additional Documentation SITE PLAN
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Mosquito
Creek ↓

agricultural use

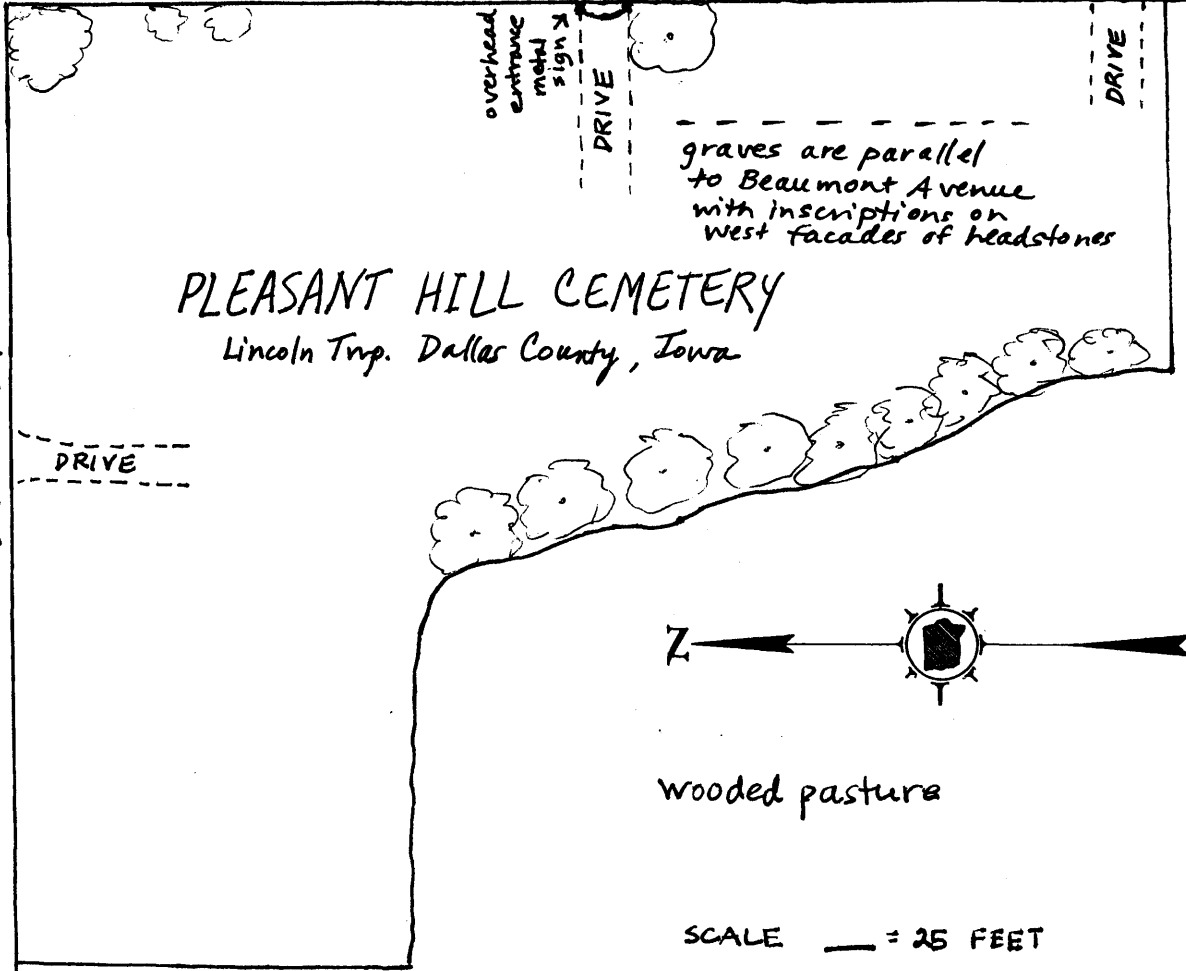
agricultural use

200th STREET



agricultural use

BEAUMONT AVENUE



wooded pasture

SCALE _____ = 25 FEET

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List of Maps

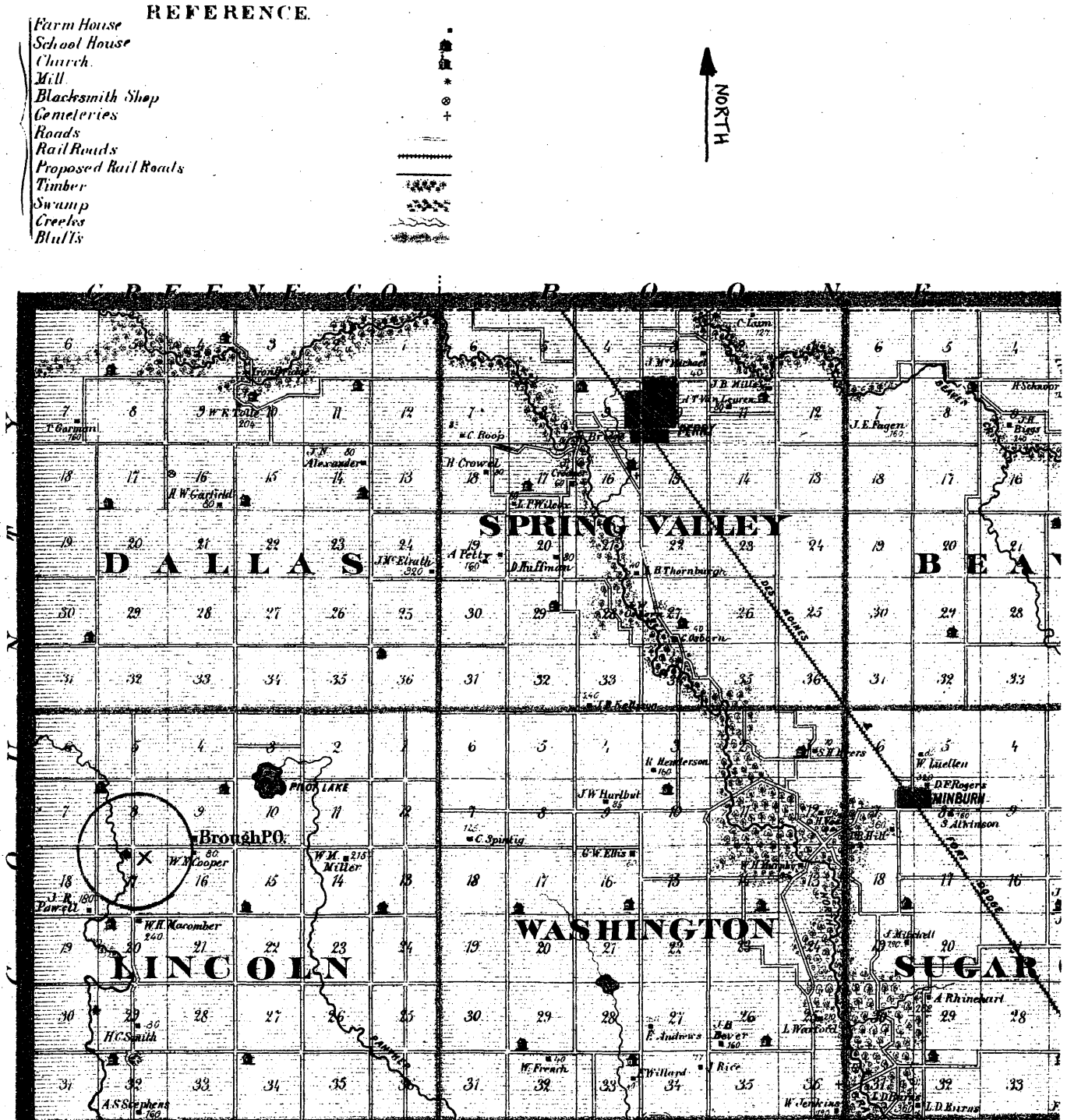
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2. Map of Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa. Mason City, Iowa: Anderson Publishing Company, 1916.
3. Map of Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa. Des Moines, Iowa: Kean Map Co., 1929.
4. Map of Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa. Rockford, Illinois: Stacy Map Company, 1939.
5. Topographical map of NE/4 Panora 15' Quadrangle, State of Iowa, United States Geological Survey, showing location of Prairie Center Church and Pleasant Hill Cemetery, 1982.

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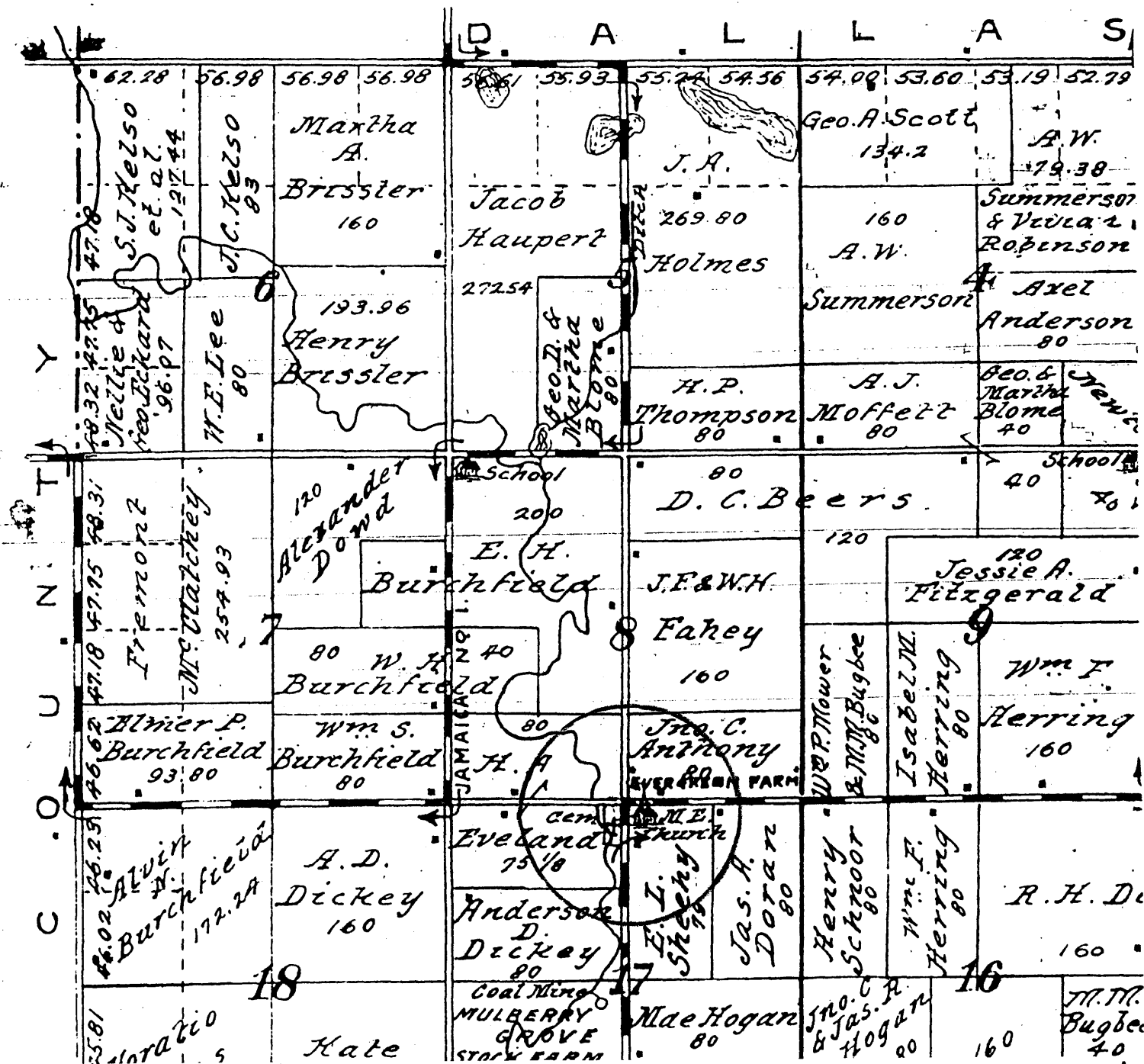
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2. Map of Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa. Mason City, Iowa: Anderson Publishing Company, 1916.



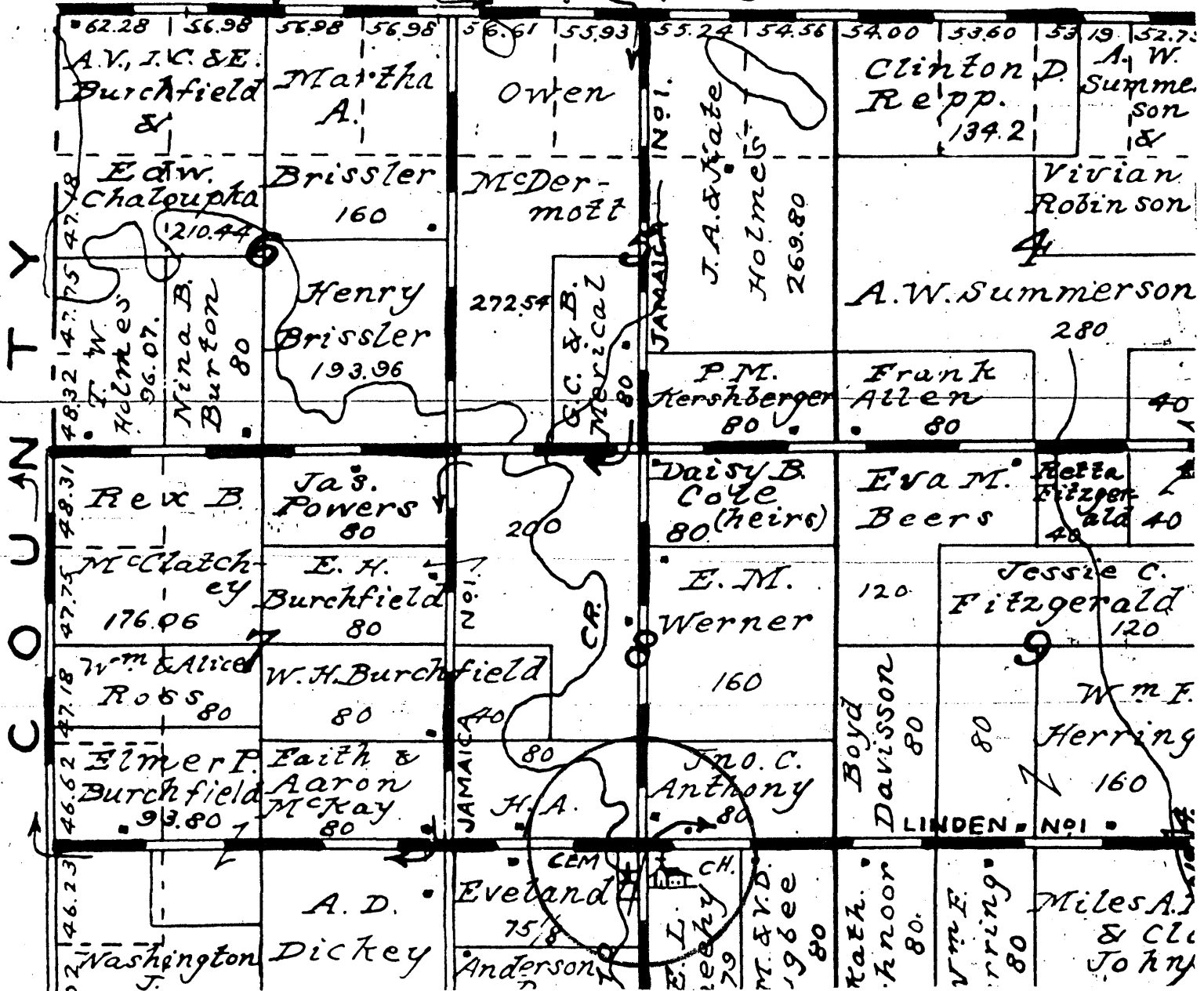
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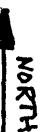
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DALLAS



3. Map of Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa. Des Moines, Iowa: Kean Map Co., 1929.



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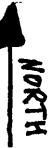
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T 80 N

R 29 W



4. Map of Lincoln Township, Dallas County, Iowa. Rockford, Illinois: Stacy Map Company, 1939.

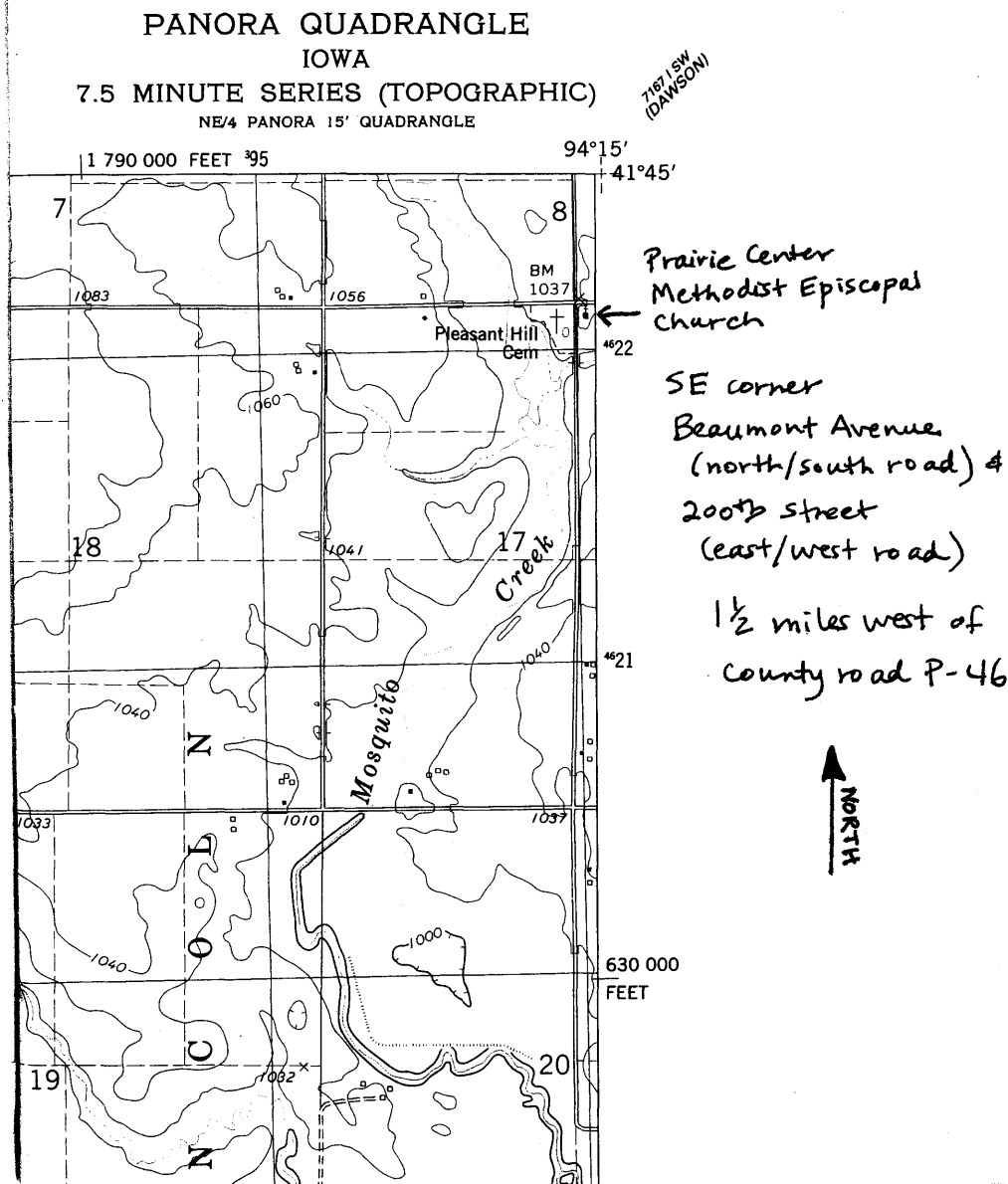


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5. Topographical map of NE/4 Panora 15' Quadrangle, State of Iowa, United States Geological Survey, showing location of Prairie Center Church and Pleasant Hill Cemetery, 1982.

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The photographs submitted with this nomination were all taken by Mary Bennett on June 20 (exterior) and September 3 (interior), 2003.

- A. View from Pleasant Hill Cemetery, west facade.
- B. Façade to west.
- C. South elevation to N showing modifications made in 1910 (tower) and 1925 (classroom/nursery and stair hall to new basement).
- D. East end of building with Gothic-style window and 1910 addition of north side for chancel area.
- E. North elevation to S with 1910 addition to original 1880 structure.
- F. Detail: Front entrance on west side.
- G. Interior: From east toward organ and Gothic-style window (colored glass) on west wall, looking NW.
- H. Interior: From back of sanctuary toward pulpit in alcove built in 1910, looking N.
- I. Interior: Basement stairs, looking S toward south entrance, kitchen to right.
- J. Interior: Basement, added in 1925 remodeling, looking SW.
- K. Privy or outhouse with two seats, situated on eastern edge of church property, probably built in 1960s–1970s (non-contributing).
- L. Pleasant Hill Cemetery entrance sign across the road to the west of Prairie Center Church and slightly south on Beaumont Avenue to SSW.

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Color slides all taken by Mary Bennett, June 2003.

- #1 Pleasant Hill cemetery entrance sign on Beaumont Avenue, looking S/SW.
- #2 Pleasant Hill cemetery early gravestones and prairie grass, looking E/SE.
- #3 Pleasant Hill cemetery gravestones with decorative symbols like lamb on right, looking E.
- #4 Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church, west side and front entrance, outhouse in distance, looking E/NE.
- #5 Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church, rear, east and north sides, looking S/SW
- #6 Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church, 1910 addition to north side, taken from corner of 200th Street and Beaumont Avenue looking S/SE.
- #7 Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church, interior from back of church looking toward organ in northwest corner, looking W/NW.
- #8 Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church, interior, front entrance doors, looking S/SW.
- #9 Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church, interior, Sunday School room added in 1925 remodeling, looking S.
- #10 Prairie Center Methodist Episcopal Church, outhouse on eastern edge of church grounds, looking E.