

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



1566

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Methodist Episcopal Church

other name/site number: United Methodist Church, Brick Church, Methodist Federated Church, Mills Methodist Episcopal Church

2. Location

street & number: 116 Cedar Street

vicinity: n/a

city/town: Three Forks

state: Montana code: MT county: Gallatin code: 031 zip code: 59752

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency or bureau

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register see continuation sheet
- removed from the National Register see continuation sheet
- other (explain _____)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson M. Beal 12/28/00

Methodist Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Gallatin County, Montana

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:	Private	Number of Resources within Property	
Category of Property:	Building	Contributing	Noncontributing
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:	n/a	<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> building(s)
Name of related multiple property listing:	n/a	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
		<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
		<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

RELIGION/Religious Facility

Current Functions:

RELIGION/Religious Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE-19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/
Late Gothic Revival

Materials:

foundation: concrete
walls: brick
roof: asphalt shingles
other:

Narrative Description

The Methodist Episcopal Church of Three Forks, Montana is located in a residential area of Three Forks on a landscaped, grassy lot with small evergreen shrubs along the south elevation. The building is a brick, one-story, rectangular building on a raised concrete-wall foundation. Indicative of its Gothic Revival design, the building features a steeply-pitched, parapetted, cross-gable roof; large, pointed-arch, tracery windows in the gable ends of the north, east, and south elevations; and a massive, Norman style bell tower with a stepped parapet and buttresses at each corner. Though an earthquake destroyed some of the original windows, non-primary elevations, and the top of the bell tower in 1925, a majority of its distinctive design features were retained after its immediate reconstruction. Except for the top of the bell tower and the west elevation, all the window and door openings are identical in size and location as those in the original design. Evidence of the earthquake and reconstruction includes the shortened entry/bell tower, which was originally twenty feet higher, castellated, and contained centered, rounded-arch, two-light, louvered window openings on the east, south, and west sides; and the absence of the large, pointed arch, tracery mural window on the west elevation.

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Exterior Building Description

East (Front) Elevation

The massive, square bell tower on the south side dominates the façade of the church. The tower contains the main entrance to the church, and features modern, four-panel wooden double doors with brass hardware beneath a pointed arch, three-light stained glass window opening. A narrow concrete drip edge above the window emphasizes its Gothic arch shape. A modern light fixture is located on either side of the doors, at the bottom of the drip edge. Three one-light, fixed, stained glass windows are centered above the arch, and feature a continuous concrete sill and narrow concrete drip edge above. The flat roof of the tower features a parapet, stepped at each corner. Narrow brick buttresses project from the lower two-thirds of the tower at each of the exposed corners. A modern concrete stairway leads to the double doors. The stairs are flanked by brick guardwalls capped with concrete, and feature a metal railing down the center.

Echoing the steeple angle of the roofline, a large, pointed-arch stained glass tracery window is centered beneath the gable end of the east elevation. A narrow concrete drip edge outlines arch. A tri-panel cross piece separates the upper portion of the window from three, fixed, four-light windows below, and a concrete sill runs across the bottom of the three fixed windows. The ceiling level of the raised basement is delineated by a brick belt course. Three full-sized one-over-one light double-hung windows are centered under the arched window between the belt course and foundation wall, and provide light to the basement. High in the gable end is a narrow, decorative recessed opening, filled with brick.

North Elevation

The north elevation consists of three flush bays. The center bay is defined by the steep cross-gable of the roof, and contains a large, pointed-arch, tracery window identical to that of the east elevation, but without the cross piece. Three one-over-one double-hung windows are again centered at the basement level. Another one-over-one double-hung window is located on the east side of the center bay at the basement level. Fixed, stained glass windows with concrete sills and drip edges flank the tracery window. A pair of fixed, one-light windows with concrete sills and drip edges are centered in both the east and west bays at the main story level. A modern, one-light metal door, located off-center to the west, appears at the basement level of the east bay. A window opening east of the door has been boarded over. A single, centered, one-over-one light double-hung window is located at the basement level of the west bay.

South Elevation

The three bays of the south elevation are defined by the bell tower to the east, the gable end at the center, and the protruding west end. The steep pitch of the roof continues across the west bay. Mirroring the north elevation, the center bay contains an identical large, arched, tracery window flanked by fixed stained glass windows, and four one-over-one light double-hung windows (three centered, one to the east) at the basement level. The south elevation of the bell tower contains three fixed, stained glass windows with concrete sills and drip edges that step up (following an interior stairwell) from west to east. A modern concrete stairway, protected by an angled brick wall, leads to a one-light metal door at the main story of the east elevation of the west bay. A single metal light fixture is centered above the door on the parapet wall. The south elevation of the west bay features a one-by-one sliding window centered at the main story, and a pair of one-over-one light double-hung windows between the belt course and foundation wall.

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West Elevation

Fenestration on the west (rear) elevation is limited to a single, one-over-one light double hung window, with concrete sill and drip edge on the south side at the main story level.

Roof

The cross-gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles, and features a brick end-wall chimney on the south slope of the west elevation. A small interior brick chimney capped with a metal pipe protrudes from the east slope of the north gable.

Interior Description

The interior of the church has a pitched ceiling 30' high, with exposed large wooden beams. These beams encase the cables and turnbuckles that control the tension and keep the building stable. In 1940, a false ceiling was installed as an energy conserving measure, which hid the original ceiling and choir loft. In a 1993 restoration, the false ceiling was removed to expose the original ceiling with its wooden beams, and the choir loft was reopened. In addition to these 1993 restorations, an elevator was installed in the northeast corner of the church, and the basement was finished.

Over the entry doors of the church is a modern stained glass, arched window depicting the Headwaters area. There are also stained glass windows in the stairway to the choir loft and three larger stained glass windows at the top of the staircase. The smaller stained glass windows in the church are modern, while the larger stained glass windows are historic.

The sanctuary is 32' by 32' and the floor slopes towards the front. The pews, which are original, are made of oak and are in three tiers, each custom made for the sloping floor. There is an overflow room separated by wooden, rolling doors and this room is 10' by 20'. The altar area in the front is 19' by 9' and is accessed by three risers. In 1993 the design was modified and the railing removed that separated the congregation from the altar. The storage room to the south of the altar is original, in the 1993 renovations a room on the north side was added, giving the sanctuary a sense of balance.

The church's basement was originally used as a coal room, furnace, bathroom, kitchen, dining area, and Sunday school rooms. In 1957, a concrete-block annex was built to house the Sunday school rooms, the kitchen, dining area, and meeting room. In 1993, the basement was finished to include two furnace rooms, the Pastor's study, a bathroom, library, and a large meeting room.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A and C

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE AND COMMUNITY
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A

Period(s) of Significance: 1914-1950

Significant Person(s): N/A

Significant Dates: 1914, 1925

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: UNKNOWN

Narrative Statement of Significance

Statement of Significance

The Methodist Episcopal Church of Three Forks is a stately brick church, significant for its Gothic architecture and its association with prominent events in Three Forks history. The history of the church dates to the founding of this railroad town, as the property was purchased in the original 1908 lot sale in Three Forks, for intention of building this church. Constructed in 1914, it reflects those origins and also bears testimony to the destructive 1925 earthquake that destroyed many of the town's major buildings. The Methodist Episcopal Church is equally significant as a fine example of Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture. For its locally representative values, the Methodist Episcopal Church of Three Forks deserves recognition and listing in the National Register of Historic Places, under Criteria A and C.

History of Three Forks

Located at the headwaters of the Missouri River, where the Gallatin, Jefferson, and Madison Rivers converge, the town of Three Forks was established in 1908 by J.Q. Adams of the Milwaukee Land Company. Formed in 1881, the Milwaukee Land Company was a wholly owned subsidiary of the Milwaukee Road. As general land agent for the Company, Adams had been in charge of acquiring right of way for the railroad from the Midwest to the West Coast. Upon completion of the right of way, he was permitted to choose a town site to develop.¹ The *Three Forks Herald* in 1913 suggests John Quincy Adams independently controlled the development of Three Forks:

It is now evident and the fact generally recognized as well as appreciated, that Mr. Adams had sufficient inside knowledge [of the railroad route] to warrant himself him (sic) and company starting a new town and purchasing farm land in all surrounding region, employing in the neighborhood of a million dollars.²

September 17, 1908, the Milwaukee Land Company held a successful lot sale in Three Forks, Montana. At the time of the sale, Three Forks had a graded Main Street and staked lots and blocks. Trainloads of prospective buyers came for the auction, a Milwaukee excursion train ran from Chicago to Three Forks, and Northern Pacific brought in a trainload of prospective buyers as well. An estimated 700 to 1000 people attended and more than 250 lots were sold the first day at prices ranging from \$100 to \$1000. Within a month of the sale, 125 carpenters and masons were employed for the construction projects. The first store in Three Forks was a tent store run by Orison Bryant and Mr. Menapace. Once construction begun, the tent store was forced to move to several different locations due the appearance of permanent buildings.³

¹ *Headwater Heritage History*. (Butte, Montana: Artcraft Printers, 1983), p. 393.

² "Remarkable Growth of Three Forks During the Past Five Years," *Three Forks Herald*, September 25, 1913, p. 1.

³ *Headwater Heritage*, pp. 335-356; *Three Forks Herald*, September 25, 1913, p. 1

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The Milwaukee Railway established an economic base for the new community by making Three Forks the division point for the Chicago, Milwaukee & Puget Sound, and the Northern Pacific rail lines. The town grew rapidly:

By June 17, 1909 Three Forks had 800 individuals, unlimited water power; division of C.M. and P.S.- two transcontinental railroads; cement factory; sheep shearing plant; graveled streets; telephone exchange; two churches [Holy Family Catholic Church and Presbyterian Chapel]- three congregations [Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist]; bank; drugstore; jeweler; two doctors; dentist; undertaker; three general stores; two furniture stores; two lumber yards; hotel; six rooming houses; eight restaurants; two barber shops with bathrooms; photograph gallery; pool hall; two bakeries; butcher shop; newspaper; three real estate firms; three hackeries; one dray line; cobbler; blacksmith shop; eight saloons; Chinese laundry; homestead lands; large wooden houses and opportunities.⁴

Five years after its founding, Three Forks boasted a population of 2,000; a projection to 1918 believed the population would grow to 10,000 people.⁵

Twice, the people of this area tried unsuccessfully to create a new county by taking small parts of Jefferson, Madison, Broadwater, and Gallatin Counties. The 1913 attempt would have established Wilson County with Three Forks as the county seat.⁶ The other unsuccessful attempt was made in 1918, under the name of Pershing County.

Methodist Episcopal Church of Three Forks

The Methodist Episcopal Church became America's first organized denomination in 1784. Methodism came to Montana in 1864; the year Montana became a Territory. Methodism found its way into Montana with the miners, and the first known cities with organized Methodist churches were Virginia City, Bannack, Junction City, Bozeman, Helena, Missoula, Sheridan, Dillon, Butte, and Great Falls.⁷

At the September 17, 1908 lot sale in Three Forks, Rev. Charles Crouch, District Supt. Rev. George King, and Rev. Charles Rhodes purchased two lots for the First Methodist Episcopal Church. Eleven days later, Rev. Crouch and Rev. Rhodes held the first religious service in Three Forks near the construction camp, in a mess tent by the roundhouse. The Church was chartered on March 31, 1909 with thirteen members. Services from this time until the building of the church were held in Brown's Hall, the old Presbyterian Chapel on 1st Avenue and Elm Street, or Henslee's Auditorium.⁸

Rev. Fleet, a circuit preacher from Montana, received a note while in Illinois from a friend in Three Forks, which said, "We spent Sunday here, you would scarcely know the place, I think you better come back. I counted nine saloons on Main Street." Rev. Fleet did return and he initiated a building program. In 1911 the foundation was laid. Two years later, Rev. Fleet was transferred to Townsend and Rev. McClure was assigned to Three Forks.⁹

⁴ *Headwaters Heritage*, p. 356.

⁵ *Three Forks Herald*, September 25, 1913, p. 1.

⁶ "Proposed New County - Relative Facts," *Three Forks Herald*, September 25, 1913, p. 5.

⁷ For a history of the Methodist church in Montana, see P. Adams' *When Wagon Trails Were Dim*, Montana Conference Board of Education, 1957, or G. Mecklenberg's *The Last of the Old West*, The Capital Book Company, 1927.

⁸ "M.E. Church Dedicated, Impressive Exercises Monday," *Three Forks Herald*, August 28, 1913, p.1; "Methodist Church to be Built Soon," *Three Forks Herald*, April 3, 1913, p.1; *Headwaters Heritage*, p. 383.

⁹ *Headwaters Heritage*, p. 383.

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Rev. McClure proceeded with the building program for the church. On August 25, 1913, the cornerstone was laid in an impressive ceremony. Bishop Luccock conducted the ceremony and other distinguished clergy were present. The *Three Forks Herald* reported, "... Bishop and the rest of his party arrived at 1:15 and repaired to the Sacajawea Hotel where they spent half an hour. At 2:00 the Three Forks Band marched to the front of the hotel and escorted them to the new church." Businesses in town were closed for an hour, allowing workers to attend.¹⁰

Brother Jacob Mills, an early Montana preacher and Presiding Elder of the Bozeman District of Methodism for nine years, was very interested in the welfare of the church and donated \$2,500 on January 9, 1914 to put the church on a secure financial foundation. After this, the church became known as the Mills Methodist Episcopal Church. Today a brass plaque with this name, which was once mounted on the exterior, is now housed inside the church. Services were first held in the church April 12, 1914 on Easter Sunday, and prominent Methodist pastors from all over Montana attended. There were three services that day, the last being interrupted by an electrical fire, which was quickly put out and service resumed. The final cost for the completion of the church was \$10,000.¹¹

The Presbyterians had a chapel on 1st Avenue and Elm Street. By 1914 the Presbyterians had plans to build a new chapel, and soon after gave up their old chapel. When the Presbyterians decided not to pursue a building program after all, the Methodists and Presbyterians combined their congregation in 1920. The church alternated pastors and was known as the Federated Church until 1953 when the church again became a strictly Methodist church. In 1968, the Methodists merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church and became known, as it is today, as the United Methodist Church.¹² Other churches in Three Forks include the Holy Family Catholic Church that appeared circa 1886, the Presbyterian congregation organized in 1909, the Grace Lutheran Church with its first services in 1917, the First Baptist Church of Three Forks with its first services in 1962, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints established circa 1950.

Earthquake of June 27, 1925

On June 27, 1925, an earthquake hit Three Forks, Montana. The first quake hit at 6:21 p.m., the second shock was at 6:54 p.m., and the third shock came at 7:43 p.m. The first earthquake loosened chimneys and veneers on buildings. The second shock resulted in a loud roaring sound resulting from bricks falling and the sound of breaking glass. While the second shock was not as severe as the first, it was certainly more destructive. The third tremor came from the north to the south; it lasted only a few seconds and caused very little further damage. By the time this tremor happened most people were outside sharing their experiences with neighbors. Businessmen had gathered on Main Street to assess the damage to properties and inquire to the safety of the townspeople.¹³

¹⁰ "M.E. Church Dedicated," *Three Forks Herald*, August 28, 1913.

¹¹ *Headwaters Heritage*, p. 383.

¹² *Headwaters Heritage*, p. 383., 380-382

¹³ "Earth Tremors Startle Citizens," *Three Forks Herald*, July 2, 1925, p. 1.

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The *Three Forks Herald* commented on the fortunate lack of injuries to people during the earthquakes, and stated two reasons for this:

On fortunate circumstances in connection with the catastrophe is the time it occurred. First the time of the day, when families were at home during supper hour; second, it being Saturday and during vacation period no children or other persons [were] about buildings to be hit by falling bricks or injured in a stampede, which would have followed the first shock had there been any activities at the schoolhouse... So, while the damages were great, yet our people have reason to be thankful that the quake came at a time when there was the least possible chance of danger to human life...¹⁴

The buildings damaged the most were the Methodist Church, the school, American Bank Building, Labor National Bank Building, drugstores, the Avery Garage, Mestad's City Bakery, and the Brackney Home. Railroad tunnels in the area also collapsed. O.W. Carmack and Rank Shandoan reported an upheaval in the bed of West Gallatin, north of Manhattan, at the time of the second shock. The two gentlemen reported at the time of the second shock, water was thrown in the air at least a hundred feet high.¹⁵

A postcard from Louise Kunze of Three Forks to her relatives in Seattle, Washington, dated June 30, 1925 states:

We have been having lots of thrills last few days. All brick buildings are nearly destroyed... A tunnel just above where I taught caved in and dammed [a] creek so people had to move out... My nerves are on edge. The house rocked so I couldn't even get out the door...¹⁶

After the earthquake it was believed the extent of the damage to the Methodist Church was so bad that it would be necessary to tear down the remains, including the belfry, and rebuild from the foundation. The west wall of the church, which contained a beautiful mural window, was destroyed with the collapse of that end of the building. The north wall was cracked and crevices were opened in other portions of the brickwork. Several days after the earthquakes, strong winds added to the destruction of the church and other buildings in Three Forks. Upon later examination, however, it was decided that the church could be rebuilt based on what was standing, and it was not necessary to take it to its foundation to rebuild: "The M.E. Church will need some further inspection, but it is believed that the foundation is intact and that only the upper portion of the tower will have to be rebuilt and the north and west walls."¹⁷ A Mr. Rasmussen was hired and the building was repaired to its original design, with only two major changes: the bell tower was shortened by 20 feet, eliminating the upper, louvered window openings and castellated parapet (a stepped parapet was built instead); and the elimination of the large mural window on the west elevation.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Three Forks Herald*, July 2, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Three Forks Herald*, July 2, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Headwaters Heritage*, p. 374.

¹⁷ "State Fire Marshall Here," *Three Forks Herald*, July 2, 1925, p.1.

¹⁸ *Headwaters Heritage*, p. 383.

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Architectural Significance

Gothic Revival architecture has been and continues to be a popularly used architectural style for churches. The Three Forks Methodist Episcopal Church used classic elements of Gothic Revival when they designed this church in 1914. While the original architect of this grand building is unknown, the Methodist Episcopal Church is an excellent example of turn of the century Gothic Revival architecture, as it has many of its elements present, including a steeply-pitched roof, wall dormers, large pointed-arch tracery windows, a tower, and buttresses. Indeed, the church boasts three large Gothic arch windows with tracery patterned windows. A large Norman style bell tower, which is the centerpiece of this building, is buttressed at each corner. The church's cross gable roof is steeply pitched, which establishes rhythm with the large arched windows and arched door entrance.

Criteria Consideration

One National Register criteria consideration, consideration A for religious properties, applies to the Methodist Episcopal Church. This religious facility is seeking consideration as a strong example of Gothic Revival architecture and for its embodiment of Three Forks' historical local events, community development and destructive 1925 earthquake.

Methodist Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Gallatin County, Montana
County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

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 -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: **Zone** **Easting** **Northing**
 12 457328 5082335

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s): SW4NW4SW4 of Section 25, T2N, R11E

Verbal Boundary Description

The Methodist Episcopal Church is located on the corner of Cedar Street and 2nd Avenue in Three Forks, Montana. The property is in the SW4 of the NW4 of the SW4 of Section 25, Township 2 North, Range 11 East, and includes Lots 5 and 6 of Block 12 in the Original Plat of Three Forks.

Boundary Justification

This is the property historically associated with the church, since the time Rev. Charles Crouch bought this property at the Three Forks lot sale on September 17, 1908 for the location of this church.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Brooke Simpson, SHPO Intern
organization: State Historic Preservation Office date: March 2000
street & number: 1410 8th Ave telephone: 406-444-7715
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59626

Property Owner

name/title: Yellowstone Conference of United Methodist Church
street & number: P.O. Box 2540 telephone: (406) 256-1385
city or town: Billings state: MT zip code: 59103

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Mecklenburg, G., *The Last of the Old West*. The Capital Book Company: U.S.A., 1927.

Three Forks Herald. 3 April 1913, 28 August 1913, 25 September 1913, 9 April 1914, 2 July 1925,
23 July 1925.

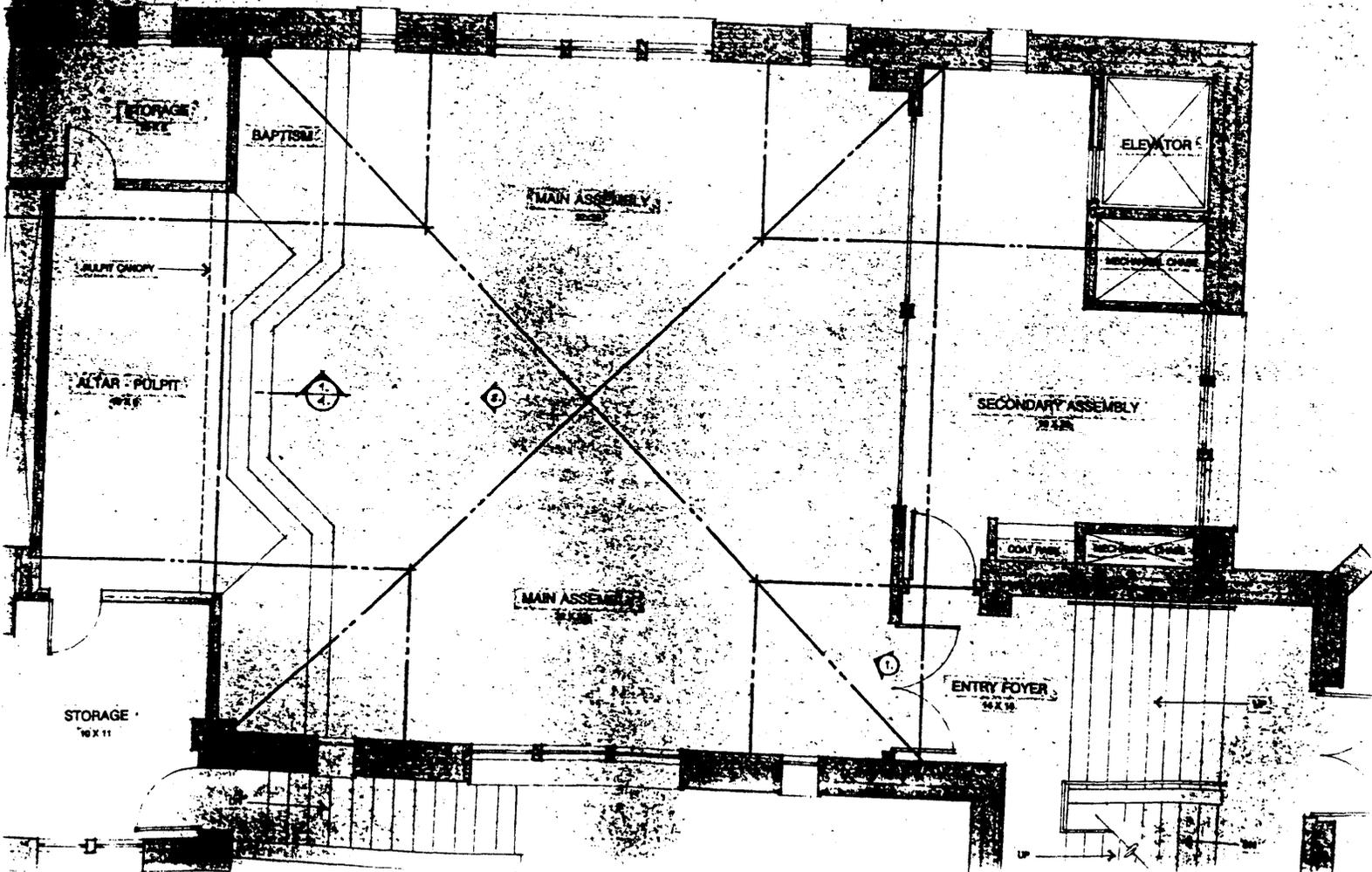
The Valley Shopper (Bozeman). August 1971.

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FLOOR PLAN - MAIN FLOOR



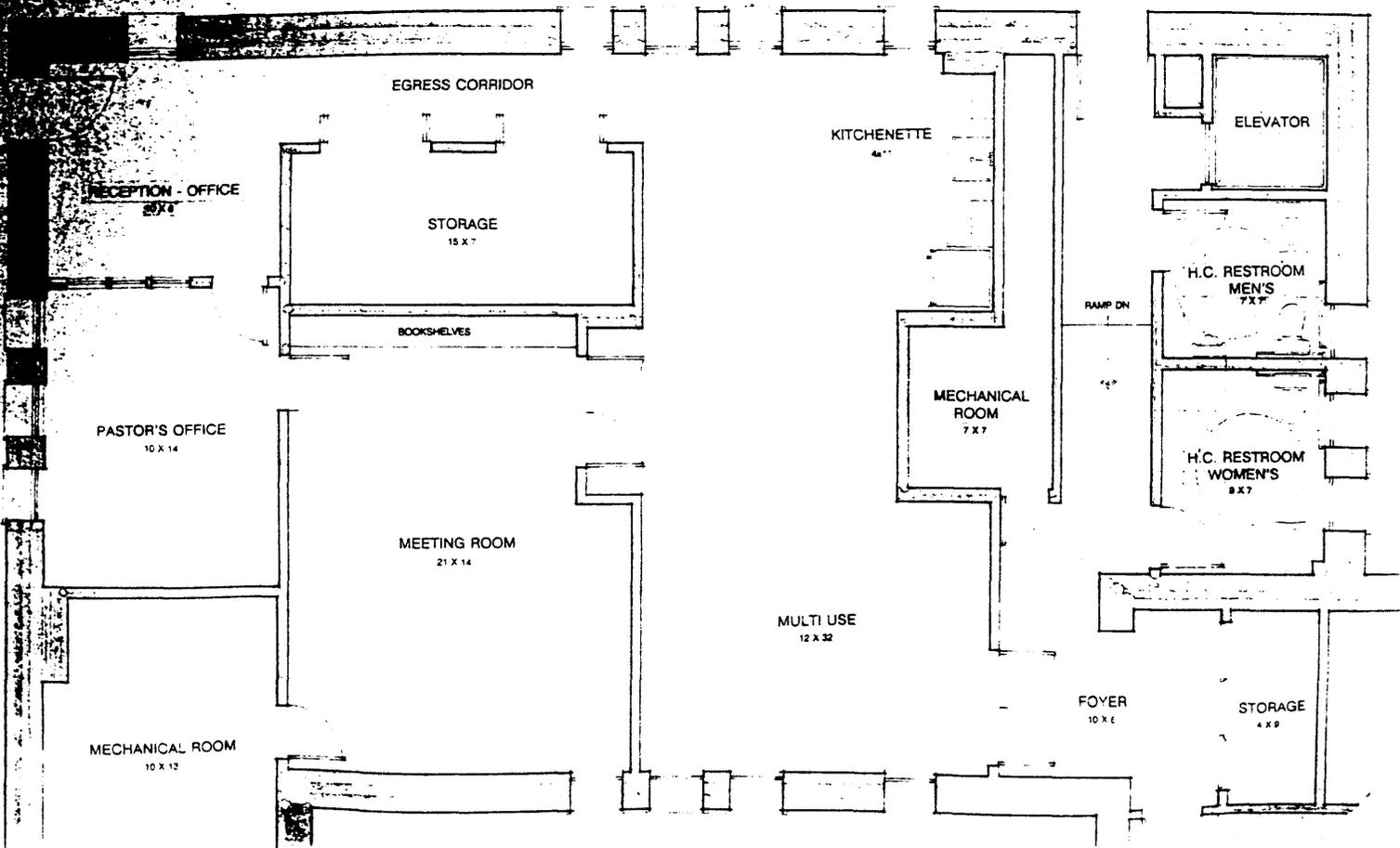
United Methodist Church- 116 Cedar St., Three Forks, MT
main floor

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FLOOR PLAN - BASEMENT



United Methodist Church- 116 East Cedar St., Three Forks, MT
basement