

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 determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction 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 Jefferson City Community Center

other names/site number Diggs, Duke, Community Center

**2. Location**

street & number 608 East Dunklin Street [n/a] not for publication

city or town Jefferson City [n/a] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Cole code 051 zip code 65101

**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 [ ])

Signature of certifying official G. Tracy Mehan III, Director

4/1/92

Date

Department of Natural Resources and State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date

- ☐ 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  
See continuation sheet [ ].

Jefferson City Community Center  
Name of Property

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### 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)  
previously listed resources.)

☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Check only one box)(Do not count

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

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.**

N/a

### 6. Function or Use

**Historic Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
SOCIAL/meeting hall

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
SOCIAL/meeting hall

### 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
No Style

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
foundation concrete  
walls limestone

roof asphalt  
other wood

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

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## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria**  
(Mark ☒ 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 ☒ 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)

Ethnic Heritage--Black

Social History

**Periods of Significance**

1942-c.1963

**Significant Dates**

1942

**Significant Person(s)**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

n/a

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

**Architect/Builder**

Cooper, Rolland/Diggs, Duke

## Narrative Statement of Significance

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

## 9. Major Bibliographic 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:**

Jefferson City Community Center

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### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
<u>15</u>	<u>572320</u>	<u>4268930</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing
<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>

[ ] 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 Susan K. Appel, Ph.D./Architectural Historian

organization URBANA Group [for the City of Jefferson] date January 20, 1992

street & number 110 S. Race St., Suite 200, P.O. Box 1028 telephone 217/344-7526

city or town Urbana state IL zip code 61801-9028

#### 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 Jefferson City Community Center Association

street & number 608 East Dunklin Street date January 20, 1992

city or town Jefferson City state MO zip code 65101

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Narrative Description**

**Summary**

The Jefferson City Community Center is a T-plan stone building set at the front edge of a large open plot of ground. While the structure has apparently changed rather little, aside from falling into disrepair, much of the adjacent land, especially in blocks to the north and west, has the relatively blank and shaped quality that often denotes urban renewal clearance areas. The larger section of the Community Center (to the east) has a shallow gable roof and houses a meeting hall, as it has since the building's construction in 1942. The east exterior wall of this section shows the outline of a long-demolished but once attached "addition," although there is disagreement as to whether the outline belongs to a building constructed before or after the present one. The smaller section of the Community Center (to the west) is lower, differently roofed and set back farther from the street. Originally, it served as the residence of the property's supervisor, but is now being converted into smaller meeting rooms, office and kitchen spaces. The conversion entails slight reconfiguration of its original four rooms but no exterior.

Detailed Description

General Site and Vicinity

The building faces roughly north and sits about 20' back from Dunklin Street on the northern edge of a large open grassy plot that eventually blends into the city's Community Park to the south. The ground slopes down and away from the building on both east and west (more sharply to the east), and to the south from Dunklin as well. Part of the grounds behind the Center is used as a ballfield and includes a baseball backstop of chain-link fencing. The site is bounded about 50' east of the building by Wears Creek, which runs in a concrete-lined channel, and about 90' to the west by Marshall Street, which dead ends to the south in a cul-de-sac at the entrance to the city park. West of Marshall Street and set well back from Dunklin is the building of the Newman Center associated with Lincoln University.

The Community Center is located about one-half block west of Lincoln University (at Dunklin and Lafayette Streets), the land between Lafayette and Wears Creek rising to the south with a screen of trees beginning about 70' back from Dunklin, east of which is a row of houses facing Lafayette Street. Across

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Dunklin, north from the Community Center, is a block of cleared land, sloping and cut through irregularly by Wears Creek; the southwest corner of this block is given over to a parking lot and tennis courts, and beyond Elm Street at its northern edge rises the elevated bed of the Rex M. Whitton Expressway (U.S. 50/63).

Exterior of the Community Center

The Jefferson City Community Center is a simple vernacular one-story building with a T-shaped plan. The longer and broader leg of the "T" (to the east) forms a meeting hall, while the shorter and more square leg (to the west) was originally used as housing for the resident supervisor of the facility; the latter portion is being remodeled into office, kitchen and smaller meeting rooms. Exterior dimensions of the hall section are about 52 x 32', and of the residential/office wing about 32 x 32'. Above a smooth-faced concrete block foundation, the exterior walls are concrete overlaid with rock-faced limestone that is basically uncoursed, although there are two or three irregular "courses" of somewhat more rectangular blocks at the base of the walls. The strong texture of the walls is augmented by "vining," a raised decorative mortar beading common to these random rock buildings of central and southern Missouri.<sup>1</sup> Occasional pieces of this decorative finish mortar have broken off, revealing a rougher tucking mortar below; in some places this rougher mortar is also visible below and to the sides of the raised finish mortar where that remains in place.

North wall: The main facade of the building is its north wall along Dunklin Street. Here, as elsewhere, the two sections are clearly distinguished from one another. To the left (east) the meeting hall section is taller and gable-fronted, while the residential/office wing is lower and set back considerably from the street. The meeting hall's medium-pitched gable roof is wood-framed and edged by a white single board wood cornice with little overhang; this same cornice treatment continues all around the building's exterior. The meeting hall is approached by a short sidewalk leading from the street to a broad concrete stoop below central double entrance doors. These doors are hollow wood, set within a narrow, white-painted wooden frame, with a transom of two rows of six lights below a gabled hood on curving wood consoles. Between the doors and the transom is a narrow sign inscribed, "Community Center/Jefferson City", and above the doors is a spherical lamp and the numbers "608" centered below the hood gable. The entrance is flanked by rectangular 6/6 wood-framed double hung sash with concrete lug sills, centered horizontally and verti-

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cally in the wall. Above the entrance at the peak of the gable is a square louvered vent with a concrete sill.

To the left (east) of the meeting hall entrance, set out from the building about four feet, is a concrete stair with pipe railing descending to the lower grade of the building's east wall. A second flight of concrete steps returns between the first flight and the building, leading down to an exterior door facing north (front) at the basement level. This door is modern and of paneled wood with a small central window near the top. Much of the building's basement wall is visible at this northeast corner, but because of the rising grade of the lot to the west, the foundation is only minimally visible to the right of the double-door main entry.

To the right (west) of the meeting hall, but set back about 15' farther from Dunklin Street is the front of the residential/office wing. Its roof appears from this north side and from the west to be a mansard or hip, but is, in reality, two gables set at right angles above the north and west walls. The roof has almost no overhang and the wood cornice is narrow enough to be hidden by guttering. Centered in the north wall of this section of the building is a modern single entrance door of stained wood, paneled below a fan-shaped four-light window. The entrance is approached by a narrow sidewalk and concrete stoop leading to a concrete threshold. Flanking the doorway on either side are single 6/6 rectangular windows, wood-framed with aluminum storm and screen windows, and concrete sills. In this front reentrant angle is a concrete-lined light-well with a metal grille at grade level that provides light and ventilation for restrooms on the lower level. Immediately above this well, set into the meeting hall's west wall where it joins the residential wing, is another single 6/6 wood-framed window with concrete sill, a window-unit air-conditioner filling its lower sash. The foundation below the residential/office wing becomes more visible to the right (west) as the ground slopes down.

West wall: A view of the building from the west again shows the setback of the residential/office section from the meeting hall, which is more pronounced to the north than to the south. The apparently hipped roof of the western section (see above) has a single board cornice visible below guttering. Evenly spaced in this wall of the residential/office wing are two rectangular windows, the north one 6/1, the south 2/2, both wood-framed and with concrete lug sills. The foundation is increasingly revealed toward the back (south), as the ground level drops toward the rear of the building. The west wall of

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the basement has two windows aligned with those above, the one toward the front (north) shorter than that toward the rear (south), but both with three lights in wood frames and aluminum storms.

South wall: Again the residential/office wing and meeting hall sections are differentiated on this rear wall, to the left (west) and right (east) respectively, with the meeting hall projecting perhaps 7' more to the south than the residential portion. Across the entire rear wall, the foundation is increasingly visible to the right (east) as the ground slopes down in that direction.

The residential/office wing itself has two parts here--the left (west) gabled, the right (east) shed-roofed with the shed set behind (south of) and alongside the gables over the north and west walls; a small brick chimney appears at the inner left (northwest) corner of the shed-roofed section, where the two gables and shed meet. The gabled section has a single board cornice and on the main level, a single 2/2 window, wood-framed and with concrete sill, set left of center; the basement below has a single three-light window at the outer right (east) corner.

The main level of the shed-roofed section (the kitchen) is entered via a wooden deck on wood posts with a simple two-level wood railing. Steps to this deck are placed at its left (west) end, extending across the corner of the gabled section but not attached to that wall. The steps are made of three levels of concrete blocks set with holes facing west, above a two-level solid concrete slab. Opening from the deck at the left side of this part of the residential/office wing is a windowless, modern, hollow wood exterior door set in a simple rectangular wood frame. To its right (east) is a high-set double window, each half 3 vertical/1 and wood-framed, with aluminum storms. Both door and windows have concrete sills. An entrance to the meeting hall section also opens from the wooden deck, set at a right angle to the kitchen wall in the reentrant angle between the sections. It is a modern, hollow wood door with a small square window above center and has a 3/3 transom with an aluminum storm. A tall brick chimney in need of tuckpointing rises about 4' behind (north) of the join between the residential/office and meeting hall sections.

Below the deck and tucked into the reentrant angle between the residential/office wing and the meeting hall, a concrete stair leads down into an squared concrete-lined well providing access to a pair of entrances to the basement. The first of these, aligned with the right half of the double window above, leads to the furnace room below the residential/office wing,



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while the second, set at a right angle to the first, is aligned with the door into the meeting hall above and leads to the meeting hall's basement.

As on the north facade, the south wall of the meeting hall proper is taller than the residential/office wing and broadly gabled with almost no overhang and a single board cornice. A vent opening in the gable is infilled with plywood. Because of the drop in grade, this wall rises above a basement revealed sufficiently to hold four regularly spaced 6/6 windows, wood-framed with aluminum storms and screens, their concrete sills just above ground level. The main level has only three windows, aligned with the left three in the basement, and with no indication that there ever was a fourth window at the right (east) end of this level. Like the basement windows, these are also 6/6, wood-framed, with aluminum storms and screens and concrete sills, but they are taller than those of the basement. There is a centrally placed exterior electric light above the main level. A cypress tree grows in front of the left two windows, about 6' out from the wall.

East wall: The basement along this side, like that on the south side of the meeting hall, is visible to the full height of its windows. A single rectangular 6/6 wood-framed window appears at the left (south) corner of the basement (opening into the lower kitchen), and two 6/6 windows of same sort appear at the right (north) corner. Between these windows, the concrete basement wall is divided into three differently treated sections. Toward the front (north) wall is a horizontally banded section (infested with wasps) with an indentation in its center top; behind this to the south is a vertically banded section recessed perhaps 6"; finally, there is a section of concrete block, less smoothly finished than elsewhere on the foundation and with a shadow of a vertical outline at its southern edge.

Toward the rear (south) of the main level on this side is a single rectangular 6/6 wood-framed window with concrete sill, aligned above the shorter version of same window in the basement level. One similar window appears above the left window of the pair in the basement toward the front (north) corner. Between these two windows, set back about 10-12' from the front (north) wall and ending about 9-10' from the rear (south) wall, the east wall on the main level shows the obvious ghost of a former addition, once used as a nursery school but demolished about 1963.<sup>2</sup> The outline, well marked by the tar edging of its roof, shows the front (north) of the missing portion to have been side-gabled with a slight overhang, while behind (to the south) was a lower shed-roofed section. Within the ghost outline of the addition the

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limestone facing is lighter in color than that of the rest of the wall, and although still rock-faced, has none of the vining mortar seen on all other exterior walls. Passage between the extant meeting hall and the demolished portion was through a rectangular doorway just right (north) of center in the former addition's gabled section. The outline of this door is also well preserved from the exterior, just above the indention noted in the horizontally banded section of the basement, but infilled with roughly coursed, poorly crafted rock, and with a metal stovepipe extending through the stone to the outside air. The upper edge of this wall has a flat, single-board white wood cornice, a piece of which is missing above the outline of the rear wall of the ghost addition.

Interior of the Community Center

The Community Center's interior is best described in terms of its two sections, the meeting hall and the residential/office wing, whose exteriors are discussed above. Both sections have one main floor above a full basement. The two sections are interconnected on both the main level and the basement via doorways between them placed roughly in the center of their joint wall.

Main Level

Meeting Hall: The main double door entrance to the meeting hall from the north leads into a shallow vestibule with a small ticket window on the west wall. From the vestibule a second set of double doors gives entry to the hall proper. These doors are painted wood, paneled below large single upper lights, and set into a simple wooden frame. The meeting hall is a single open room about 42' long (north to south) by 30' wide (east to west), by perhaps 12' high, with no interior supports. Its ceiling is painted plaster, its walls painted plaster above painted concrete block, and its floor hardwood. On either side of the central main entrance along the north wall is a small enclosed room, each entered by a single paneled wood door without lights. The room to the east is a coatroom about 8' deep that occupies the entire north-east corner of the building. The room to the west is smaller in both plan dimensions and serves as the ticket office; the ticket window seen in the vestibule opens into this space. At the northwest corner of the meeting hall is another door leading to stairs to the basement which take up the rest of the space in this corner.

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The hall's east wall has a rectangular 6/6 wood-framed window near each of its corners. Right (south) of the northern one of these is a sealed door (which once led to the attached nursery school wing, now demolished). Set in front of the sealed door is a metal heating stove, vented by a stovepipe through the door to the exterior. The south wall of the meeting hall has three regularly spaced rectangular 6/6 wood-framed windows set off-center to the right (west); no evidence of a fourth window exists at the east corner. Near the south end of the west wall is an exterior door with transom, and at the north end of this wall is another 6/6 window with a window air conditioner filling its lower sash. Left of center in the west wall is a single modern door with a small square window at upper center; this leads into a small vestibule with two doors into the residential/office wing and a third door providing access to the basement's furnace room.

Residential/Office Wing: This section of the building is roughly square in plan and is divided into four major spaces, with a restroom carved into the center. Ceilings are about 8' high in three of the four main rooms, lower than in the meeting hall. In mid-October 1991, this part of the center was being prepared for renovation. Some of its walls were freshly drywalled, while others showed evidence of the deterioration that stimulated the remodeling campaign.

The main exterior entrance to this wing is centered in the north wall, where a single door opens into a small vestibule about 4' wide. Angled just beyond the swing of the entrance door on either side of the vestibule are doors into the two rooms along the north wall of this wing. The room to the left (east) is approximately 13 x 15', has a window centered in its north wall and two doors in its south wall, that at the right (west) corner leading to the restroom, and that at the left (east) corner leading to the small vestibule leading to the meeting hall, kitchen and basement entry. The eastern door is slated to be closed off and a new door cut directly into the meeting hall at the south edge of the room's east wall.<sup>3</sup> This room is to be remodeled into an office for the Community Center Association.

The room to the right (west) of the main entrance is approximately 13 x 16' and has a 6/6 rectangular window in a painted wood frame centered in each of its north and west walls. Its painted plaster walls are chipped and worn, and its acoustical tile ceiling is falling in places. Its south wall is opened wide by a painted wood-framed passage into the adjacent room; these two spaces are to be remodeled into smaller meeting rooms. The second of these to the

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rear (south) is about 14 x 16' and has a 2/2 rectangular window centered in each of its west and south walls. A small closet is set against the short wall at the northwest corner of this room. Near the south end of the room's east wall are two single doors, the right (south) leading to the rear entrance and the kitchen. The left door now leads into the restroom, but will be removed and the opening closed off; most of the doorframe has been removed and the wall around it stripped to lath or beyond and partially reframed. Sections of this room's ceiling have been partly removed.

The fourth and last major room in this wing is to serve as a kitchen about 10 x 13' in plan, its ceiling only about 7' high. At the room's southwest corner a short corridor, shaped on its northern side by the outer wall of the restroom, connects the kitchen with the meeting room just described and serves the single-door rear (south) entrance. No appliances were in place in the kitchen in October 1991, all walls but the east wall had been recently drywalled, and the floor and ceiling were also being renovated. The east wall shows a broad but shallow chimney flue to the left (north), while to the right, the wall retains part of its former tile covering, now heavily damaged toward the south end. According to the renovation architect's drawing, a four-burner stove will be set into the right half of this flue space and countertop installed along the east wall and around the corner to the south, where a double sink will be installed below the central double window set high in the south wall. Roughly opposite the sink a refrigerator will be set into a nook to be formed by extending part of the restroom wall. The east corner of the kitchen's north wall has a single door leading to the small vestibule that also provides access to the meeting hall, the soon-to-be office room and the basement, each by means of its own single door; as noted above, the door leading to the office is to be removed.

Basement Level

Meeting Hall: The basement level of the meeting hall can be reached directly from the hall's northwest corner by a door leading to an L-plan wooden stair with simple wood bannister. This part of the building's basement is essentially one large open room, its ceiling supported by a central row of metal posts, its walls of concrete block, and its floor covered with linoleum. However, the plan of this space is more irregular than the main level's, since a restroom is built into the "L" of the stair and a large kitchen is enclosed at the southeast corner. The main room has two rectangular 6/6 wood-framed windows at the north end of the east wall and three windows of the same type

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along the south wall. The kitchen has a window of the same design in its south wall (making a total of four evenly spaced openings along this wall) and another near the south end of its east wall. An exterior single door appears near the south end of the west wall, aligned with the door in the main level, and from the center of this wall a small vestibule-like space opens westward, connecting with the basement of the residential/office wing.

Residential/Office Wing: The northeast corner of this section of the basement level is given over to a second restroom, accessed by a single door in an angled wall forming the northern edge of the vestibule from the meeting hall. From this vestibule another single door leads into a large space running the full width (east-west) and at least half the depth (north-south) of the rear (south) of this wing. This room houses the furnace and other utilities and is also entered by another stair, an open wood stair leading down in a single flight from the main level's office-kitchen-meeting hall vestibule. Near the southeast corner of this room is a single exterior door, and small single three-light windows admit light on the south and west walls. West of center in the furnace room's north wall is a single door leading into a storage room that completes the basement level of this wing; it is lighted by another small three-light window in its west wall.

1. A description of this finishing technique can be found in David Quick and Lynn Morrow, "The Slab Rock Dwellings of Thayer, Missouri," Pioneer America Society Transactions XIII (1990): 41.
2. Date provided by Mr. George Burns in an interview with Susan Appel, October 17, 1991.
3. Michael L. Benendzen, AIA, blueprint of plans for renovating the west side of the community center, Project Number 9122, Jefferson City, MO, September 15, 1991.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance**

Significance Statement/Summary:

The Jefferson City Community Center is historically significant under Criterion A, under the area of significance of Ethnic Heritage--Black, as one of the few remaining architectural survivors of what was the heart of the African-American community in Jefferson City from the turn of the century to the early 1960s. The Community Center is also significant under the area of Social History, since its establishment was motivated by efforts to promote the welfare of society, specifically Jefferson City's African-American society. As a center of Black culture, the Community Center fulfilled this function most strongly from the 1940s to the early 1960s, when urban renewal decimated the community it was designed to serve. As a resource representing an entire category of history from which so few resources survive, the Community Center is of exceptional significance, having achieved significance within the last fifty years (Criteria Consideration G).

The building particularly symbolizes important social, cultural and educational efforts on the part of local African-Americans to improve conditions in their community during and after the Great Depression of the 1930s. The structure's location on East Dunklin Street between Marshall and Lafayette placed it in the midst of one of the greatest concentrations of African-American residences and businesses in Jefferson City in the 1930s and 40s. Its site is also only half a block from Lincoln University, a traditionally African-American institution of higher education founded in the wake of the Civil War and initially funded by donations from African-American Missourians who served in the 62nd and 65th regiments of the United States Colored Infantry.<sup>1</sup>

The predominantly African-American cultural context in which the Jefferson City Community Center was established is only partially preserved today. Lincoln University's student body is no longer overwhelmingly African-American, and urban renewal in the 1960s destroyed all of the black-operated businesses in the immediate vicinity of the Community Center and large parts of the oldest and most densely populated of nearby African-American residential areas. The Community Center remains and is being renovated to meet the needs of the new community that has grown up in the area since urban renewal. This population is more racially mixed than earlier, and the new programs envisioned are intended to serve all residents. Nevertheless, the Center con-

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tinues to express, in its physical presence and the nature of the activities that take place within it, local citizens' pride in their African-American heritage and continuing desire to contribute meaningfully to the quality of life in this part of Jefferson City.

Origins and Early History of the Jefferson City Community Center

The building that serves as the Jefferson City Community Center was the dream of an organization of local African-American citizens who sought to create a place where significant needs of their community could be met. Stimulated in part by the impact of the Great Depression, the Jefferson City Community Center Association incorporated in February of 1935 "to serve the Negro citizens of Jefferson City in the matter of welfare, reconstruction, education, charity, recreation, social life and other matters conducive to good citizenship."<sup>2</sup> Early activities of the Association included providing basic foodstuffs to needy community members, as evidenced by two index cards dated 1935 that record goods such as meat, rice and beans distributed to citizens that year.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to serving the public welfare, the Community Center Association also worked gradually to provide a structure that could house its various interests. First led by J. W. Damel, President; Mrs. Estella Diggs, Secretary; and V. H. Collins, Treasurer; this new organization was an offshoot of the Modern Priscilla Art and Charity Club, with whose members originated the desire to construct a community center building.<sup>4</sup> The concern for such a building is reflected in the initial articles of incorporation of the new Jefferson City Community Center Association, which specifically empowered it to collect money to lease or buy and to accept as gifts facilities and furnishings to further its purposes.

Drawing largely on the generosity of a less-than-affluent community, the new Association began a fund-raising campaign that slowly accumulated money and donations of materials and labor. Full records of this process are not preserved, but the painfully gradual nature of the campaign is suggested by a surviving list of monetary donations to the center in 1942. The majority of these were very small amounts (\$1, \$3 and \$5), along with larger sums, such as \$10, \$25 and \$50; some 137 separate donors in 1942 contributed about \$1040,<sup>5</sup> an average of just over \$7.59 per donor. Current members of the Community Center Association recall that residents of the area "pinched pennies for

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years and many donated \$1 a month to help construct the building."<sup>6</sup> In addition, individuals and institutions such as Lincoln University donated such goods and services as light fixtures, lavatories and bathroom stool, piano tuning, and general repair work,<sup>7</sup> especially as the possibility of having a building of the Association's own drew nearer. Not until 1942 was enough accumulated to realize the dream of a Community Center building, the structure that still stands at 608 East Dunklin Street.

Actual construction of the Jefferson City Community Center took place during the summer and fall of 1942, based on plans provided by Rolland Copper and directed by an important local black contractor and business man, Duke Diggs.<sup>8</sup> Payments for footing and foundation work, raising of the building and span labor occurred in mid-July, and payroll records show the work being performed by a relatively consistent group of seven or eight men, all of whom received some compensation for their labor.<sup>9</sup> In September 1942 the Community Center Association took out loans from the Exchange National Bank totaling \$2,500.66, no doubt to facilitate completion of the building.<sup>10</sup> By late fall of that year the building was sufficiently ready to allow an official dedication ceremony on November 29, an occasion that again engendered a rash of donations, ranging from \$1 to \$110.64, from both individuals and groups such as Alpha Kappa Alpha and the American Legion Auxiliary.<sup>11</sup> The simple, solid vernacular nature of the building attests to both the very modest means and the firm commitment of those responsible for its construction. Aside from the bank loans, there is no evidence that any major assistance for this project came from other than members of the local African-American community. In an age when segregation forced "separate but equal" facilities for blacks and whites, Jefferson City's African-Americans "had to build this ourselves."<sup>12</sup>

The site chosen for the Jefferson City Community Center was well located to serve the city's African-American population, which had been concentrating in the southeastern part of town since before the turn of the century. Throughout the early decades of the 20th century, the area in the general vicinity of the Community Center acquired growing numbers of African-American residents, as well as black-operated businesses; by the late 1930s and early 1940s, more streets in the area came to be inhabited entirely by African-Americans.<sup>13</sup> In many cases, however, the condition of African-American housing here was deplorable even into the mid-1920s,<sup>14</sup> suggesting that the social needs for which the Community Center was in part established had roots that had been growing since well before the Great Depression. Housing conditions began to improve somewhat in the following decades as Lincoln University was able to



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upgrade faculty salaries, effecting "the emergence of a well-trained, financially-better-off, class of professional African-Americans who could afford to buy houses which other Jefferson City African-Americans could not afford."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the Community Center's community retained many residents of much less affluence.

Early activities in the Community Center building were many and varied, aimed at as broad a spectrum of the local populace as possible. Events ranged from dances, meetings of area clubs and organizations, activities and cultural experiences for children, young people, and adults, to social services such as a soup kitchen. Initiated during the days of World War II, the Center also served as a U.S.O. center for black military personnel, a function it resumed during the Korean conflict. And from at least 1948 into the early 1950s, a nursery school provided educational opportunities for young children, as well as a small income for the Community Center Association.<sup>16</sup> Long-standing members of the Association today recall that the nursery school met in an addition to the current building (whose outline is still clearly visible on the exterior east wall of the structure), but it is not clear if that addition existed before the Center proper or was built at some unknown date after 1942; it was demolished about 1963.<sup>17</sup>

While the Jefferson City Community Center has benefited from the active involvement of many local citizens, two of the most prominent of them were Duke Diggs and Charles E. "Lefty" Robinson, Sr. Duke Diggs seems to have been largely in charge of the Center's construction. Little concrete information about his life has surfaced, except that he had a local moving business listed in the Jefferson City Directory as early as 1913,<sup>18</sup> and that he was said to own a number of local buildings that he had constructed himself.<sup>19</sup> Community Center Association records underscore his vital involvement in the building campaign, as noted above. Furthermore, one of the 1942 gifts to the Center was the portico over the front door to the meeting hall, given by Mrs. Duke Diggs and apparently embellished with a tablet incorporating her husband's name with that of the Center.<sup>20</sup> This confirms the recollection of current Association members that the building was sometimes called the "Duke Diggs Community Center."<sup>21</sup>

A second prominent figure associated with the Community Center was Charles E. Robinson, Sr., who gained fame in both black and white communities. When he retired from the Community Center Association in 1957, Robinson had served as its president for 15 years, that is, from the year in which the Center was

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constructed. After his retirement he planned to continue working with the Center, teaching kids to play ball and to be good sports and good citizens. This goal reflected more than one of the important issues of his life. Born in 1891 in New London, Missouri, "Lefty" Robinson was well known in Missouri baseball circles as a "left-handed fireball pitcher." After moving to Jefferson City in 1921 and beginning a series of jobs in state government, he organized an important local ball club, the Mohawks, for which he was manager and pitcher, compiling a 17-0 win-loss record in 1923. Robinson also attained considerable recognition for his civic activities, which increased from the 1930s. He joined the Community Center Association in its initial year, 1935, and was a charter member of the N.A.A.C.P., serving as its treasurer for 27 years. Among the honors accorded him were Omega Psi Phi fraternity's "Citizen of the Year" award, a "Meritorious Service" certificate from Lincoln University, and the naming by Governor Christopher S. "Kit" Bond of November 4, 1973, his birthday, as Charles E. Robinson Day in Missouri. Although he died in 1974, Robinson was not forgotten, and in 1983, Jefferson City dedicated its new bus and public vehicle facility as the Charles E. "Lefty" Robinson Transit/Central Maintenance Facility. On that occasion, Robinson's sister recalled that "'It seems like the white people (in Jefferson City) thought as much of my brother as the black people did, and you don't find that just everywhere.'"<sup>22</sup>

Decline and Rejuvenation

From its construction in 1942 until the onset of urban renewal in the early 1960s, the Jefferson City Community Center existed within a very different physical milieu than is visible today. Before massive clearance in the 1960s, the block north across Dunklin Street from the Community Center (bounded by East Dunklin, Lafayette, East Elm and Marshall Streets) contained the greatest concentration of black-operated businesses in Jefferson City, and was thus an important focal point for the local African-American community. That block included the Booker T. Hotel, the only black-operated hotel in town, along with a black-operated gas station, barber and beauty shop, restaurant and more.<sup>23</sup> Located diagonally across the intersection of Lafayette and East Dunklin from Lincoln University, this business block developed from before the turn of the century, and with the University and nearby residential areas, it helped to form the immediate physical and social context for the Community Center. Not one of these businesses survives today, and substantial numbers of the residences that supported those businesses have likewise been demolished.

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The eradication of such a substantial portion of the major historically black neighborhood of Jefferson City was a tragedy that paralleled events in many other cities during the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>24</sup> However well-meaning it may have been initially, wholesale clearance of blighted urban districts was eventually recognized to be undermining their multi-layered social fabrics. Ironically, this new comprehension of the complexities of cities and their renewal began to emerge in Washington, D.C. in 1962 and 1963.<sup>25</sup> By the time newer ways of thinking filtered out to places like Jefferson City, the damage had already been done.

With the demise of the African-American business community and displacement of perhaps 70 percent of the neighborhood's residents, the Jefferson City Community Center fell on hard times.<sup>26</sup> Its own addition to the east was demolished about 1963, during the same period in which urban renewal gutted the surrounding community, but the Center proper, with its meeting hall and residential wing, survived, if gradually falling into disrepair. It continued to be a meeting place for local organizations, and it has served various church congregations before they were able to afford their own church buildings.<sup>27</sup> From the early 1960s until recently, however, the Community Center was understandably a less vital institution than it once had been.

Recent efforts to revitalize the Community Center and the community it serves have begun to bear fruit. While the Community Center Association is not as large as when the building was constructed in 1942, it too has survived, and has undertaken repairs and begun raising funds for a much-needed renovation program for the Center. Motivation for this stems from a renewed desire to provide programs and activities for youth and families and from rejuvenated pride in the history of the Community Center and the local African-American community at large. As one member of its Board of Directors stated in July 1991:

This used to be where everything happened. . . . We want to bring all of that back. This building is part of this city's history and it's real important to me and everyone around here to try to maintain it--have it refurbished and have it be someplace. . . our kids can look up to as well as everyone in this whole community.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, the greater racial integration of the local neighborhood in recent years has broadened the outlook of the Community Center's Board. It

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now plans to provide programs to serve all residents, regardless of race, and hopes to be an alternative to other private social, educational and recreational facilities that are often too expensive for the still modest incomes in the area.<sup>29</sup> The building remains the focus of community activities and has served or still serves as the meeting place for groups such as Delta Sigma Theta, Alpha Kappa Alpha, the Modern Priscilla Art and Charity Club, and the NAACP. The City of Jefferson has assisted the Center in several ways, including allowing the Parks and Recreation Department to maintain the grassy land behind the building and to complete a new practice field there during the summer of 1991.<sup>30</sup> Cooperation and support now mark the relationship between the Association and the City, where neglect and destruction characterized official attitudes toward this part of town in the 1940s and 1960s. This change of approach should help to preserve the Jefferson City Community Center, an important reminder of the history of African-Americans in the state capital of Missouri.

Endnotes

1. Lorenzo J. Greene, Gary R. Kremer and Anthony F. Holland, Missouri's Black Heritage (St. Louis: Forum Press, 1980), 82-87; Duane Meyer, The Heritage of Missouri--A History (St. Louis: State Publishing Company, Inc., 1963), 498-499.
2. Cole County, Missouri (1935), Articles of Incorporation, Jefferson City Community Center Association, dated and filed February 11, 1935.
3. Index cards for Earnest Tyree, R.R. 3 #9, Russelville, MO, with transactions dated 1-25-35 and 2-1-35, and for Dewey & Julia Wade, 1020 East Elm [Jefferson City], with transactions dated 4-19-35 and 4-26-35. These cards found inside the "Community Center Cash Book" in the possession of Mrs. Rose Evans, which otherwise records Association activities of 1942.
4. Cole County, Missouri (1935), Articles of Incorporation, Jefferson City Community Center Association; "Jefferson City Community Center," Architectural/Historic Inventory Survey Form, Missouri Office of Historic Preservation, [date cut off on my copy].
5. "Community Center Record Book," in the possession of Mrs. Rose Evans, entries for 1942, n.p.

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6. Shelly Perez, "Community Renewal; Group Restoring Neighborhood Center." News Tribune (Jefferson City, MO), July 7, 1991, 1-A.

7. "Community Center Record Book," entries for 1942, n.p.

8. "Community Center Cash Book," n.p., records payment in May 1942 to Rolland Copper for plans, with additional payments to Duke Diggs. In an interview with Susan Appel in October 1991, current Community Center Board of Directors members Mrs. Rose Evans and Mr. George Burns disagreed on the roles played by Copper and Diggs. Mr. Burns believed Copper served as architect for the building, but Mrs. Evans believed Diggs was both architect and contractor, noting that Diggs owned many buildings in the area that he had built himself. According to Sherman Savage in The History of Lincoln University (Jefferson City, MO: New Day Press, 1939), 210-211 and 217, Diggs was "a Jefferson City business man" whose also served as Business Manager for Lincoln University from 1927 to 1929.

9. "Community Center Cash Book," Building Fund records dated May to July, 1942, n.p. Most payments recorded here during the fall of 1942 were for labor, rather than materials, indicating that the acquisition of materials and initial heavy construction was likely completed by late summer.

10. Ibid., n.p.

11. "Community Center Record Book," n.p. The page referred to is, as with the rest of the book, handwritten and actually dated "November 29, 1943." The year must be incorrect, since Building Fund records in the "Cash Book" clearly suggest that construction was completed by late 1942.

12. Rev. William Rice, member of the Community Center Association's Board of Directors, quoted in Perez, 1991, 1-A.

13. Gary R. Kremer and Ann Jenkins, "Missouri's Black Historic Sites: A View Over Time," report prepared for The Missouri Department of Natural Resources, 1982, 36-40, 46.

14. "Sociological Survey of the Colored Citizens of Jefferson City, Missouri," Third Biennial Report of the Missouri Negro Industrial Commission, 1923-24, 33, 36-37, cited in Kremer and Jenkins, 1982, 46.

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15. Ibid., 47.

16. "Community Center Money Receipts Book," in the possession of Mrs. Rose Evans, contains entries dated 1948-1950 which are predominantly rental receipts for this nursery school.

17. Interview with George Burns and Rose Evans, October 17, 1991. Mr. Burns and Mrs. Evans also remember the east addition being used as a kitchen before those in the current building were finished and equipped. They had opposite recollections as to whether the addition or the Community Center was built first.

18. Kremer and Jenkins, 1982, 39.

19. Mrs. Rose Evans, interview, 1991.

20. "Community Center Record Book," n.p.

21. Rose Evans and George Burns, interview, 1991.

22. Mrs. Victoria Pollard, quoted in Dwight Warren, "Transit Facility Dedicated," Post-Tribune (Jefferson City, MO), October 31, 1983, 1. See also "Charles E. 'Lefty' Robinson Transit/Central Maintenance Facility Dedication Ceremony Program," Jefferson City, MO, October 30, 1983; "Charles Robinson Retires From Community Center," St. Louis (MO) American, June 27, 1957, 11.

23. Kremer and Jenkins, 1982, 33.

24. See Chapter V, "The Metropolis and the 'Establishment': 1930-1959," and Chapter VI, "Federal-Metropolitan Convergence in the 1960's" in Blake McKelvey, The Emergence of Metropolitan America (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1968).

25. Mel Scott, American City Planning Since 1890 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 589-600.

26. Perez, 1991, 1-A.

27. "Jefferson City Community Center," Architectural/Historic Inventory Survey Form.

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28. Melvin Smith, quoted in Perez, 1991, 1-A.
29. Perez, 1991, 1-A.
30. Perez, 1991, 1-A.

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Cole County, Missouri (1955). Extension of Duration of Corporate Body, Jefferson City Community Center Association, dated February 17 and filed February 18, 1955.

Cole County, Missouri (1964). Corporate Deed transferring property from the City of Jefferson, Missouri to the Housing Authority of the City of Jefferson, dated August 4, 1964. (Part of Lots 51 through 54 and Lots 78 through 81, Little and Keyes Subdivision of Outlots 15 and 16, City of Jefferson, Missouri.

Cole County, Missouri (1969). Certificate of Incorporation, A General Not for Profit Corporation, Jefferson City Community Center Association, dated and filed February 24, 1969.

Cole County, Missouri (1969). Quit-Claim Deed transferring property from the Community Park Village, Incorporated to the Jefferson City Community Center Association (incorporated February 24, 1969), dated July 8, 1969. (Part of Lots 55, 56, 57, 58, Little and Keyes Subdivision of Outlots 15 and 16, City of Jefferson, Missouri - part of the vacated Marshall Street right-of-way.)

Cole County, Missouri (1969). Quit-Claim Deed transferring property from the Community Center Association (1935 defacto corporation) to the Jefferson City Community Center Association (incorporated February 24, 1969), dated August, 1969. (Part of Lots 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, Little and Keyes



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Subdivision of Outlots 15 and 16, City of Jefferson, Missouri - part of Marshall Street [vacated] and part of Ashley Street [vacated]; all of Lots 28 to 41, and 44 to 57 and part of Lots 58 to 68, Little and Keyes Subdivision, part of Ashley Street [vacated] and part of Missouri Street [vacated].)

Cole County, Missouri (1991). Annual Registration Report (Not for Profit Corporations), Jefferson City Community Center Association, dated July 17, 1991.

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"Community Center Money Receipts Book." Entries dated 1948-1950. In the possession of Mrs. Rose Evans.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 28 to 51 and 55 to 77 in the Little & Keyes Subdivision, City of  
Jefferson City, Cole County, Missouri.

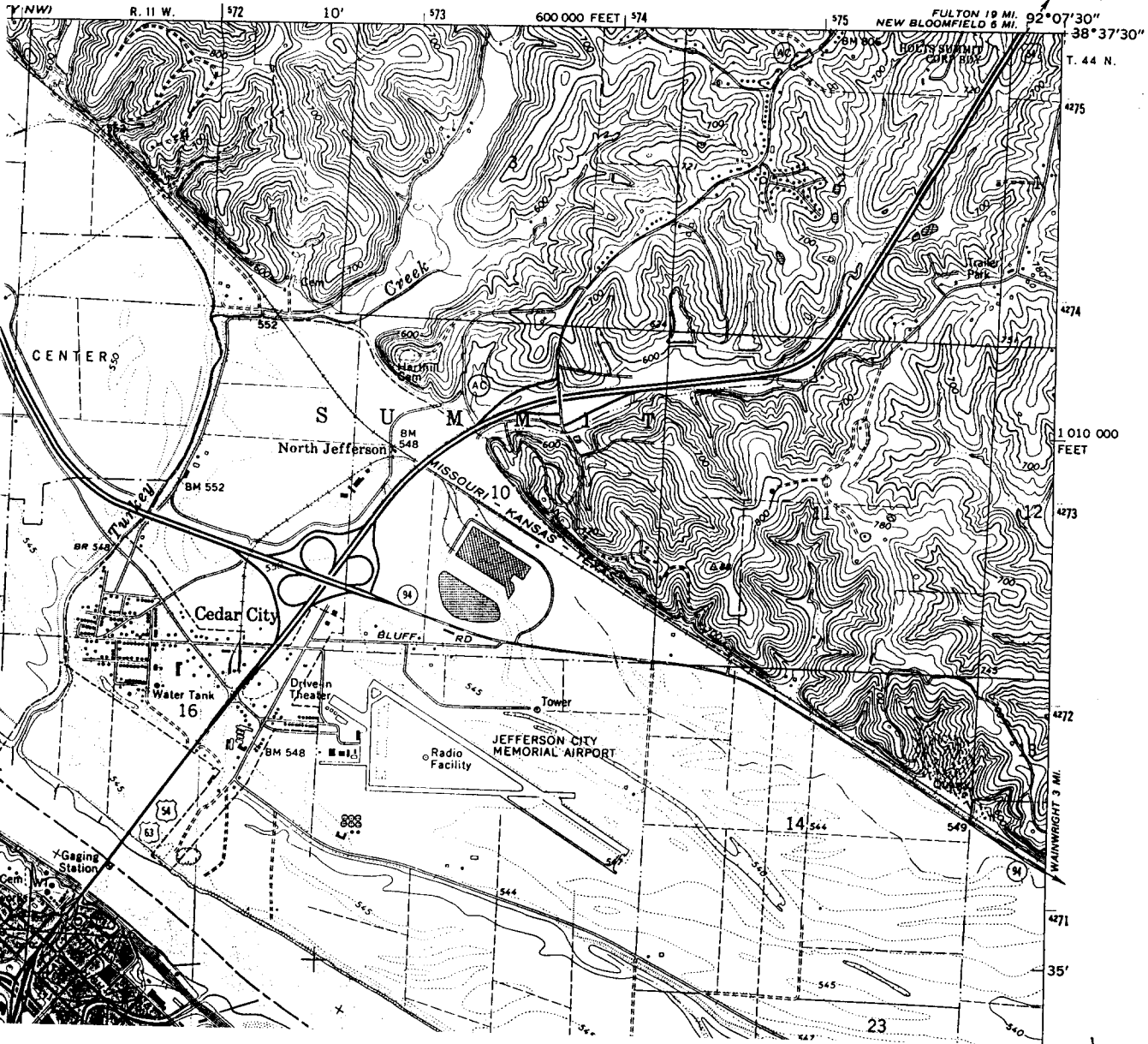
Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all city lots which have historically been associated  
with the property.

MISSOURI  
NATURAL RESOURCES

JEFFERSON CITY QUADRANGLE  
MISSOURI  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

756.11 NE  
NEW BLOOMFIELD



Nothing: 4268930

JEFFERSON CITY COMMUNITY CENTER

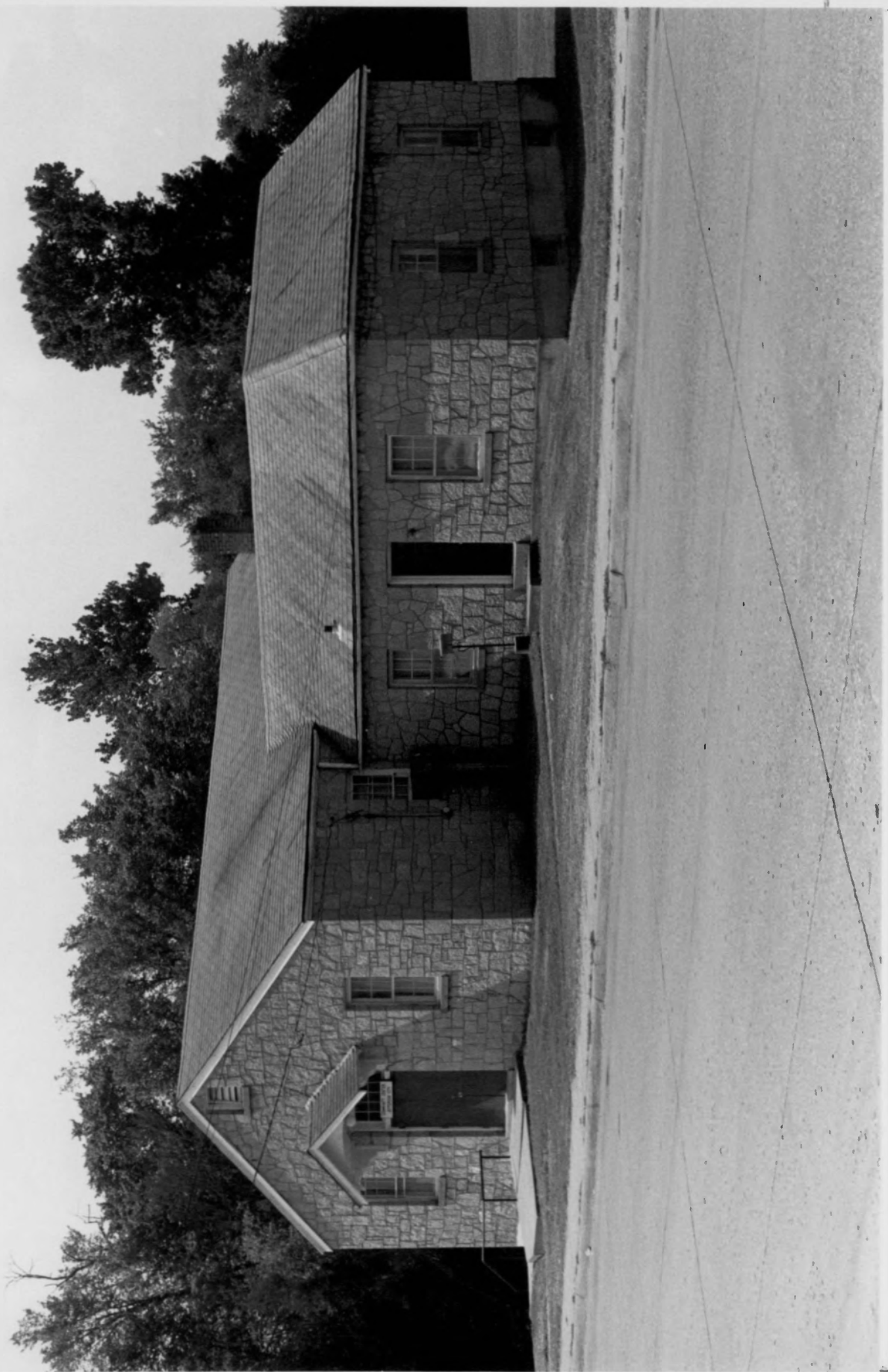
JEFFERSON CITY, COLE CO., MO

THE URBANA GROUP (APPEL), 10/91

NEGATIVES: MO HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

CAMERA FACING: S.E.

PHOTO #: 1 / 5



JEFFERSON CITY COMMUNITY CENTER

JEFFERSON CITY, COLE CO., MO

THE URBANA GROUP (APPEL), 10/91

NEGATIVES: MO HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

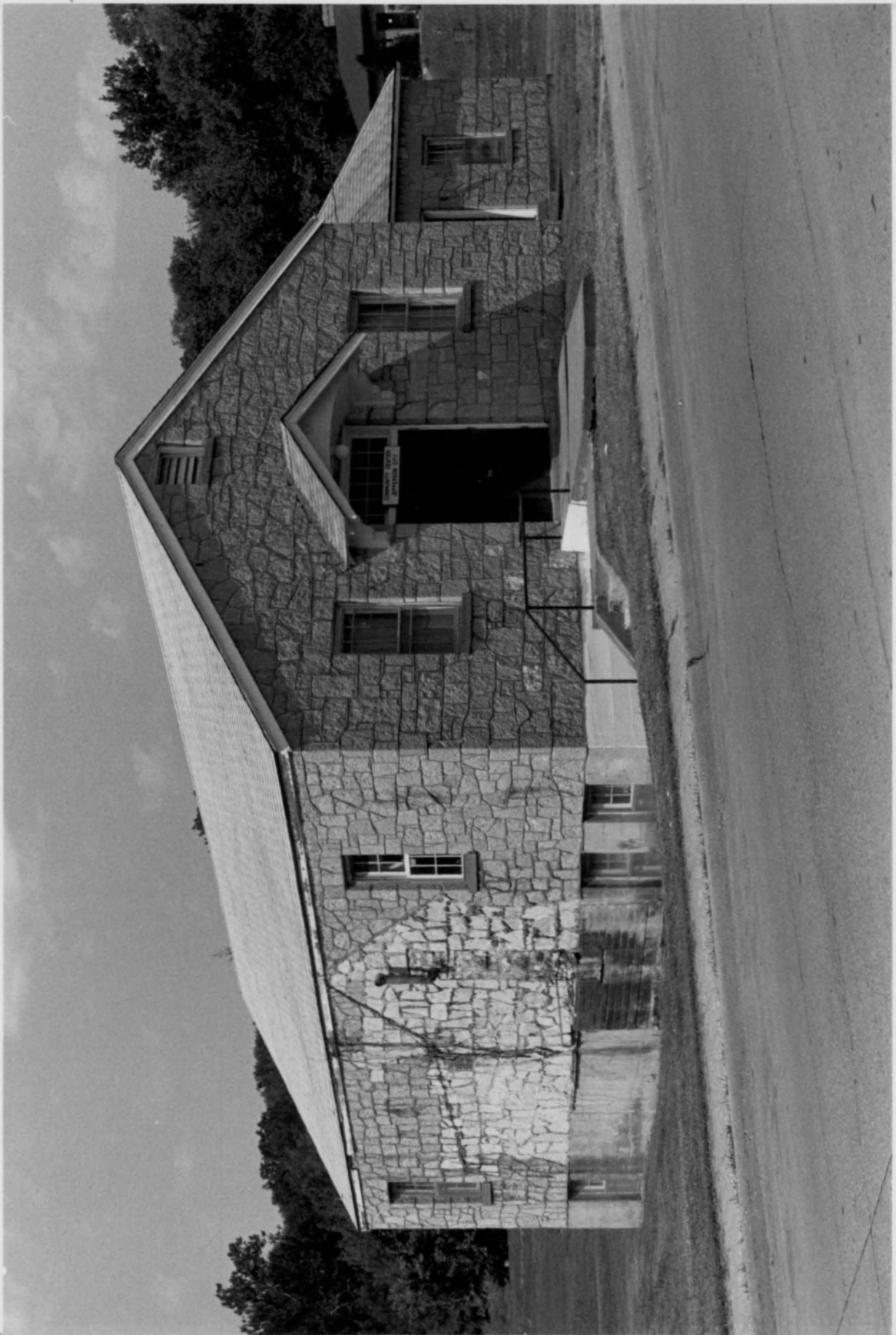
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NEGATIVES: MO HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM  
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PHOTO # : 3 / 5



JEFFERSON CITY COMMUNITY CENTER

JEFFERSON CITY, COLE CO., MO

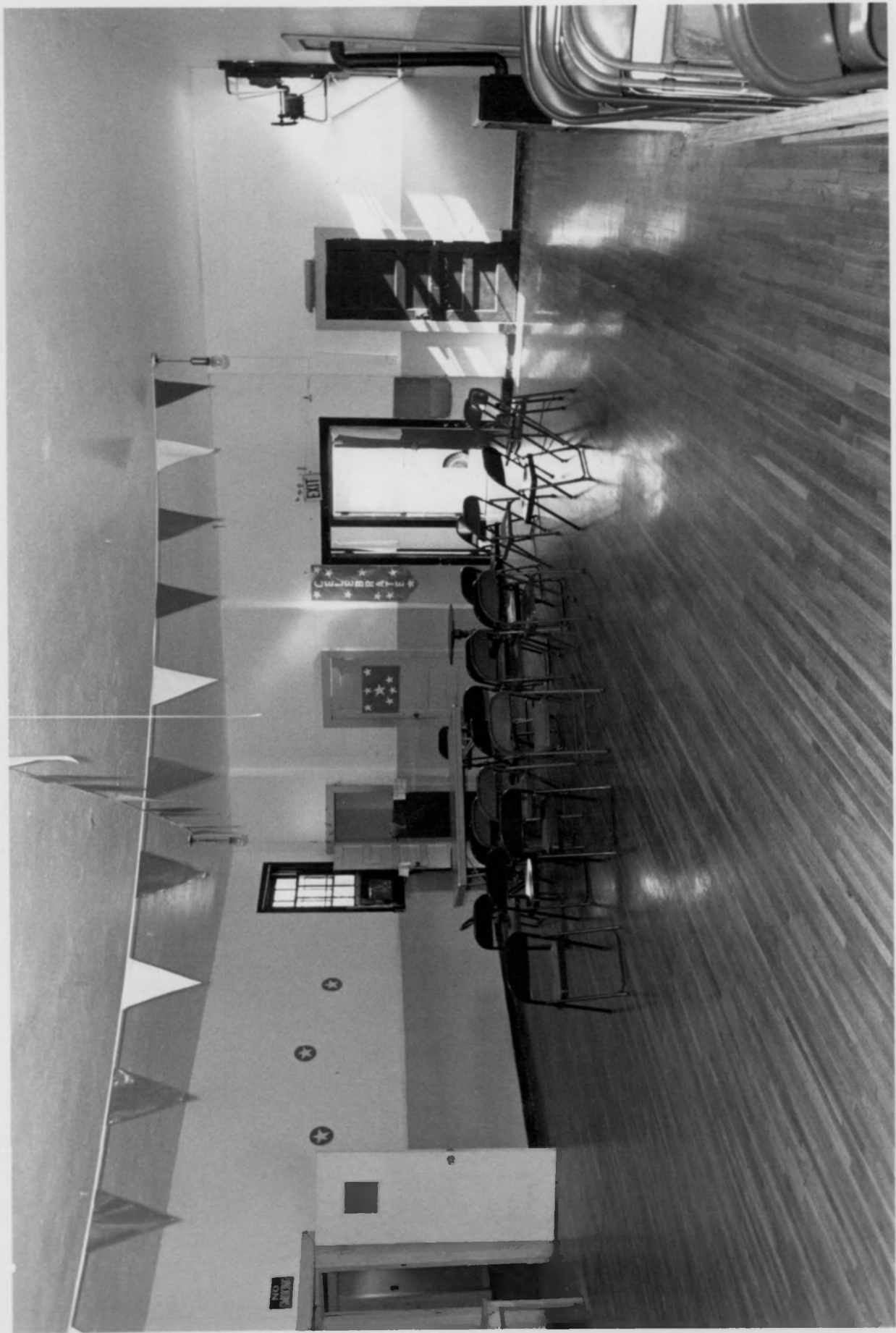
THE URBANA GROUP (APPEL), 10/91

NEGATIVES: MO HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

CAMERA FACING: MEETING HALL

N.W.

PHOTO #: 4/5



JEFFERSON CITY COMMUNITY CENTER

JEFFERSON CITY, COLE CO., MO

THE URBANA GROUP (APPEL), 10/91

NEGATIVES : MO HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
PROGRAM

CAMERA FACING: FROM SOUTH MEETING  
ROOM, N.E. INTO  
NORTH MEETING ROOM

PHOTO #: 5/5



