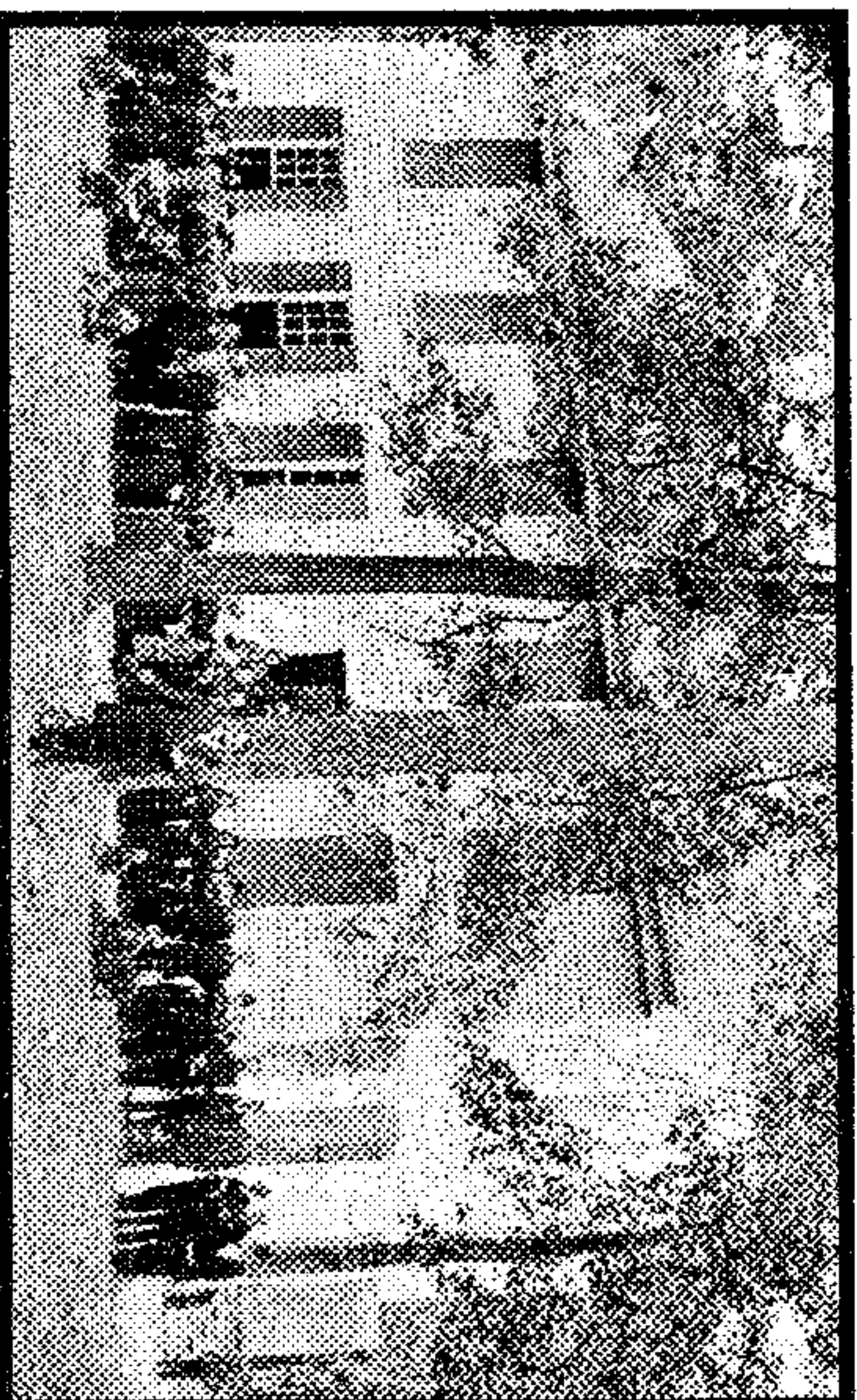


A Brief History of Bethel Baptist Church



*Bethel, 1896. Picture courtesy of the
South Caroliniana Library, U.S.C.
McDonald Furman Papers.*

Bethel Baptist Church was organized in 1780, with Solomon Thomson as the first minister, and admitted to the Charleston Association in 1782. In the early records of the Association, Bethel is referred to as Bethel Black River, so designated because of its location near the Black River. Bethel is the second oldest Baptist church in Sumter, formed with help for her mother church: High Hills Baptist of Statesburg.

Dr. Wood Furman in his book, "*History of The Charleston Association*", published in 1811, gives the above dates for the organization and admission into the Charleston Association. Following tabulated information, he gives a brief sketch of the church. He had this to say: "*After having been long in an unhappy divided state, this church was dissolved; but was revived and constituted again on April 29, 1810.*"

The building in which worship was held prior to 1823 was of logs and stood about two hundred feet west of the present one. We assume that it was on land belonging either to Hezekiah or Jesse Nettles—because in 1823 adjoining tracts of land containing in all thirty-three acres were deeded by these two men to the Baptist Church on the High Hills of Santee in trust for Bethel Church. The land was given so "*that they may have a place for public worship, and a parsonage for their minister to reside, and a burial ground for the burial of their dead...*" The deed of conveyance on January 5, 1828, stated that the church has been incorporated by the General Assembly of South Carolina in December 1823. Also the place of worship and parsonage had been erected.

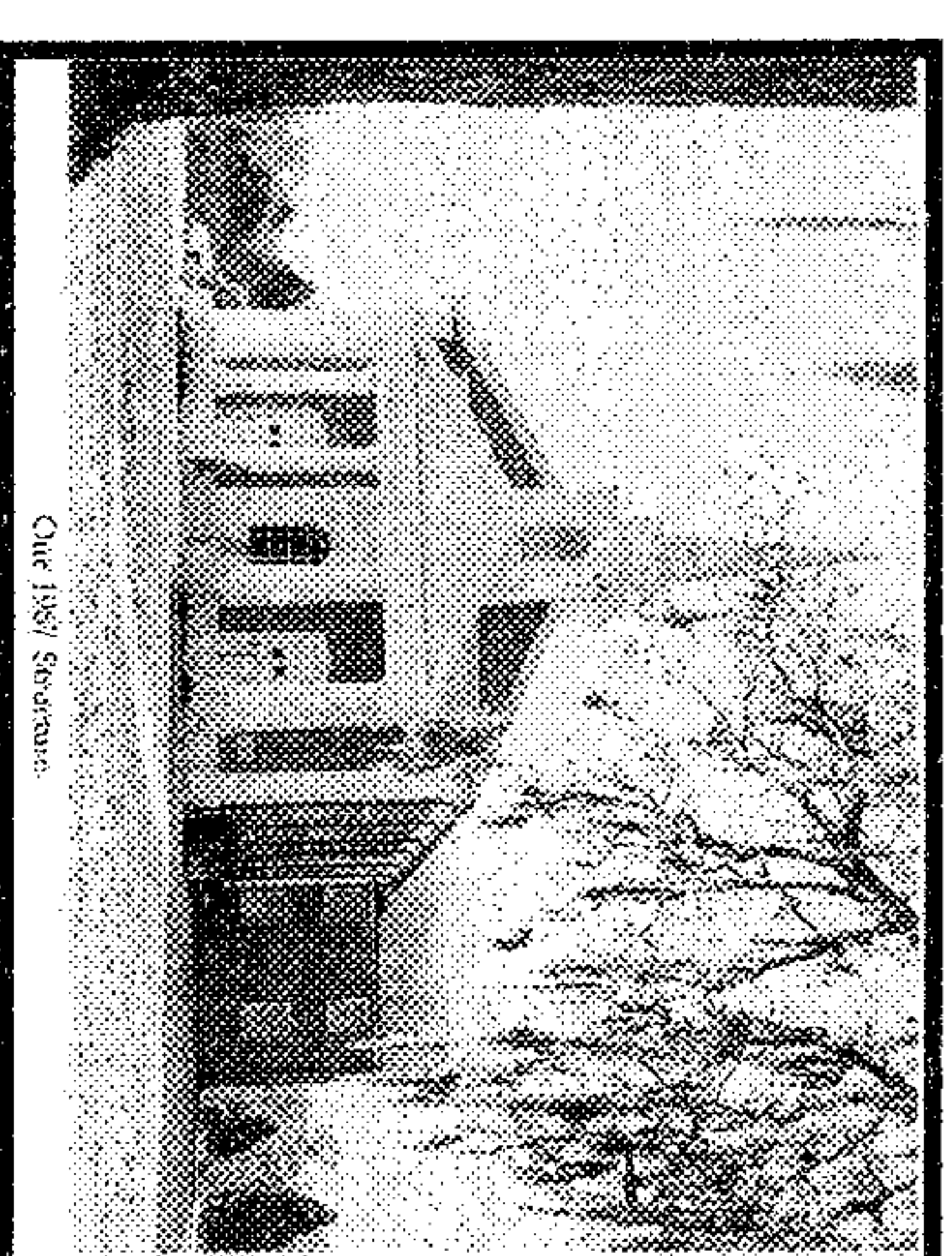
Col. John Blount Miller in a deed dated November 11, 1840, donated two acres of land to the church to be used for a graveyard for white people, giving the location as "*situated on or near Nasty Branch, water of Black River*". In another deed, dated November 3, 1842, he gave "one quarter of an acre or more" as a graveyard for the colored members of Bethel Church.

The second sanctuary—evidently erected between 1823 and 1828—was of wood, built on the same site as the former one. The sanctuary was used as a House of Worship until 1849. In the minutes of the Charleston Association for that year the church reported that they had "*commenced building a better House of Worship*".

The third sanctuary, built of wood with a seating capacity of 500, is in use today. Planned in the time of slavery, its balconies were then used by the Black Members of Bethel. The second sanctuary was eventually sold. For a while the

older building, called the Grange Hall, served as a community center and social hall for Bethel.

In 1956 the first Educational Building was dedicated, attached to the back of the present sanctuary. The building was designed to contain a kitchen, several small classrooms and office space. Currently the building is now largely used for office space, a few Sunday School classes, and choir room.



*Bethel Baptist Church Sanctuary with
Educational Building addition. 1967.*

The present parsonage was erected in 1961 across the street from the W.P.A. Schoolhouse.

Bethel grew greatly during the 1960's and 70's and soon she needed a larger space for Sunday School and a space to host church socials. In 1979, the church began to utilize its new three-story Educational Building. This structure contains several larger classrooms, and a large fellowship hall with a full kitchen. In the fall of 1980, the church began a new pre-school and day care in the Educational Building.

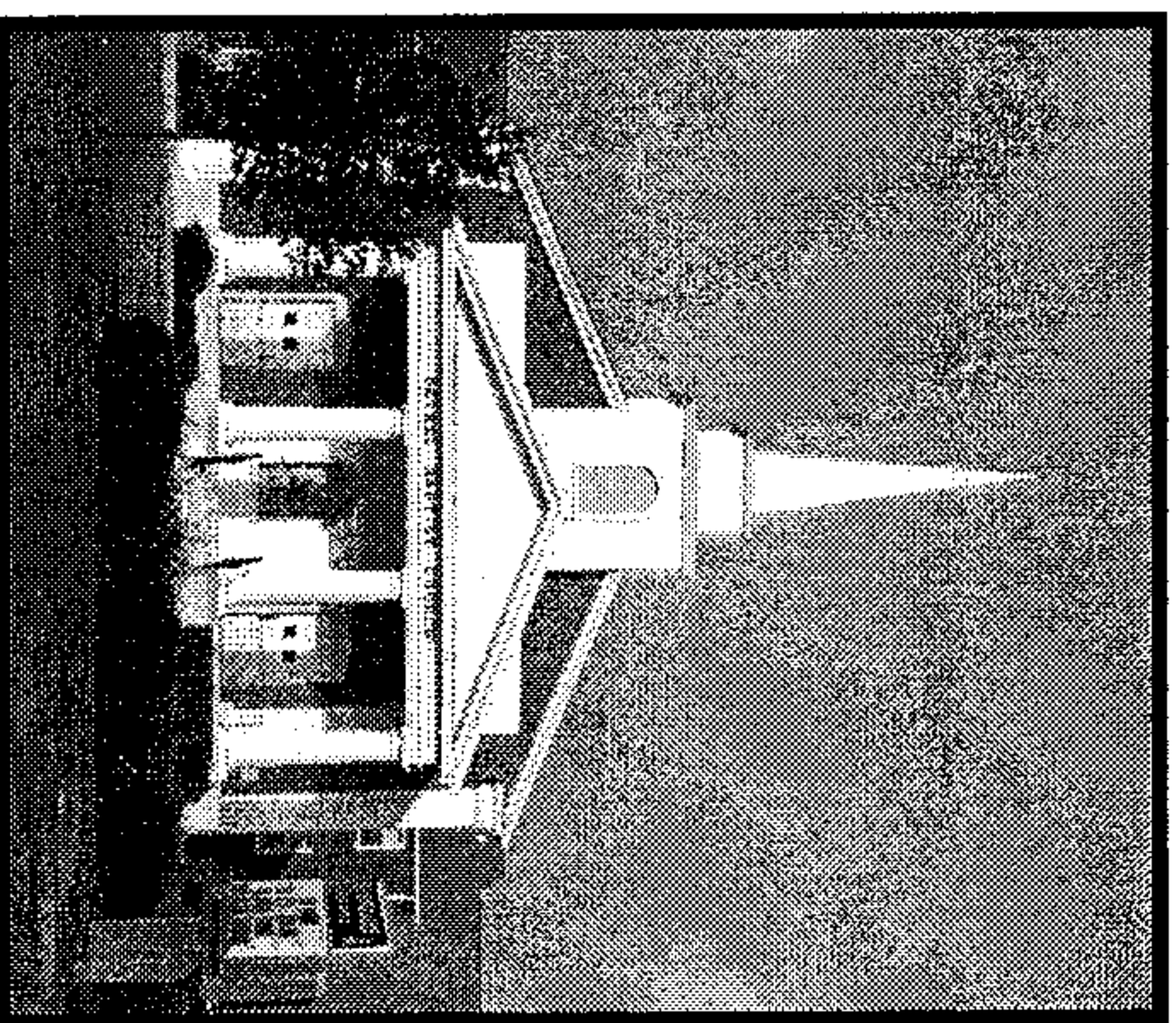
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In 1982 Bethel experienced a peak in attendance and growth. According to the church's yearly report Bethel baptized 69 and had a grand total of 981 present members. Because of the busing ministry V.B.S. was also quite large: the count was 468 in attendance. Two years later, in 1984, Bethel first reached a membership over one thousand.

In 1999 Bethel opened a new facility, the Family Life Center. The FLC contains a large gymnasium, a spacious kitchen, and the space is frequently used for many different socials. This latest addition has proven to be a very useful asset for Bethel.

After many years of growth and decline, trials and triumphs, and much change, Bethel now celebrates 230 years. Only God the Father knows what the future holds for this friendly country church on the corner.

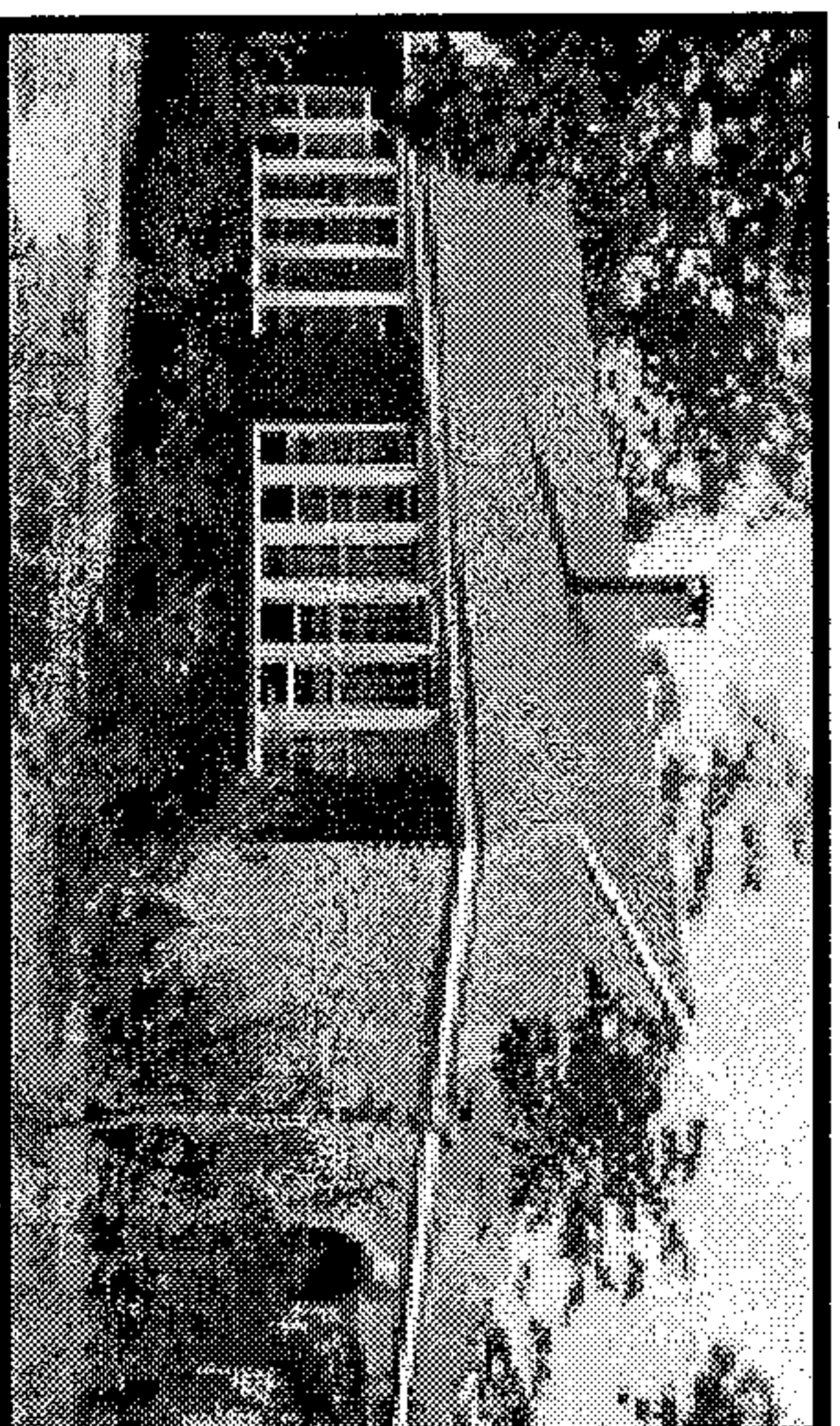


Bethel 2010

Much of this history is copied from Bethel's 1976 Church Directory. Additions and modifications were added by Kyle T. Austin. 10/07/2010

Bethel School

From the late 19th Century until 1986 the Privateer community has had a school alongside Bethel Baptist Church. The first school was started by Bethel, soon the school grew and a larger two story schoolhouse was built. Part of the Privateer School District #3 the school served over a hundred students within the Privateer community. One day that structure caught fire while the school was in session, so a new schoolhouse was needed. In 1935 the Works Progress Administration program began building the present structure. Once again the school was built in partnership with Bethel Baptist Church on church property. The public elementary school operated there for many years, until it finally closed in the early 1960s.



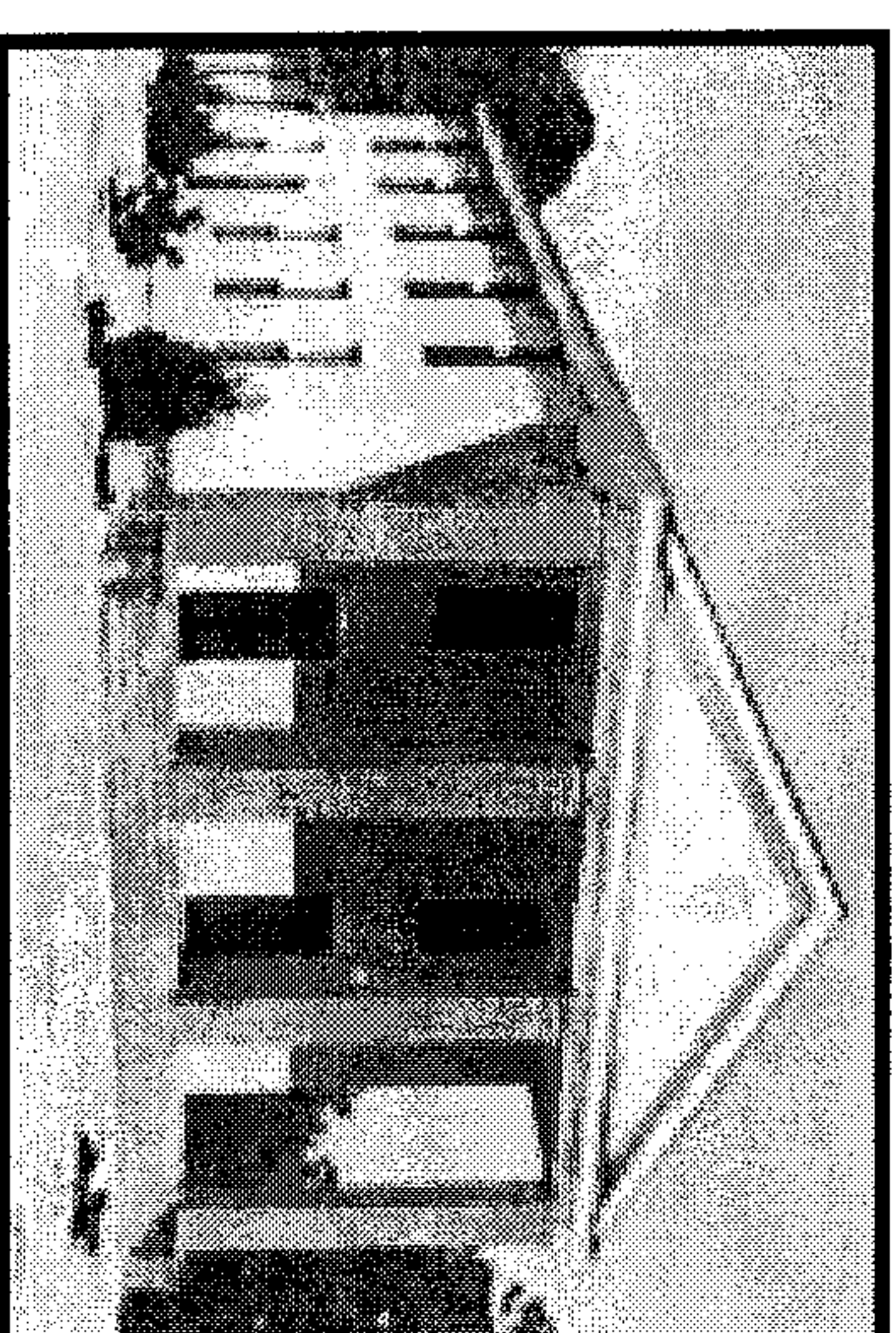
*Bethel Schoolhouse, 1940's.
South Carolina Department of History &
Archives.*

After the public school system left the building two private schools used it. The first in 1965 was Francis Marion Academy which lasted there only for a few years. Finally, Thomas Sumter Academy began using the building starting in 1970 and continued to operate there until 1986. Bethel Church has used the building some over the years for Sunday School, socials, and VBS. Currently the building sits largely unused, awaiting restoration.

A Brief History of Bethel Baptist Church

(1780-2010)

Sumter, S.C.



Bethel 1947

Celebrating 230 years!

Homecoming Service:
Oct. 3rd, 2010
11:00am

Ph: 803-481-2160
2401 Bethel Church Road
Sumter, SC 29154
www.bethelbesumter.org