

EBENEZER METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
North side of I-70, immediately
adjacent to Township Road 614
California Vicinity
Washington County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5375

HABS
PA
63-CALIV
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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Location: North side of I-70, immediately adjacent to Township Road 614
California Vicinity
Washington County
Pennsylvania

UTM: 17.592240.4440320
Quad: California, Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: 1883.

Present Owner: Grace United Methodist Church
Coal Center, Pennsylvania

Present Occupant: Seventh Day Adventists of Charleroi
Charleroi, Pennsylvania

Significance: Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church is an intact example of a Western Pennsylvania rural vernacular church building influenced by the Gothic tradition. The church's configuration and detail are an interpretation of the Gothic Revival rural church developed by Richard Upjohn in his 1852 pattern book Upjohn's Rural Architecture. Ebenezer demonstrates the late nineteenth century perpetuation of this tradition by the Methodist Episcopal Church as seen in their Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: 1883 (Carson, "History of Ebenezer Church 100 years," p. 6). In August of 1883 this frame church was finished, replacing an 1850 brick structure. The minister serving the congregation at the time of the frame building's construction was Rev. C. H. McCaslin (Carson, p. 5).
2. Architect: Possibly built using plans designed by Philadelphia architect Benjamin D. Price for the Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages Furnished by the Board of Church Extension. The use of the Star of David and the quatrefoil, as found on Ebenezer, both predominate in these plans. Little is known about the life of Benjamin D. Price. He is listed in the city directories of Philadelphia from 1869 to 1888. His livelihood appears to have been centered on the distribution of mail-order church plans and imitation stained glass. His plans particularly appealed to Methodist Episcopal and Baptist congregations. In 1889 Price purchased the rights to the plans he had designed for the Methodist Board of Church Extension. He claimed to have sold over 5,350 plans by the end of 1891. In 1904 Price coauthored with his brother, Max Charles Price, Church Plans.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Reference to the title to the land upon which Ebenezer stands is in the Washington County Office of Recorder of Deeds, Washington County Court House, Washington, Pennsylvania.

1851 Deed, January 30, 1851, recorded in volume DB 3N:393, Joshua G. Baker and Mary (his wife) to Rev. William Ward, John Beadle, John White, Lewis Beadle, Stephen Luce, Ashberry P. Smith, Barnet Sickman, and James Stroud.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The foundation was built by John (M.?) Moss and his sons Charles and John (Carson, p. 6).
5. Original plans and construction: No original drawings or plans have been located for either the

frame church or the earlier brick structure. However it seems likely that Ebenezer was built using plans from the Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages Furnished by the Board of Church Extension. It is very similar to plan No. 5E, as seen in the Catalogue for 1889, except the tower was not built, leaving the church with its unusual roof line. Ebenezer's Star of David and quatrefoil windows are quite common in the plans offered by the Methodist Board of Church Extension. The Board first began furnishing plans in 1877. By 1881 they offered approximately fifty different plans and had sold over 360 copies. Historic photographs of the structure also have not been located. The construction cost of the brick church was \$1,000.00 and Rev. Thomas Hudson performed the dedication service (Crumrine, History of Washington County Pennsylvania, p. 795).

6. Alterations and additions:

At the beginning of the twentieth century the balcony was closed off in some way, keeping individuals from sitting there during service. This was done because it was proving difficult to maintain order among the people sitting in the balcony. Today curtains are hung separating the balcony from the auditorium.

The majority of Ebenezer's alterations and additions were performed during the tenure of Rev. Wilbur P. Blackhurst. In 1948 he introduced a major fund raising campaign to wire the church for electricity. It is likely that the translucent hanging ceiling lamps were installed at that time.

Other renovations that were carried out in 1948 include the digging of a new basement and the laying of a new foundation. The new cornerstone was laid on September 19, 1948. Two new stairways, one on the exterior and one on the interior, were added to the church to provide access to the basement. The interior stair is located at the southwest corner of the building in Room 2. The exterior stairs are located at the center of the southwest elevation.

A heating plant was also added to the church in 1948. The single chimney on the rear elevation

could be related to this. In addition a kitchen and an indoor toilet were added to the church to modernize it for more varied functions. A well was dug to service the kitchen and toilet.

In 1948 new pulpit furniture was donated to the church by Oma Frye. A new Estes organ was also acquired by the congregation. In 1953 the Estes organ was traded in and a new Baldwin organ purchased.

In 1950 the majority of the windows' acid-etched lights were replaced with textured translucent glass.

1950 also saw the roof repaired.

B. Historical context:

The Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church, of Fallowfield Township, Washington County, Pennsylvania, was founded in 1850 when a group of Methodists attending services at a schoolhouse, now referred to as Jackman's School, arranged to acquire 97.5 perches of land ($5/8$ of an acre) near Maple Creek on the Belle Vernon State Road and construct their own church building. The site was one mile past the East Bethlehem post office, four miles from Jonestown. It was owned by Joshua and Mary Baker, members of the Jackman's congregation. The group paid \$1.00. The deed for the land purchase was recorded in January 1851, after the church was constructed.

Jackman's was a log schoolhouse in Long Branch, south of Maple Creek. It is believed by some that Jackman's may have been the site of the first Sunday school west of the Appalachians. It was not uncommon for frontier revivalist congregations to meet in nonecclesiastical structures, such as homes or schools like Jackman's, not only for practical reasons, but as an expression of the simplicity of their doctrine.

The exact reason why this group detached themselves from Jackman's and built their own church is unclear. There has been some attempt to equate their departure with dissension within the Jackman assembly over the question of slavery. Slavery was

an issue that did split the Methodist church twice within two years. From the 1784 formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, slavery was banned except where this tenet conflicted with the laws of an individual state. In 1843 the most radical abolitionists within the M. E. Church removed themselves from the church organization and established the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America. A year later, in the General Conference of 1844, the Church hierarchy was divided into two opposing factions as concern over the balance of power resulted in a schism of the church's organization. The southern churches withdrew after a southern bishop was expelled for slave ownership. Interestingly, the new southern church kept the same organization and doctrine as the northern; they even maintained the same edict on slavery.

One newspaper article reported that: "On at least one occasion pro-slavery night riders attempted to silence anti-slavery preaching at the church by threatening to burn the newly built church building to the ground." This would indicate that Ebenezer was active in the abolition movement, however, it is unknown whether or not the slavery debate precipitated its formation as an individual congregation. It is unclear whether the establishment of Ebenezer was the result of a division within the individual Jackman congregation, mirroring the split that occurred within the organizational structure of the Methodist church itself. The erection of Ebenezer could have been merely the result of the expansion of the congregation or the desire to have a church building.

Ebenezer was one of four churches in Fallowfield Township in 1870. The others included a Presbyterian Church, a Disciple Church, and another Methodist Episcopal Church--New Kirk Church, also known as Pigeon Creek or Old Gibson Methodist Church. Fallowfield Township was one of Washington County's thirteen original townships. The townships were organized on July 15, 1781, three months after Washington County was created out of Westmoreland County on March 28, 1781. Carson reports in his history of Ebenezer Church that in 1799 there was no Methodist church in the area of Fallowfield

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Township, but there were two or three families in the area who were Methodist.

The minister at the time of the church's formation was Rev. Warner Long. Ebenezer's dedication service was performed by Rev. Thomas Hudson. Methodism in rural western Pennsylvania was a frontier religion and Ebenezer, like many other churches, did not have a full time minister. It was almost 100 years before a full time minister was assigned to the church. Instead it was serviced by itinerant circuit riders. For a more thorough background in the history of Methodism in rural western Pennsylvania the leading source on the topic is Methodism in Western Pennsylvania by Wallace Guy Smeltzer.

Ebenezer is located within the Methodist Pittsburgh Conference. When the conference was instituted in 1825 it consisted of 44 circuits, 66 preachers, and 18,614 members. The Pittsburgh Conference was created out of the territory covered in the old Redstone Circuit, established in 1784, which was within the Baltimore Conference. At the end of the eighteenth century the Redstone Circuit was divided into the Redstone, Ohio, Clarksburg, Pittsburgh, and Greenfield Circuits. In 1836 the Pittsburgh Conference was further divided into the Pittsburgh and Erie Conferences. Ebenezer was on the Pittsburgh Conference's Beallsville Circuit (originally the Monongahela Circuit, in 1834 it was changed to the Uniontown Circuit and then to Beallsville). The early traveling Methodist ministers' circuits averaged four hundred miles in circumference. The early Redstone Circuit was at least three hundred miles. Its boundaries were east and west to Pittsburgh and Fairmont, and north and south to Uniontown and Wellsburg. The circuits could embrace as many as thirty churches and take as long as six weeks to cover.

The first Ebenezer Church was a brick structure of unknown configuration, although it is quite likely that it was a simple unornamented structure. It cost \$1,000.00 to construct (Carson, p. 5). The members of the building committee were the Rev. William Ward, James Strout, and John Beadle. There were Methodist precedents in Washington County for constructing a brick structure. The first brick

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Methodist Church in the area went up in Greenfield (now called Coal Center) in 1834-5. Also Fallowfield Township's other Methodist church, Pigeon Creek M. E., was brick. Built in 1836, this church is still standing, although in the late 1850s it was moved from its original location. It is a simple rectangular structure, in keeping with the simplicity of the Methodist faith, and largely unornamented except for semi-elliptical brick work beneath the roof line.

The earliest surviving examples of Methodist churches are plain structures. The first Methodist Church in the area, Howes, was a simple 1800 log building. Although a log structure was not an unusual building type for a frontier church, it still demonstrates the simplicity of the early Methodist churches. Two of the oldest Methodist churches in the county also illustrate this: the 1816/1817 James' Methodist Episcopal Chapel, near Gastonville, and the 1824 Tucker Methodist Episcopal Church. James' is one of the oldest structures in the county. Both are unadorned stone buildings without any original features to distinguish them as religious buildings. However, a cupola and belfry, respectively, have been added to the buildings.

In 1883, during the ministry of C. H. McCaslin (1882-1885), the brick church was sold to a Mr. McCrory and removed. The present frame building was then constructed. The reasons for the removal of the brick church are unknown. Perhaps as Methodism became a more mainstream Protestant sect a desire developed among the congregation to have a more stylized church building. Nonetheless for some reason the brick building no longer met the needs of its congregation whether it was due to space requirements or aesthetics. The seats from the original church were given to the Roscoe Methodist Church. The present Ebenezer Church, which replaced the brick building, was completed debt free in August 1883. The foundation was begun on August 14 and the cornerstone laid on August 18. Carson states that while it was being built Rev. McCaslin at least once used a lumber pile as his pulpit.

Although Ebenezer has always had a small flock, after World War II its membership dropped to a mere

35. In comparison, church records indicate that in 1909-1911 there were 88 families active in the congregation. The revitalization of the Ebenezer congregation appears to have been in large part the result of the arrival in 1947 of Wilbur P. Blackhurst to Ebenezer's pulpit. Blackhurst would become the church's first full time minister and definitely one of its most influential. Under Blackhurst the congregation grew to well over 100 when it peaked in 1954. Blackhurst appears to have made an effort to administer to the multifaceted needs of the community. For example, he founded the Ebenezer Youth Fellowship in 1947 and a year later oversaw the construction of an outdoor youth worship center behind the church. The land on which it was built, .61 acre, was finally deeded to the church in 1953 by Edward J. Protin, although he had given permission by 1948 for the erection of the center on his property. Blackhurst's fund raising campaign led to the renovation and modernization of the church building. Renovations under Blackhurst totaled \$2,786.00. Some of these renovations, such as the addition of a basement and a kitchen, led to opening up the church to other purposes besides just Sunday worship. The church became capable of meeting more varied needs. Wedding receptions could be held in the new basement and this led to more weddings being held in the church. Previously they had been held in the home. Blackhurst left Ebenezer in 1956.

In 1961 plans for building a larger church were introduced, however, they were not pursued and in 1967 three of the areas churches (Clover Hill, New Kirk, and Ebenezer) merged to form Grace United Methodist Church, located in Charleroi. The Ebenezer church building was then rented to the Seventh Day Adventists who have been using it as their place of worship since that time.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church is a Western Pennsylvania example of a simple rural vernacular church building which makes use of Gothic Revival details. The building

has a high degree of integrity and its appearance does not seem to have altered much since its construction. The Final Report of the Fayette County Historic Resource Survey characterized the ecclesiastical architecture of Fayette, a neighboring county to Washington, as following "... a simplistic Vernacular design, commonly represented by the single story, rectangular edifice with a gable roof, and occasionally hinting of Gothic or Romanesque influence." Ebenezer demonstrates that this statement also holds true for Washington County. It also affirms Charles Morse Stotz's report in The Architectural Heritage of Early Western Pennsylvania: "The use of Gothic forms in western Pennsylvania was confined almost entirely to churches and cemetery structures; and in most instances these forms were but superficially followed." Ebenezer's architectural plainness is also in keeping with the simplicity of the Methodist doctrine. Ebenezer is the product of a national tradition of Gothic Revival rural churches developed in the mid-nineteenth century by Richard Upjohn in his 1852 pattern book Upjohn's Rural Architecture. The Methodist Church was perpetuating this tradition, and officially sanctioning it, at the end of the nineteenth century in its Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages Furnished by the Board of Church Extension. These plans, largely designed by Philadelphia architect Benjamin D. Price, were greatly influenced by the Gothic tradition.

2. Condition of fabric: Although the church has undergone some alteration and modernization, such as a new foundation, it still has a high degree of integrity. Other changes, such as the replacement of the majority of window lights, have not altered the basic appearance of the building. In the case of the windows the original openings and sash remain. The interior is especially noteworthy because the vast majority of the original woodwork and hardware remain intact.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 65'-6" x 34'-9"
2. Foundations: The foundation under the projecting entry bay is coursed sandstone rubble; this could

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be the remains of the original foundation. The foundation under the rest of the church is concrete block.

3. Walls: The exterior walls are covered with 5-1/2" wide German cove siding with wooden corner boards. The siding is attached with cut and wire nails.
4. Structural system, framing: Studs on 16" center.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The building has a small porch at the main entrance atop a set of poured concrete steps. The steps gradually decrease in width as they approach the door. Square brick pillars are located at the top and bottom of the staircase. The pillars at the top of the staircase are topped with electrical lanterns. Metal hand rails follow the curve of the concrete stairs.
6. Chimneys: On the northeast corner of the building is an exterior brick chimney.
7. Openings: The main facade, southeast elevation, is three bays wide; the rear facade, northwest elevation, is 2 bays wide, and the side elevations are each five bays wide.
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entry is located in the center bay of the main facade, in the projecting entry bay. It consists of a wooden double door with five vertical panels; the second panel from the top in each is a window. On the rear elevation, northwest, there is a wooden paneled door beneath a three light lancet window.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The windows are largely 3 over 2 double-hung lancet windows with Gothic tracery in the upper sash. The original acid etched lights have been replaced with translucent textured glass. The top light, a distorted diamond shape, is blue. In the gable ends of the front and rear elevation are circular rose windows. The front elevation contains a Star of David with a circular center. The rear contains a quatrefoil with a blue glass circular center. The windows all

have wood tracery. There are modern casement windows in the basement.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The church has a gable roof covered with tin shingles. The shingles are square and decorated with an indented v notch which creates a raised upside down Y.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The roof has simple overhanging eaves.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: The center bay of the main facade is a projecting tower which serves as the entry bay. The tower rises to the ridge line of the gable end.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: A full finished basement was added to the church in 1948.
- b. First floor: The first floor consists of four rooms. The vestibule (Room 1) is located in the center of the building in the entry tower, at the southern end of the building. To each side of the vestibule are two small square rooms (Rooms 2 and 4), probably class rooms, each a little more than one bay wide. The largest room on the first floor is the sanctuary (Room 3). It is four bays wide and covers the north end of the building.
- c. Second floor: The second floor consists only of a balcony (Room 5).

2. Stairways: There is an enclosed stairway between the vestibule and Room 4 which leads to the balcony. The stairway consists of wraparound steps made up of eight steps plus a raiser. In the southwest corner of Room 2 there is a quarter-turn with landing stairway that leads to the basement. It consists of seven steps plus a raiser before the landing and three steps plus a raiser to the bottom.

3. Flooring: The flooring consists of random width 3'-6" tongue and groove varnished wood boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plaster with beaded wooden wainscoting. The surface is finished with applied wood graining of a simple stylized nature. In the sanctuary and balcony the upper area of the wall, above the windows to the ceiling, is covered with beaded diagonal boards. The sanctuary ceiling is also covered with beaded wooden boards.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Three sets of wooden and glass doors, with molded trim, separate the sanctuary from the other first floor rooms. Four folding doors lead from both Rooms 2 and 4, closing the class rooms off from the auditorium. They all have four panels, the top three panels are largely the original acid etched windows. The etching consists of decorated style crosses and a floral motif. The doors leading from the vestibule to the sanctuary are double four paneled folding doors. The second panels are acid etched windows. Lancet shaped wooden paneled doors lead from Room 1 to Rooms 2 and 4, and to the stairway to the second floor.
 - b. Windows: The lancet windows have molded wood trim.
6. Decorative features and trim: The balcony has a wooden skirt decorated with a carved, beaded, and sawtooth pattern.
7. Hardware: A great deal of the original hardware remains, including door knobs and cast iron hinges and escutcheons. The hardware is highly decorative, especially in comparison with the simplicity of the church building itself.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Heating plant added 1948.

b. Lighting: Throughout the church there are translucent hanging ceiling lamps molded with lancet arches. The ones hanging in the sanctuary are long and six sided. The one in the lobby is eight sided and squat. The building was electrified ca. 1948.

c. Plumbing: Installed ca. 1948.

9. Original furnishings: The original pews of the church have been removed. Those present in the sanctuary are slightly curved wooden pews. There are straight pews in the balcony which one source believes could be some of the original pews.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Ebenezer is situated approximately 80 feet north of the edge of I-70 and 50 feet east of Township Road 614. The church originally sat at the northwest corner of the intersection of two township roads. However, when I-70 was built the north-south road was moved to the west side of the church and the east-west road then terminated at the church. Today it is used as the parking lot.

2. Historic Landscape Design: Due to the lack of information the historic landscaping of the church building is unknown.

3. Outbuildings: None

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings: None

B. Early Views: None

C. Interviews: Bell, Dr. Raymond. Interview with Mary K. Mannix. Washington, Pennsylvania. 22 June 1988.

D. Bibliography:

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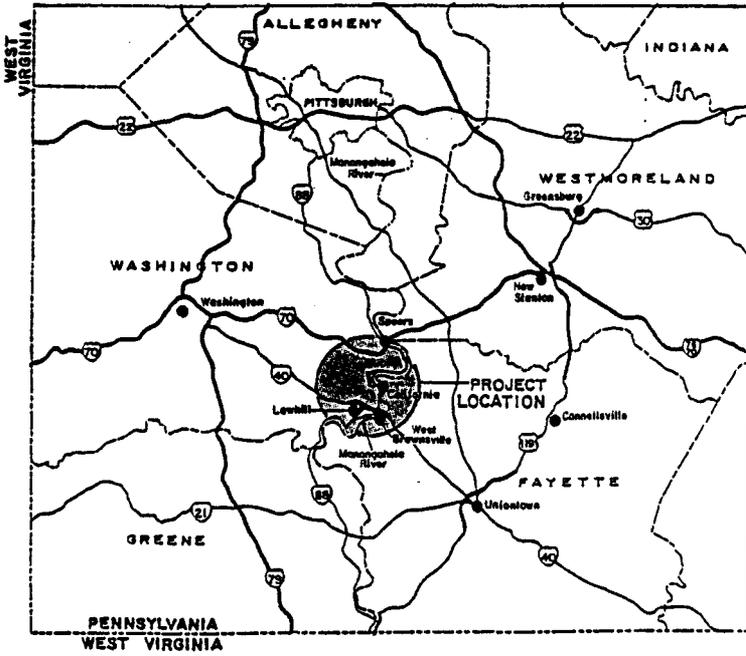
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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

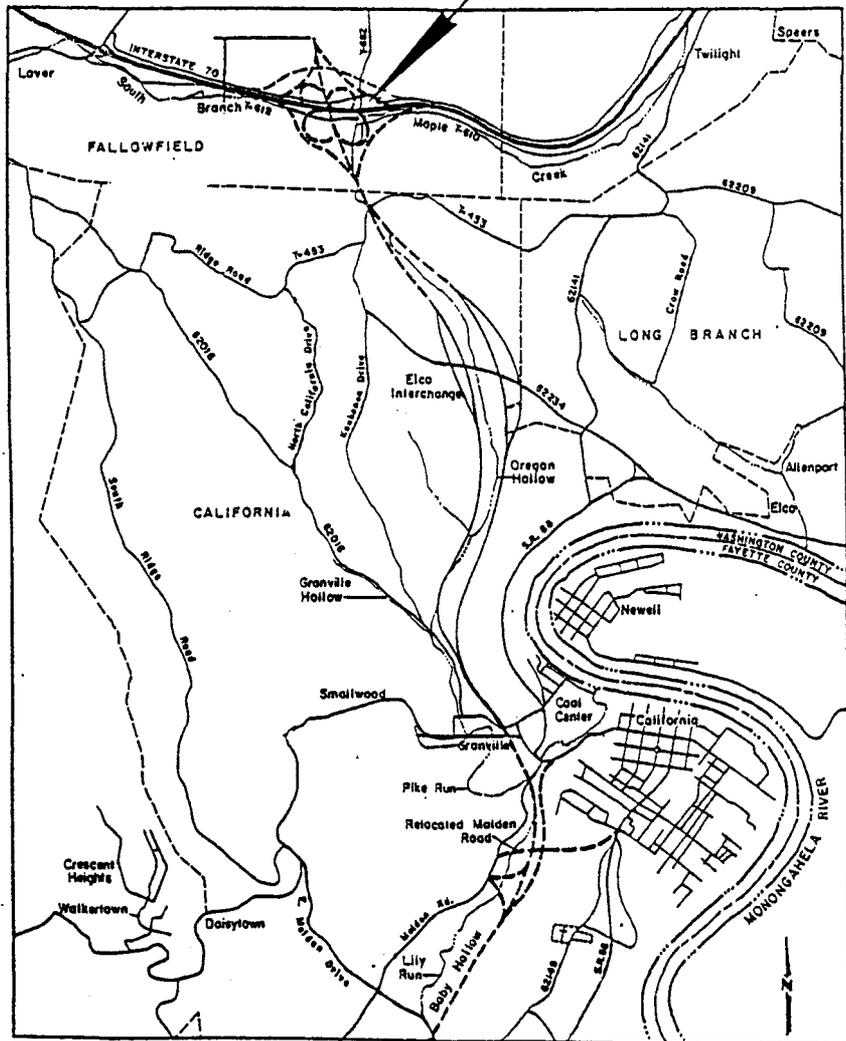
The Mon Valley Expressway has been in the planning process as a toll road from Pittsburgh to West Virginia for several decades. Since the mid-1960's the highway between Route 40 and Interstate 70 has been under development. Portions of the road were constructed in the 1970s; although funding problems halted construction until the 1980s, preliminary design plans were completed for the portion adjacent to Ebenezer Church. The project was reactivated in 1987 as a portion of one of seven proposed pilot toll facilities in the United States. Current plans propose to build the toll road and interchange around Ebenezer Church. Alternatives have been studied to avoid the demolition of the church. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation undertook the documentation of the church in 1988 during this study. Work commenced in January 1988 to record Ebenezer Church at its undisturbed location. This documentation package was completed in April 1989.

Prepared by: Mary K. Mannix/Paula A. C. Spero
For: The Pennsylvania Department of
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Structures Consultants
Date: January 1988 - April 1989

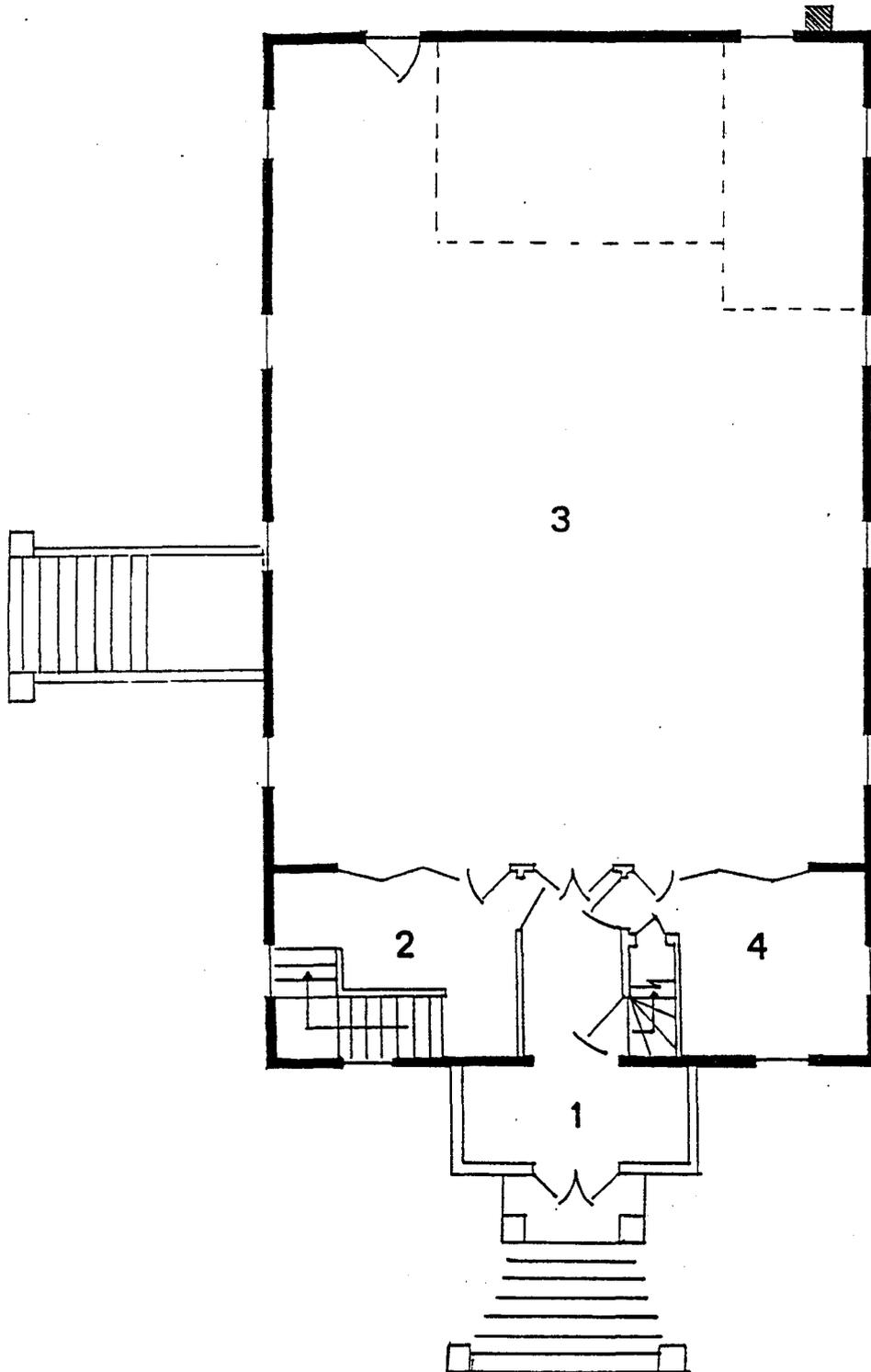
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Site Location



EBENEZER CHURCH



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First Floor Plan



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Second Floor Plan

