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REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
MT. ZION BAPTIST CHURCH
301 N. W. 9TH STREET
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Sarah E. Eston _____ Date _____
Historic Preservation
Planner

Accepted by Arthur H. King _____ Date _____
Chairman, Heritage
Conservation Board

Designated by the Miami City Commission

Ordinance No. _____

Date _____

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Current Name:

Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Location:

301 N. W. 9th Street
Miami, Florida 33136

Present Owner:

Mt. Zion Baptist Church
301 N. W. 9th Street
Miami, Florida 33136

Present Use:

Religious

Present Zoning District:

RG-3/7

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-0102-070-1210

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

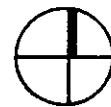
Lots 19 and 20, less street, and a portion of Lot 18 further described as follows: beginning 6.89+ feet north of the southeast corner of Lot 18, thence running N. $24^{\circ}09'08''$ W. along the easterly right-of-way line of I-95 for 86.64+ feet, thence continuing N. $29^{\circ}09'26''$ W. along the right-of-way line of I-95 for 39.15+ feet to the westerly line of Lot 18, thence running N. along the westerly line for 27.87+ feet to the northerly line of Lot 18, thence running E. along the northerly line for 50.01+ feet, thence running S. along the easterly line for 143.15+ feet to the point of beginning, of Block 27 of the plat of MIAMI NORTH (PB B-41)

HC Zoning Classification:

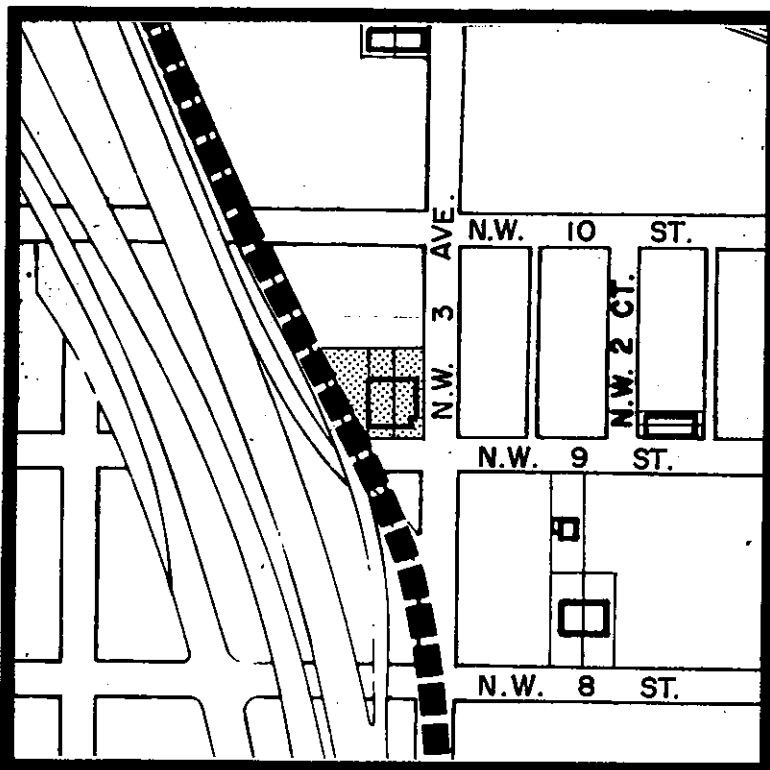
Historic Site

MT. ZION BAPTIST CHURCH

301 N.W. 9 STREET



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1928

Architect:

William Arthur Bennet

Statement of Significance:

The Mount Zion Baptist Church is architecturally significant because it is one of the few examples of the Mediterranean Revival style found in Overtown, a neighborhood within downtown Miami originally known as "Colored Town." The church building also houses one of the oldest and most prominent black congregations in South Florida, founded in 1896. The present church building also possesses important historical associations with the pastorate of Reverend J. R. Evans at the church.

The exterior of Mount Zion Baptist Church embodies the distinctive physical characteristics of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture. The visual composition of the building is architectural noteworthy for its adaptability to the area's climate. The tall ceiling and the placement of the porch along the longer elevation assist in alleviating the impact of the hot climate on the interior. The appearance of the building is also significant because it is one of the most imposing buildings remaining in Overtown, an area with few buildings of any architectural significance. The scale and location of the church make it one of the "anchor" landmarks of the Overtown neighborhood.

The present building houses a congregation that was organized on 17 September 1896. The first church building consisted of a palmetto shack located near the courthouse. A frame structure was eventually erected on the present site only to be damaged by the hurricane of 1926. As a result of the damage, the congregation worshipped for two years in a tabernacle built from the wreckage. Construction of the present church building began in 1928, with the congregation worshipping in the basement until 1941, when the sanctuary was finally completed.

The present church building was constructed under the direction of Reverend J. R. Evans, one of the most prominent religious leaders of Overtown. Reverend Evans was born in Brownville, Tennessee, in 1870 and went on to study at Roger Williams College. He became Dean, and eventually president of the college, but preferred the "active ministry" and pastored in several churches in Tennessee and Kentucky.

Under his pastorate, which he assumed in 1918, the enrollment of Mt. Zion Baptist Church exceeded 1,400 parishioners. Reverend Evans was also active in the city's interracial and interdenominational activities. He died in 1947.

Although the architect of the church has been identified through the application for a building permit, research has not provided any biographical information on him.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

Mount Zion Baptist Church houses one of the oldest and most prominent black congregations in South Florida. The building also possesses important historical associations with the pastorate of Reverend J. R. Evans.

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

Mount Zion Baptist Church embodies the distinctive physical characteristics of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture and is one of the few examples of the style in Overtown.

7. Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

The visual composition of the church building is noteworthy for its adaptability to the area's climate through the use of tall ceilings and the placement of a porch along the longer elevation.

III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

The Mount Zion Baptist Church building is a large two-story masonry structure executed in a Mediterranean Revival architectural mode. Construction of the church began in 1928 according to plans provided by the architect William Arthur Bennet. The main sanctuary of the church was not completed until 1941.

Situated on the northwest corner of N. W. 9th Street and N. W. 3rd Avenue, the church is a rectangular plan structure built of reinforced concrete atop a concrete foundation. The lower story of the church is dedicated to a large auditorium and classroom space, while the taller upper story is dedicated to sanctuary use. As originally planned, the principal entrance to the church fronted to the south beneath a projecting gable portico. At present, the principal entrance is located at the east, placed within a recessed porch that spans five bays of the elevation parallel to N. W. 3rd Avenue. The exterior of the church building is clad in stucco, and its gable roof is clad in asphalt shingles. A square corner tower, rising to a height of four stories, is capped by a pyramidal hipped roof. The corners of the tower are highlighted by masonry quoins rising from the second story to the roofline.

The principal elevation of the church features three bays set within a gable end facing N. W. 3rd Avenue. The center bay contains the projecting gable portico with double stairs ascending to it from the sidewalk level. Below the portico is an entrance to the lower story. Within the gable end is a stylized quatrefoil window set within a masonry surround. The east elevation is characterized by an open porch that is comprised of a recessed arcade five bays long. Each bay is defined by a simple Tuscan column supporting a classically-inspired entablature. The porch is situated at the level of the second story and reached through double stairs rising parallel to the sidewalk. This elevation is five bays long and has had its original window openings blocked up. There is an entrance from each end of the porch into a vestibule that leads to the sanctuary.

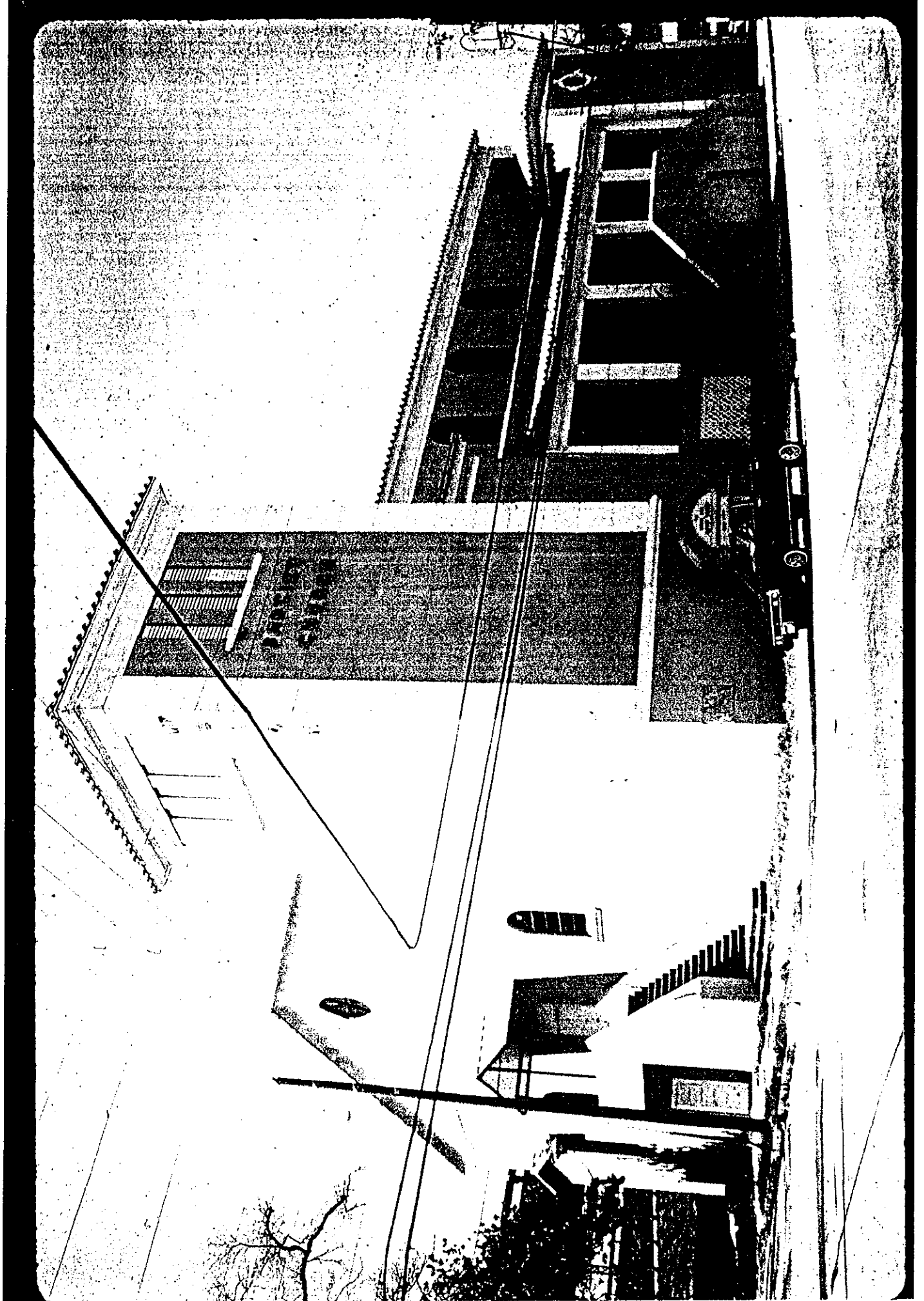
The original fenestration of the church has been slightly altered through the blocking up of some windows. An old photograph of the church reveals that the church had nine-over-nine, double-hung sash windows set within wooden frames. Many of these windows have been replaced with more contemporary double-hung windows set within metal frames.

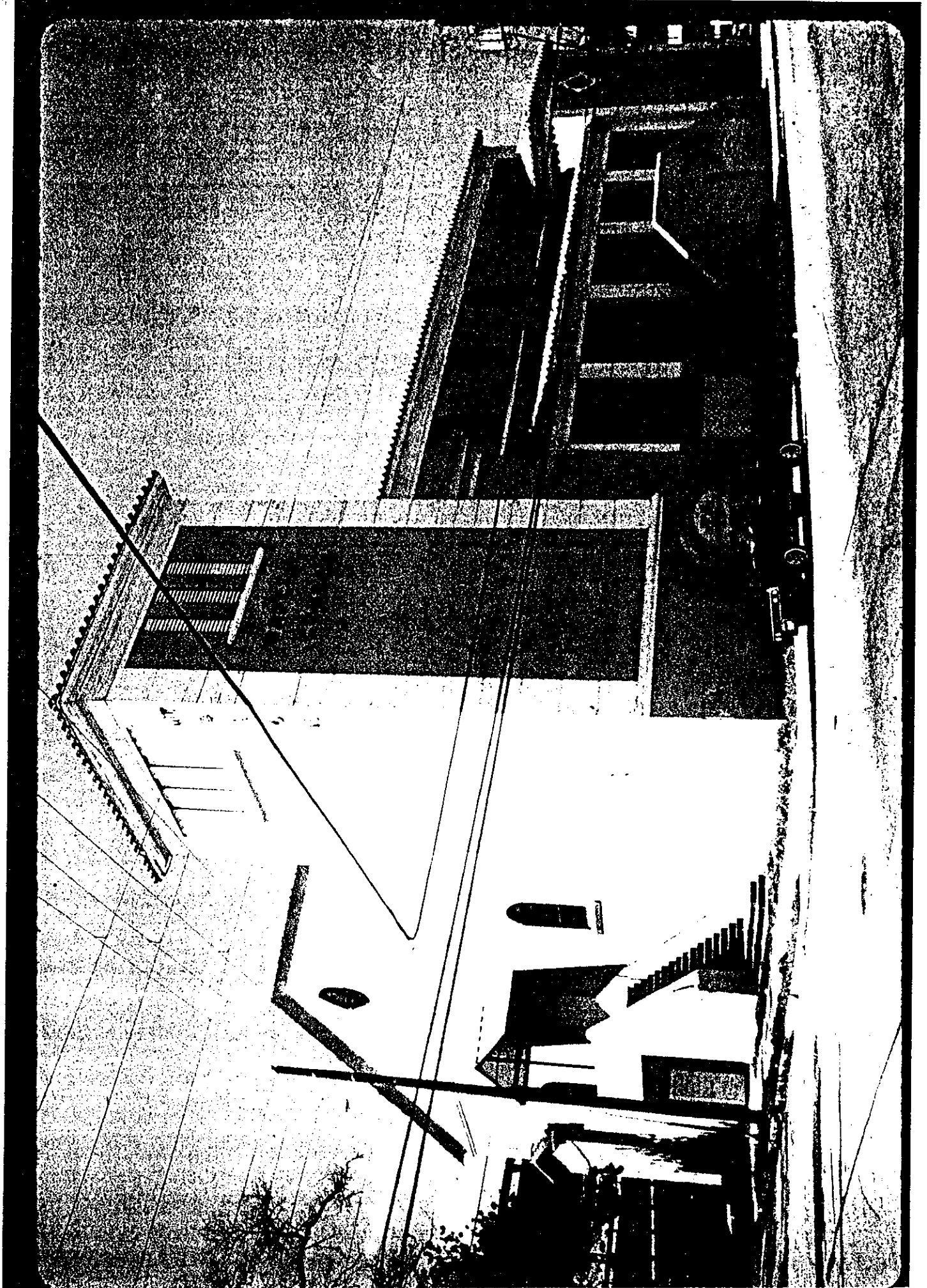
The interior of the sanctuary is rectangular in plan and contains an altar at its northern end. Behind the altar is a choir gallery, and behind it is a baptismal font. Four aisles divide the sanctuary into

three main seating areas which contain the original wooden pews. A shallow balcony is found parallel to the south wall. A cross section of the sanctuary reveals a basilica-type space with a peaked ceiling following the ridge of the gable roof, and lower ceiling heights on either side. The interior is rather plain and devoid of decorative ornamentation. The only windows that bring natural light into the space are found high above the floor level, located underneath the roof eaves. Although there have been minor modifications to the building's architectural fabric, the original design intent is readily perceived.

Description of Site:

Mount Zion Baptist Church is located on the northwest corner of N. W. 3rd Avenue and N. W. 9th Street. A portion of the original church property was acquired for the construction of an entrance ramp to I-95, which abuts the property on the west.





IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

Mount Zion Baptist Church continues to be occupied by its original congregation, one of the most prominent in Overtown today. The church was negatively impacted by the construction of I-95, when a portion of the church property was acquired for an entrance ramp to the interstate.

Mount Zion Baptist Church was identified in the Southeast Overtown/Park West Development of Regional Impact (DRI) as a historic site. The property has also been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The church is in close proximity to the proposed Historic Overtown Folklife Village, which would revitalize and showcase the history of the Overtown community.

Conservation Objectives:

Mount Zion Baptist Church is one of Overtown's landmarks, and the continued preservation of the building should be encouraged. Any future alterations to the building should respect its historic and architectural character.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by maintaining the present zoning of the property. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the existing zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the property.

V. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include that tract of land on which the church building is located.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All four facades shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review.

Interior Surfaces Subject to Review:

The church sanctuary shall be subject to review. Review of alterations to this space shall be guided by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation."

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include any features which are subject to requirements for tree removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.