

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
ST. JOHN'S BAPTIST CHURCH
1328 N. W. 3RD AVENUE
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by

Sarah E. Eaton
Historic Preservation Planner Date

Accepted by

William H. King Jr.
Chairman, Heritage Conservation Board Date

Designated by the Miami City Commission

Ordinance No. _____

Date _____

CONTENTS

	Page
I. General Information	1
II. Significance	4
III. Architectural Information	6
IV. Planning Context	9
V. HC Zoning Elements	10

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

St. John's Baptist Church

Current Name:

New St. John Institutional Baptist Church

Location:

1328 N. W. 3rd Avenue

Present Owner:

St. John's Baptist Church, Inc.
1328 N. W. 3rd Avenue
Miami, Florida 33136

Present Use:

Religious

Present Zoning District:

CR-2/7

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-3136-037-0091

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

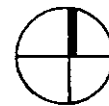
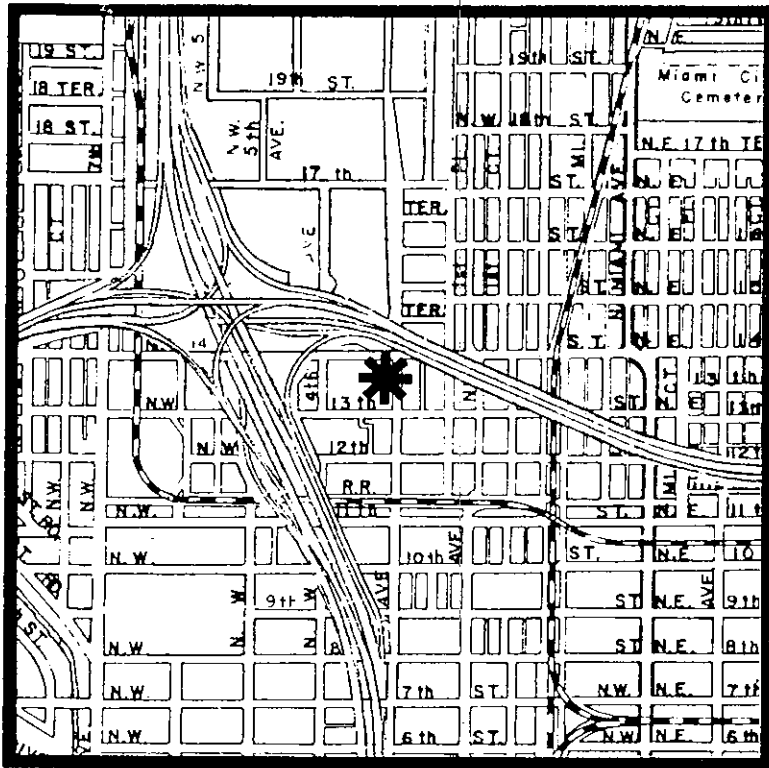
Lots 19 and 20, less the southerly 90.6 feet, of Block 2 of the plat of SOSTS SUBDIVISION (PB B-27)

HC Zoning Classification:

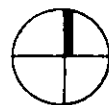
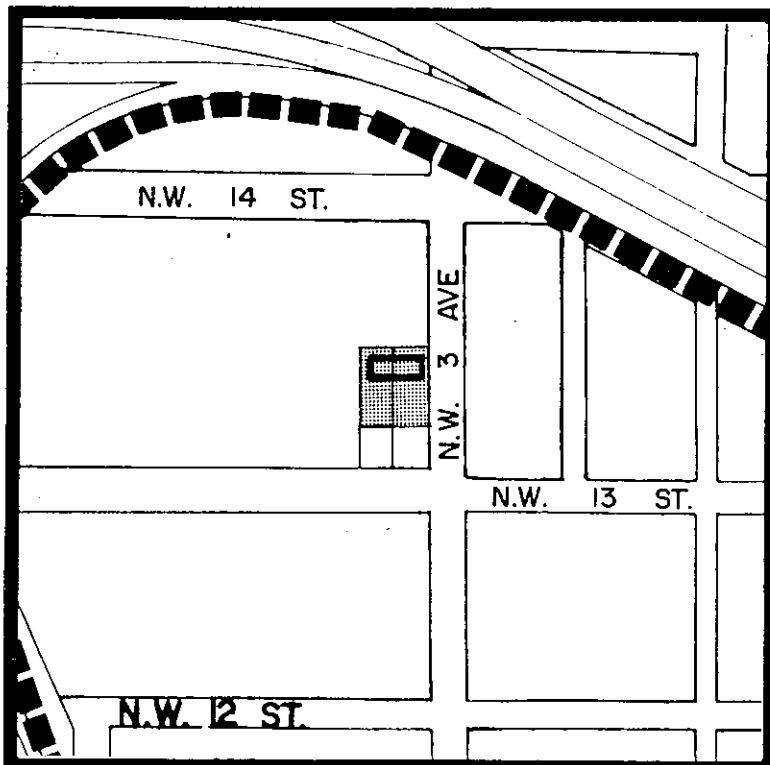
Historic Site

ST. JOHN'S BAPTIST CHURCH

1328 N.W. 3 AVENUE



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Date:

1940

Architects:

McKissack and McKissack

Statement of Significance:

The St. John's Baptist Church is architecturally significant because it constitutes a rare example of the Art Deco architectural style in Overtown, a neighborhood within downtown Miami originally called "Colored Town." The church building also serves as the home of one of the older black congregations in Miami, having being organized in 1906. Although less than 50 years old, the building is exceptionally significant because of the quality of its architectural design, the rarity of the application of the Art Deco style to religious buildings in Dade County, and the visual prominence of the church in Overtown.

The exterior of St. John's Baptist Church embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco style of architecture. The visual composition represents a fine example of modernism in ecclesiastical architecture in Dade County, as evidenced in the use of the buff-colored brick as a surface material inside and out, and for the use of stylistic features. The appearance of the church is also important for it is perceived as one of the most imposing structures of the Overtown neighborhood. The scale of the building, its construction materials, and corner location make this church one of the most attractive visual landmarks of Overtown.

The church building houses a congregation that was organized on 17 June 1906. The first services were held in a small frame structure two blocks away from the present site. Within a few years after its creation, the congregation procured a frame building for services. By 1939, with membership exceeding 1,000 parishioners, a new church was planned and subsequently built for approximately \$75,000.

The present church building was constructed at the urging of Reverend J. W. Drake, one of Overtown's most prominent leaders. Drake was born in 1872 in Oglethorpe County, Georgia, and studied at the Baptist Seminary in Atlanta. He came to Miami in 1912 and transformed the little Baptist Church in Overtown into one of the area's leading churches. Drake died in 1951.

Although the architectural firm for the church is identified on the building's cornerstone, research has not provided any biographical information on the architects.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

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

St. John's Baptist Church is historically significant for its role as the home of one of the older black congregations in Miami.

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

The church building constitutes a rare example of the Art Deco architectural 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 building is particularly noteworthy for its use of buff-colored brick and for its stylistic features, scale, and corner location.

III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

The St. John's Baptist Church is a large two-story building executed in the Art Deco architectural style. Construction of the church structure was completed in 1940 with the design being provided by the architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack. The present church constitutes the second church building on the same site.

Situated on the southwest corner of N.W. 3rd Avenue and 13th Street, the church is a rectangular plan structure built of masonry construction. The lower story of the church is taken up by an auditorium and classroom spaces which are accessible from a side entrance found on the south elevation. The principal entrance of the church is found at the east elevation, facing N. W. 3rd Avenue. The exterior of the church is sheathed in buff-colored brick and is characterized by a central tower comprised of a series of setbacks. The tower, with its gradual setbacks, serves to accentuate the placement of the entrance and the symmetrical composition of the church. A gable roof, covered with Mission tiles, runs the length of the church in an east-west direction. Flanking the central tower are low parapet walls which serve to conceal the gable roof end. The parapet walls are capped by a simple masonry coping.

The entrance to the church is approached by a series of broad steps which lead up from the sidewalk level. The elevation of these steps serves to conceal a raised basement behind. The principal elevation of the church is three bays wide with the entrance located within the center bay and tall window openings recessed within the end bays. The entrance is characterized by double doors containing a glass inset and is capped by a rectangular transom. Flanking the central double doors are two single doors that match the central doors in size and materials. A masonry surround framing the entrance contains stylized ornamentation with religious iconography.

The side elevations are five bays long and contain an elongated, multi-pane window at each bay. The windows are set into simple wood frames and rest atop a flat masonry sill. The exterior of the church is relatively plain except for a water table that wraps around the church, and brick corbeling found at the cornice height of the elevations. The tower is embellished by a simple circular window with triple windows above it.

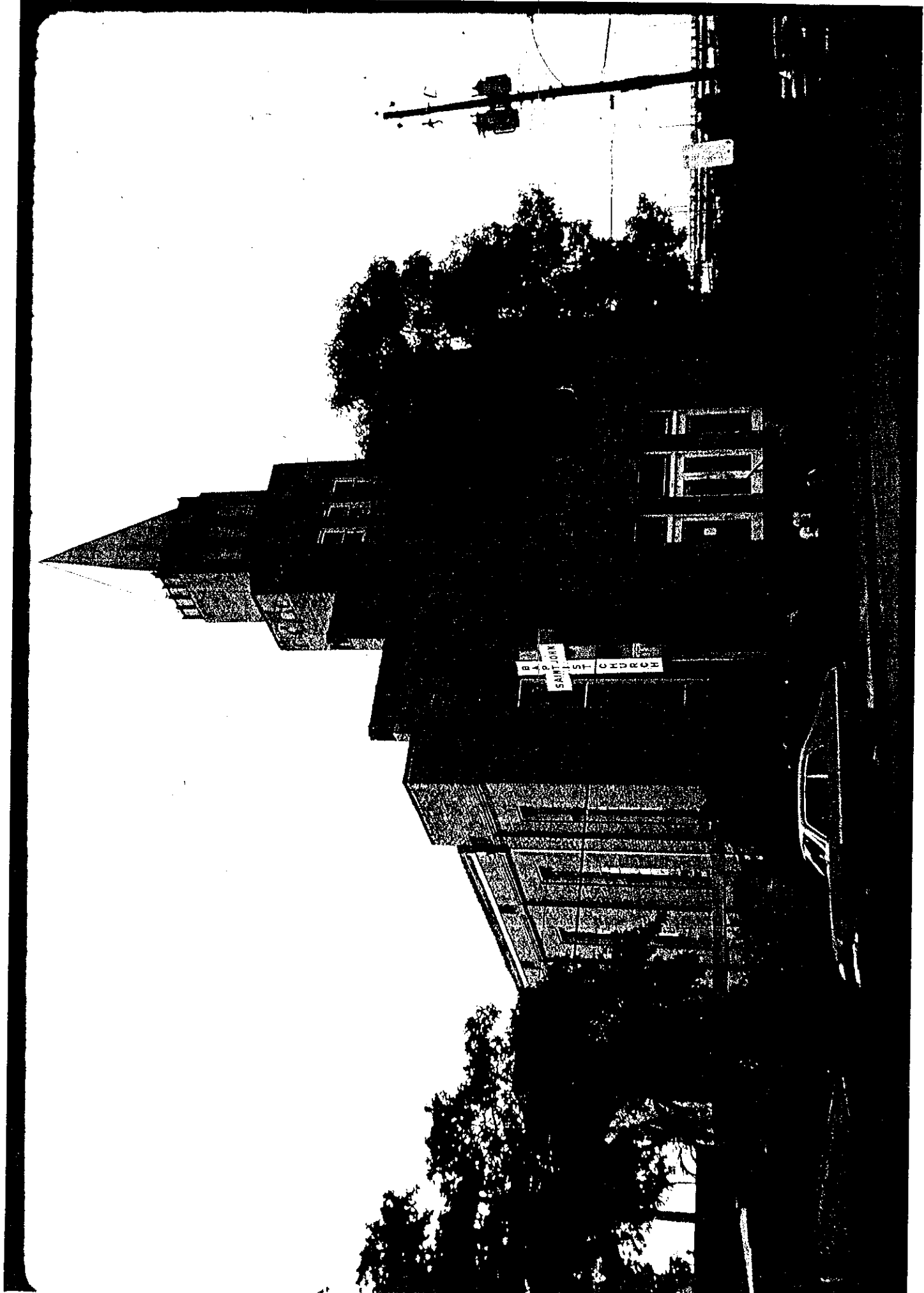
The interior of the church sanctuary is rather plain and is characterized by a balcony located to the rear of the church, and a choir gallery that is split into two and flanks the altar on either side as cantilevered projections above the sanctuary floor level. The altar is located to the west of the sanctuary and behind it is a raised

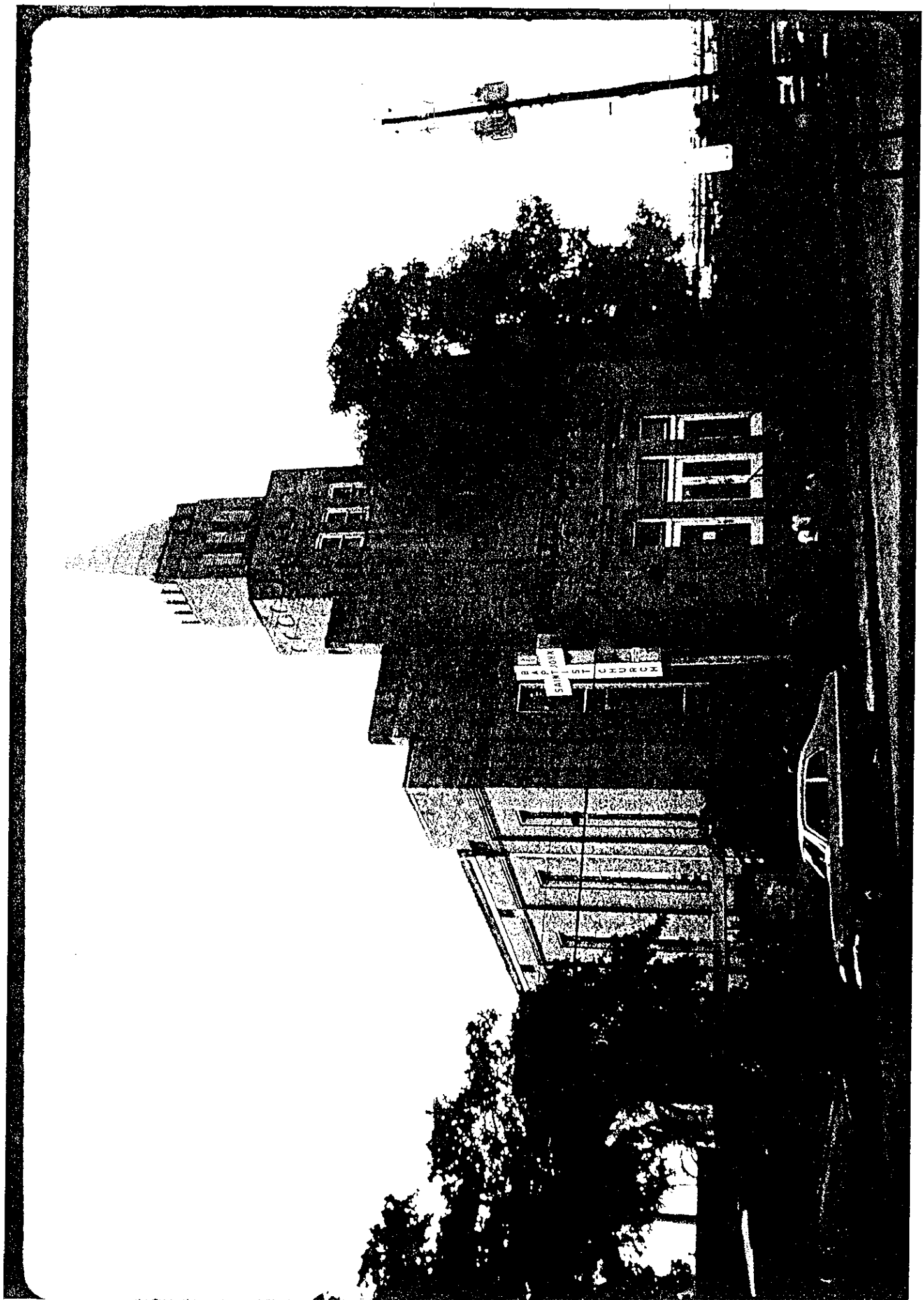
baptismal font. The interior walls are clad in brick, and the only decoration of the wall surfaces is found within the flat brick pilasters which divide the wall into bays.

The architectural fabric of St. John's Baptist Church remains unaltered from the day it was constructed. The modernistic image of the church is enhanced by a monolith found in front of the church which serves as signage. This monolith is composed of glass block and buff-colored brick, and contains an inscription that the church is "fully air-conditioned."

Description of Site:

St. John's Baptist Church is located on the west side of N.W. 3rd Avenue between N. W. 13th and 14th Streets. The building fronts directly of the sidewalk. Newer church buildings are located to the west of the historic structure.





IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

St. John's Baptist Church remains in active use today as one of Overtown's major churches. The building itself has been carefully preserved by the congregation since the time of construction. Any future changes to the building should continue to preserve its architectural character.

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

Conservation Objectives:

The continued use of this church building by St. John's congregation should be encouraged. The building itself is one of Overtown's major landmarks and should be preserved.

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 only that portion of the site on which the historic church building is located. The newer church buildings are not included in the proposed designation.

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 considered 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.