

Schools Left Behind

by Michael P. Harker

I had been working on my project of photographing one-room schoolhouses for about a year when I heard about the remains of a limestone school on Highway 61 somewhere north of Mediapolis.

I was in Davenport at the time, and, as always, I had my camera with me. Mediapolis is south of Muscatine and the drive from Davenport took me over an hour.

I actually drove past the limestone structure before I realized it was the school. There had been a snowfall a couple of days before, but most of the snow had melted already. The light was perfect that morning and the snow in the cornfield helped provide some fill light in the shadows. This is my favorite image from the schoolhouse project because it reminds me of an old Roman ruin.

Of the dozens of Iowa schools that I photographed over three years and 25,000 miles, here are a few of my favorites. Although many no longer look as they did in their glory days, the photos are silent witnesses of their role in Iowa's past.

Right: Ruins in a field, Mediapolis, 2004





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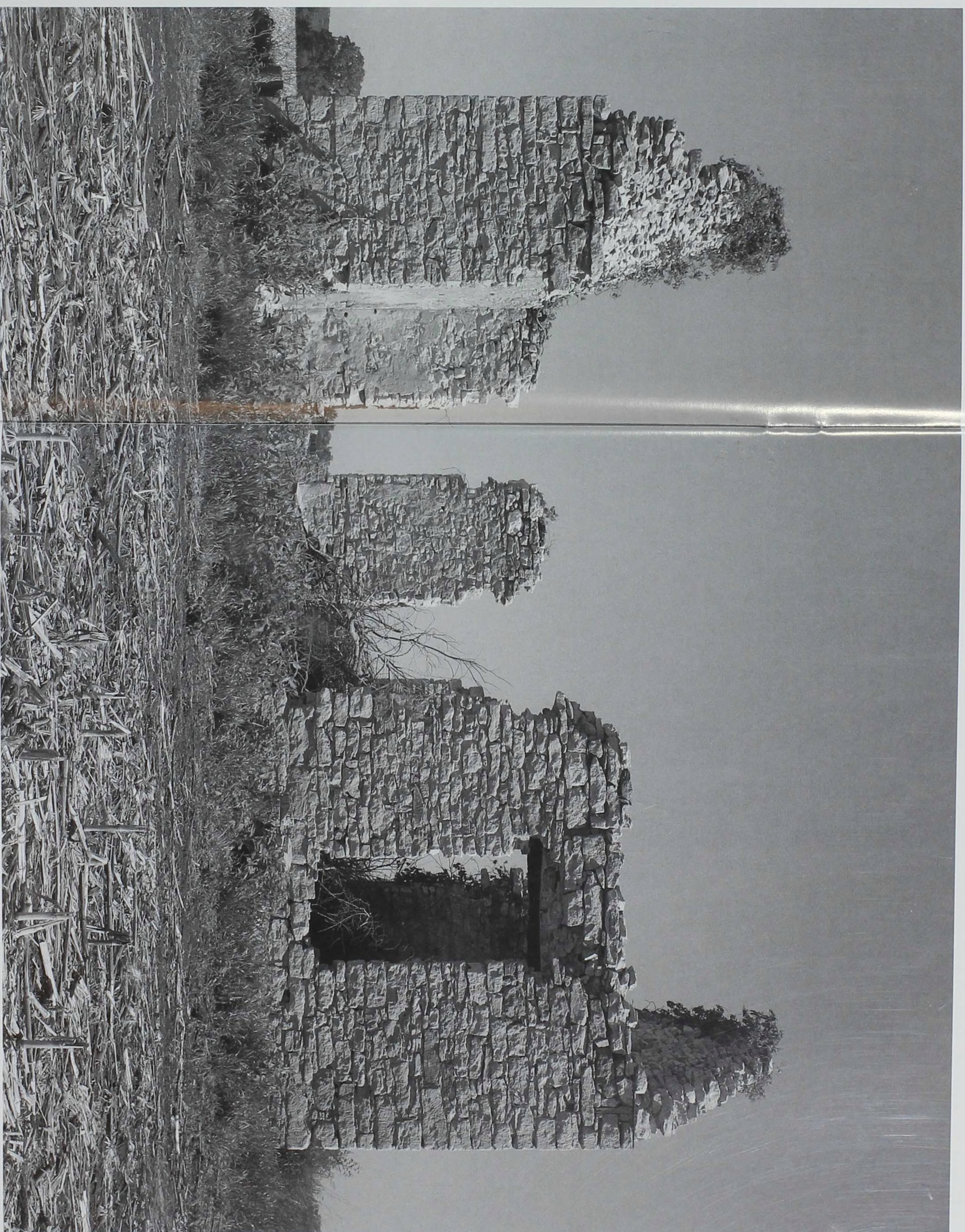
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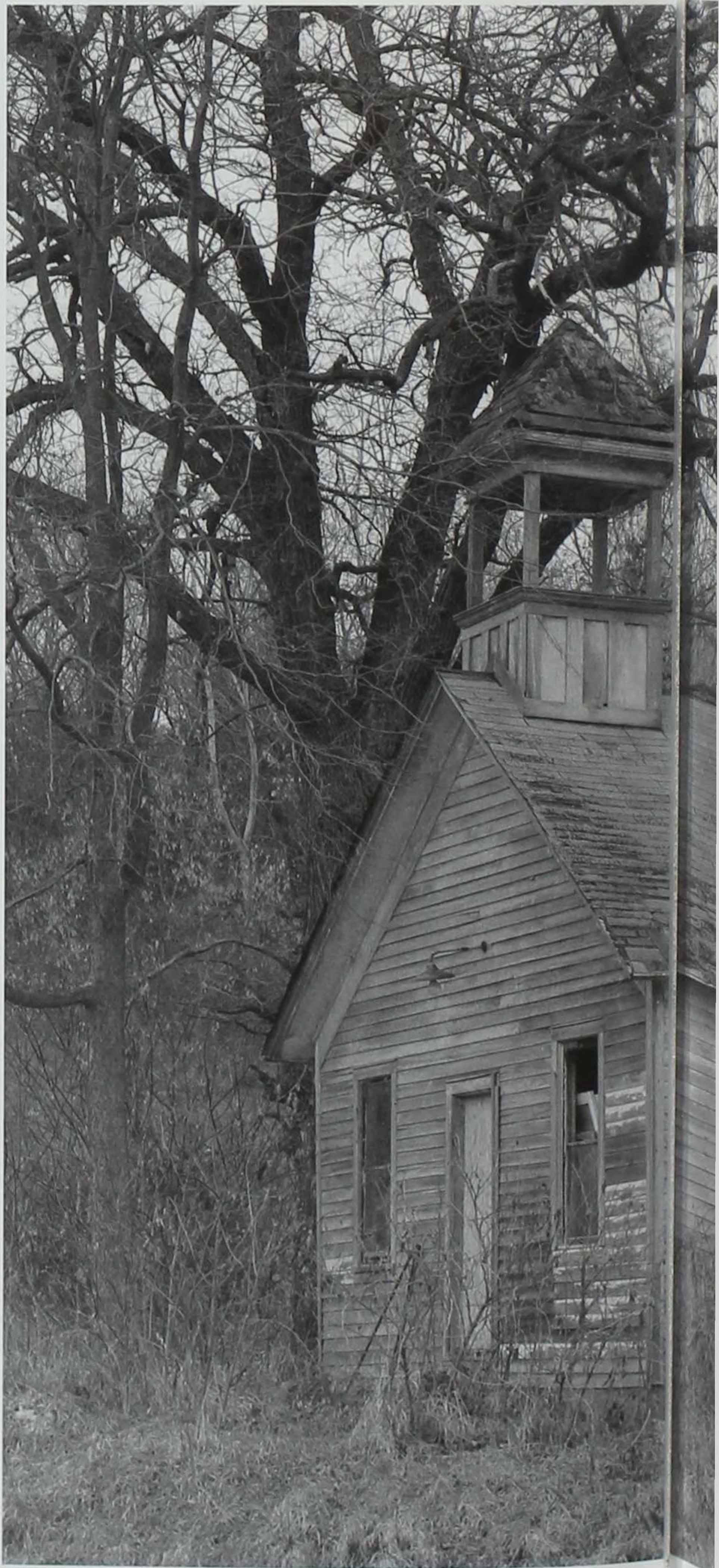
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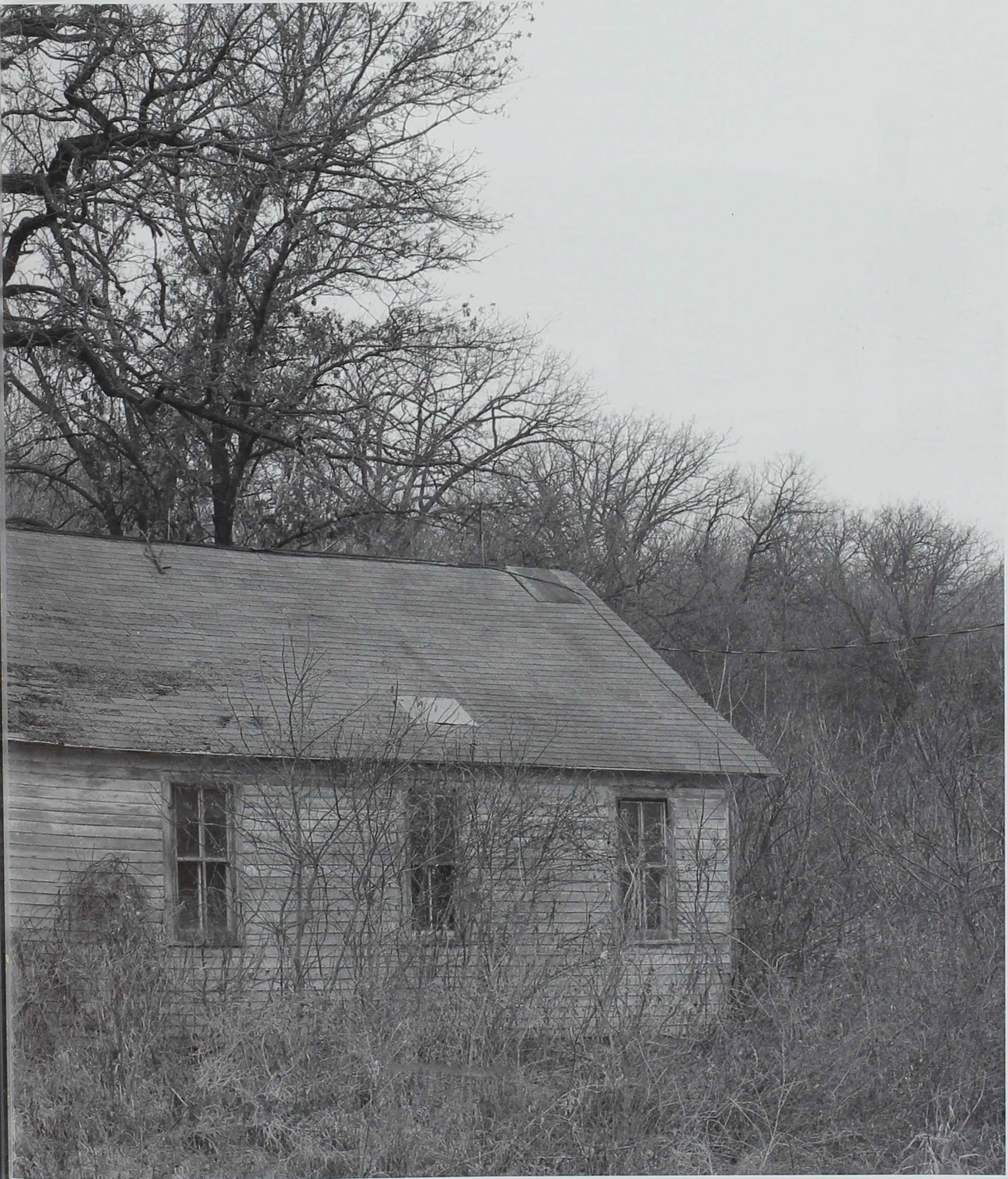




Unknown school, Festina, 2006



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Left: School bus, Iowa City, 2006

Above: Landru School, Forest City, 2006



Unknown school near Solon, 2005





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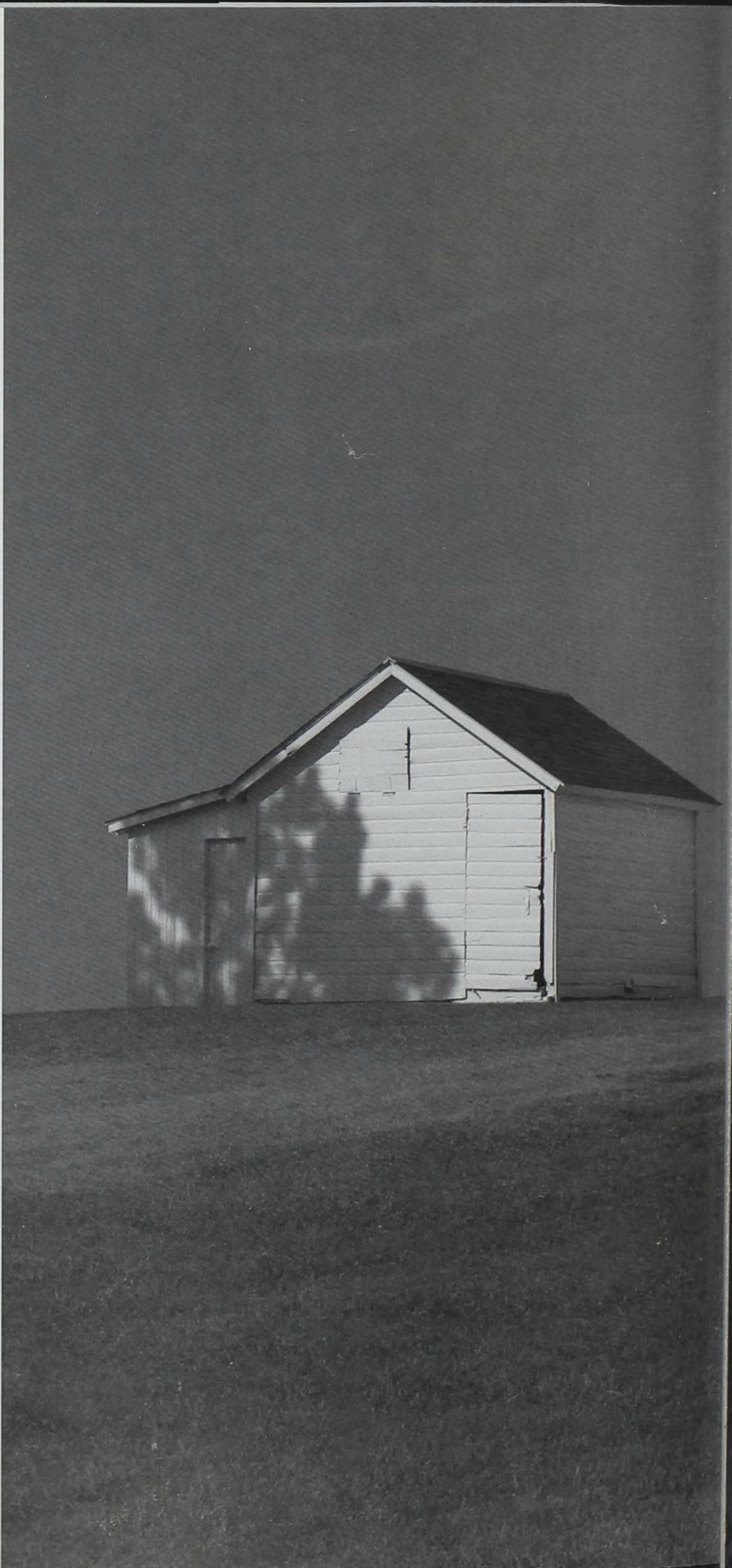
Dexter School,
Madison County, 2004





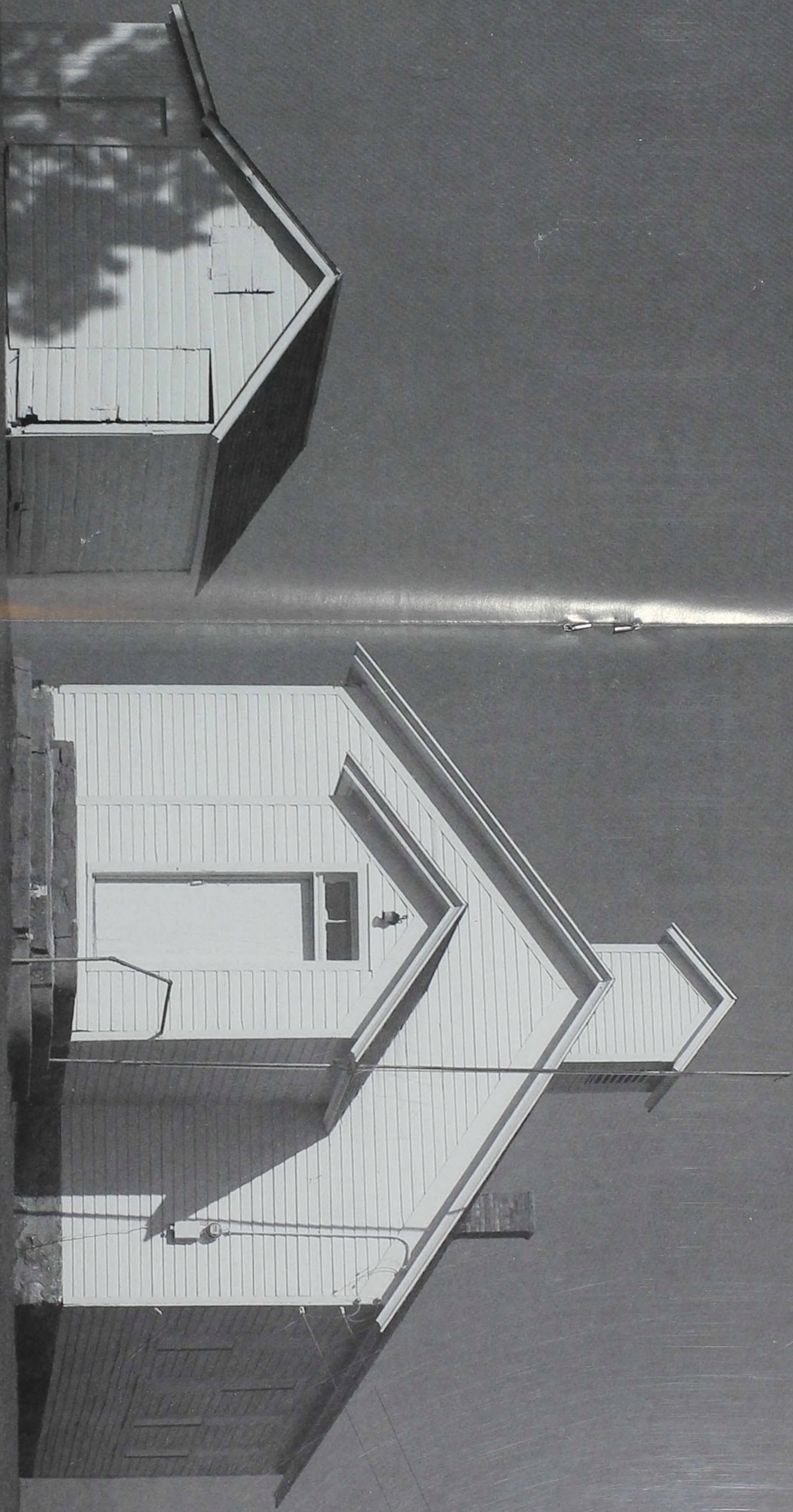
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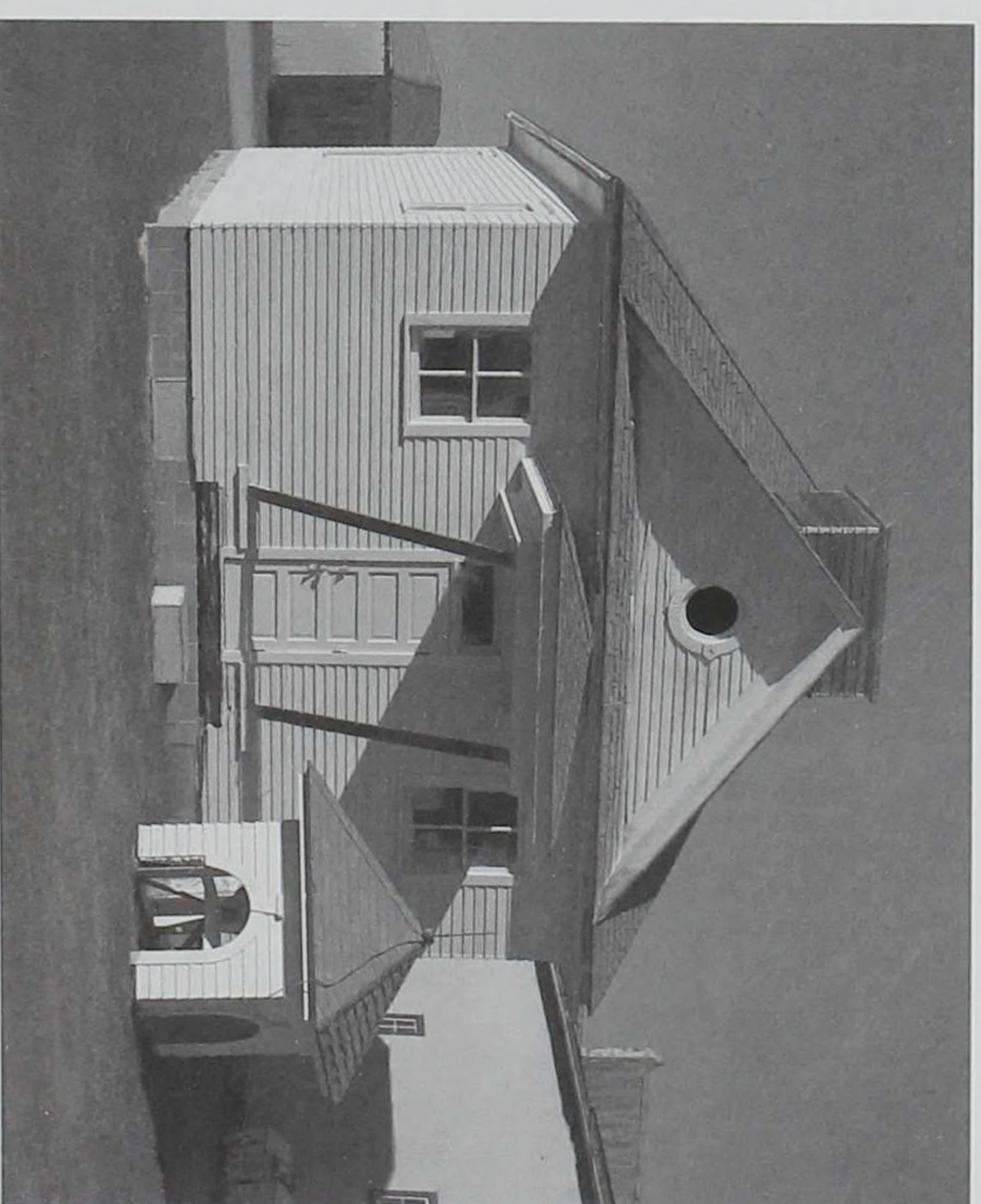
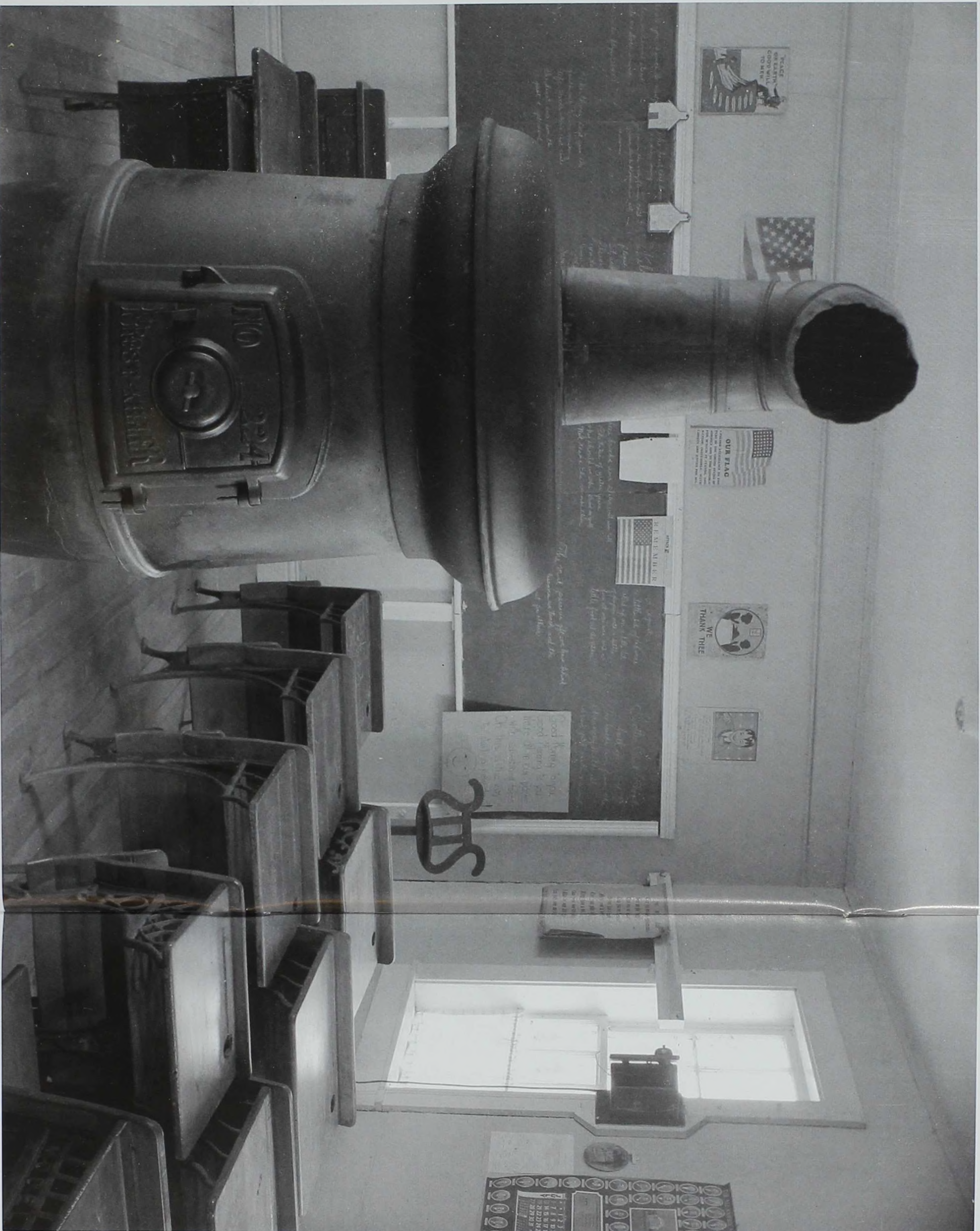
School near Webster City, 2006





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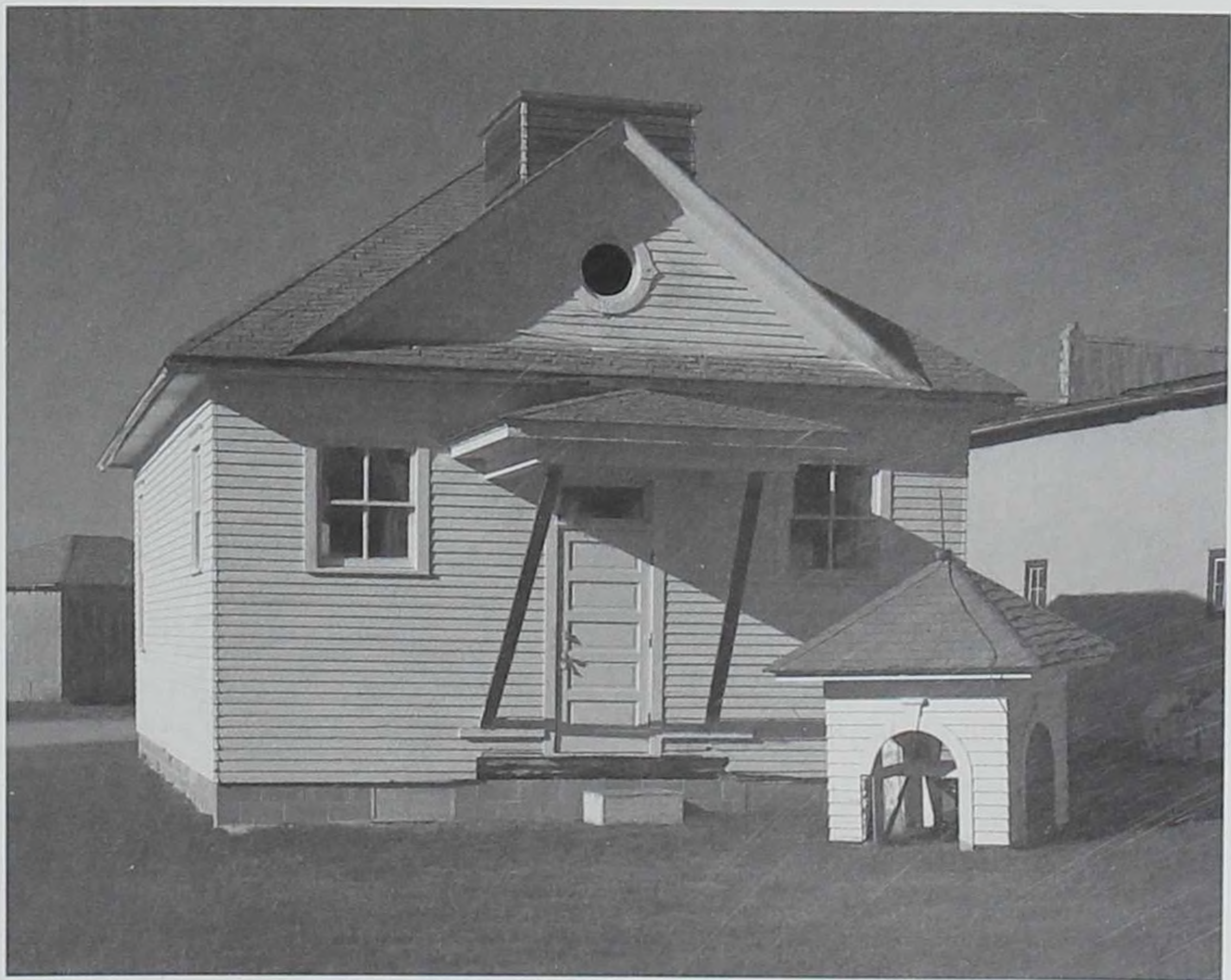
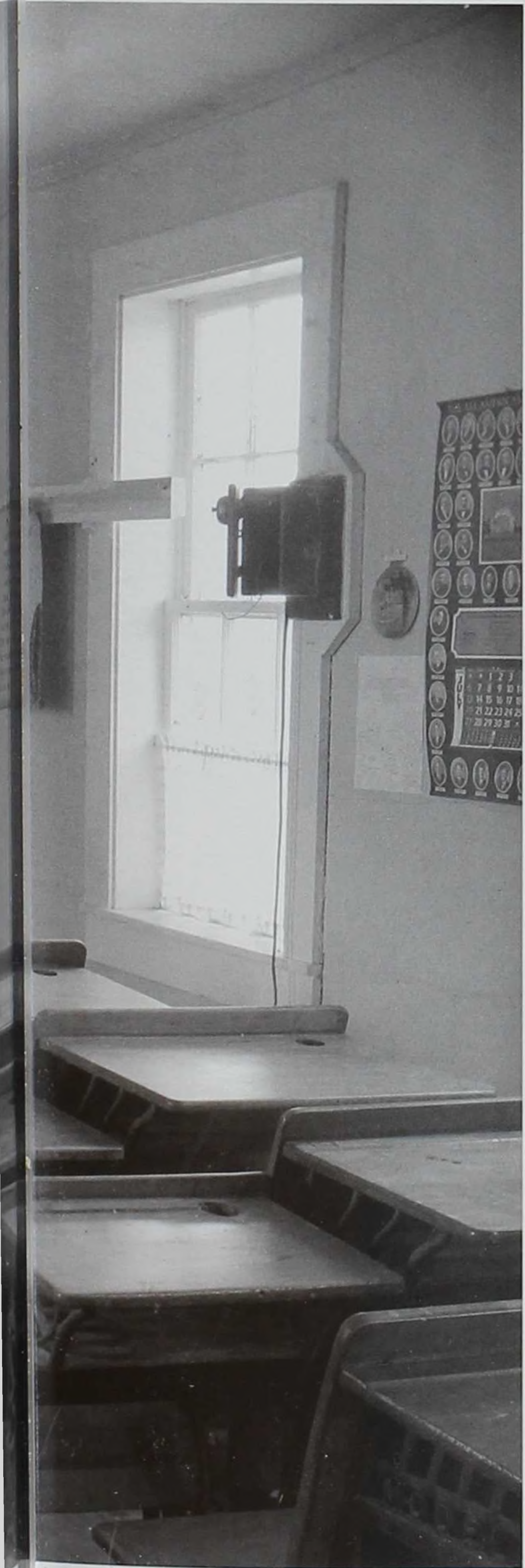




Above: School in Clutter, 2006

Left: Gritter School, North English, 2004





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Oak Grove School, Marengo, 2004

Documentary photographer Michael P. Harker records Iowa's historically significant architecture—barns, one-room schools, courthouses, rural churches, banks, and houses. His most recent book is Harker's *One-Room Schoolhouses: Visions of an Iowa Icon* (University of Iowa Press, 2008). He works with a large format camera in black and white, utilizing the scientific technique of Ansel Adams's Zone System. His career spans more than 37 years.





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