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A Historical Description of the Areal Distribution of the Churches of Warren County, Kentucky

Neilam Adams
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1971

A HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREAL DISTRIBUTION
OF THE CHURCHES OF WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Geography
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Neilam D. Adams

May 1971

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A HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREAL DISTRIBUTION
OF THE CHURCHES OF WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

APPROVED

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Man has had religion prior to written history. As a part of his religion man has constructed many and varied types of worship structures; everything from goatskin tents and brush-arbors, to small brick or wood churches, to massive cathedrals and temples. Many religious structures such as the pyramids of Egypt have survived for thousands of years. Most sacred structures, however, are not as long lasting. They are established when a need arises, and when the need has been served the building becomes a small part of history. Certainly, most buildings pass through history without ever being noted by most of the world's people.

Churches have been a part of the American heritage from its beginning. The Pilgrims came to the New World to gain religious freedom, and one of their first structures was the fortified church. When new frontiers were established, the church either led the way or soon followed. One writer said of church establishment in the westward expansion:

Every village crossroads looked forward with assurance to the day when it would become, if not a Chicago at least a Dubuque. With this attitude of expansion as an incurable law of American life, elders set up churches of their particular denomination in every village and hamlet; not because of obstinacy or selfrighteousness or failure to see that other denominations might be religious, but because it was poor churchmanship not to have churches ready for the people who were to come to

each metropolis. The people never came but the churches were there with their buildings, memorial windows, emotional ties, commitments of pride and loyalty. It is hard to get rid of even an unneeded agency once it has begun life of its own in a community.¹

This idea of building a church in every village, hamlet and crossroad can be seen in Warren County, Kentucky, with places like Hadley, Rockfield, Woodburn, Oakland, Smiths Grove, Polkville, Greenhill, Hydro, Martinsville, Boyce Bolling Springs, Rich Pond and Riverside--all with one or more established church erected in the earlier days of county settlement, as few new churches have been built in rural locations in the past sixty years.

Purpose of Study

Religion is a part of man and his culture. We cannot understand the totality of man if we do not understand his religion. The church structure is the visible expression of man's religion.

The purpose of this study is to describe the distribution of churches in Warren County,¹ Kentucky, and to examine the factors that contribute to this areal pattern. In an attempt to further clarify this human-religious expression the following points will be considered: (1) the reasons for denominational change through time; (2) the association of church location and population with corresponding rural-urban shifts; and (3) the style of church architecture as a response to local community need.

¹Rockwell C. Smith, The Church in Our Town (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokebury Press, 1945), p. 63.

A familiar pattern of settlement in the United States is the rural to urban migration of population that has been in effect since the beginning of the twentieth century. This migration has brought a change in the rural landscape. The further one goes from an urban center the less dense the population. Homes have been deserted and left to fall down; villages contain vacant stores and buildings. One would expect a corresponding pattern within the rural churches. However, there has not been a reduction of rural churches, while at the same time there has been a dynamic growth in the urban center. The reasons for this phenomena will be examined and discussed.

Description of the Study Area

The political region of Warren County, Kentucky, was chosen for the study because records were present and nearly complete in one principal location. The area has definite historic boundaries, thus no problems of shifting demarcation. The study area also possesses a sharply defined rural-urban continuum suitable for a basis of comparison. Located in the south central portion of the Commonwealth of Kentucky approximately one hundred and ten miles south of Louisville, Kentucky, and sixty miles north of Nashville, Tennessee, Warren County does not possess the social disrupting effect of a bedroom county. The central portion of the county is well adapted to farming and this is the rural area that contains the greater portion of the present rural population.

The area to the south is of an undulating physiography that is underlined with limestone that has experienced solution erosion, thus forming numerous sinkholes. This has resulted in this area

being a less desirous one for farming and the farms located here appear less prosperous and support fewer people than those in the central part of the county.

The northern part is divided from the central by an escarpment that transverses the county from east to west. That area located north of the escarpment is dissected by numerous streams that flow into the Barren and Green rivers. This presents a rough topography, which when coupled with thin soils of this area results in few farms and those present are generally located in the stream valleys. This area contains fewer people than the other areas of the county.

Historical Background of the Study Area

At the close of the Revolutionary War the way was open for settlement to the west. The first migration took place from the Middle Colonies westward through the broken hills of the southern Alleghenies into Kentucky.² Shortly afterward, when the Indian threat had been lessened a migration began into the Northwest Territory from the Northeast. These two phases of migration are shown in Plate I.

The early settlers to Warren County, Kentucky, brought with them the religions of the sections of the country from which they emigrated. The first phase of migration was from Virginia and the Carolinas. The settlers brought with them the Baptist, Methodist

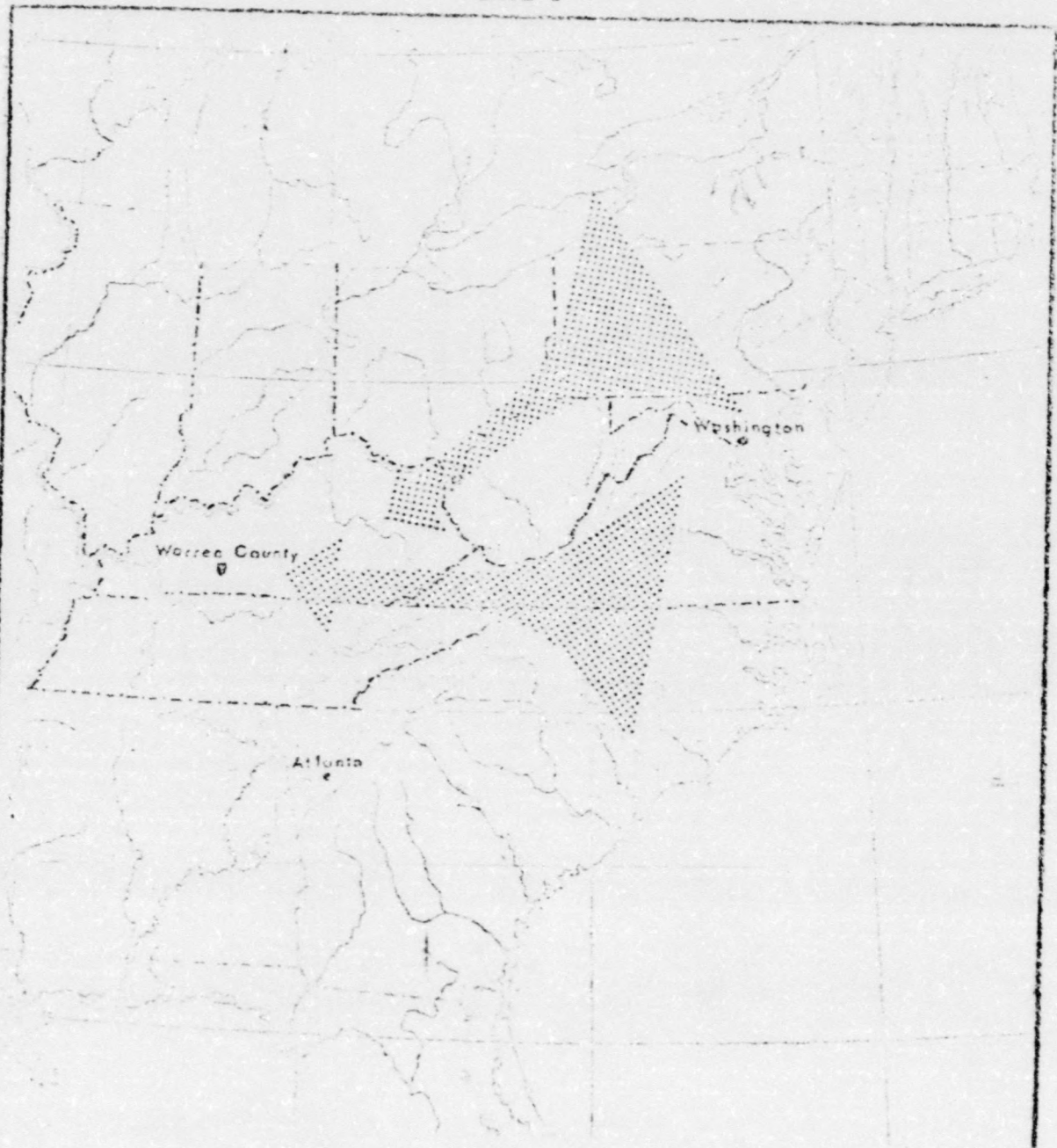
² Wesley Akin Hotchkiss, Areal Pattern of Religious Institutions in Cincinnati (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1950), p. 33.

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Two Phases of Westward Migration
into Kentucky*

*Hotchkiss, Areal Pattern of Religious Institutions in Cincinnati, p. 12.

and Presbyterian religions.³ The second phase of settlement came some years later from the states of the northeast crossing the Ohio River into Kentucky. These emigrants were basically Catholic, Christian and Episcopal in religious beliefs.⁴

The Presbyterians had their main strength in the Middle Colonies of Pennsylvania, Virginia and the Carolinas and of all colonists were in the most advantageous position of all to move into the new West.⁵ The Baptists and Methodists were also strong in the states of Virginia and the Carolinas, and they too moved into the frontier areas in great numbers. It has been estimated that fully one-fourth of the Baptists of Virginia emigrated to Kentucky and Tennessee between 1791 and 1810, and the Baptists were everywhere on the frontier both numerous and aggressive.⁶

Problems Encountered in the Study

In 1961 Zelinsky pointed out the problems of lack of previous work in religious geography, as well as the small amount of data and the unreliability of data that was available.⁷

³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵ William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), p. 303.

⁶ William Warren Sweet, Our American Churches (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1924), p. 57.

⁷ Wilbur Zelinsky, "An Approach to the Religious Geography of the United States: Patterns of Church Membership in 1952," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 51, June, 1961, pp. 139-193.

Payne⁸ and Price,⁹ in more recent studies, encountered the same problem of acquiring accurate data. Hart's study experienced the problem of definition of just what constitutes a church.¹⁰ Is it only a place for worship of a god or does it include such items as schools, social organizations and their buildings?

In this study one of the most difficult problems encountered was in attempting to locate all the deeds to the different churches in the study area. Many times deeds may not be recorded for a number of years after the transaction has taken place. Old Union was established in 1795. The deed, however, was not recorded until 1831, some thirty-six years after the establishing and building of a church house.¹¹

Some churches have never had a deed. A plot of land was donated to the congregation by an owner and the building erected with only an agreement between the land owner and the congregation. This writer was never able to locate a deed for Rich Pond Baptist Church. Nevertheless, the church has been there for a number of years, and there is a tombstone in the cemetery that dates from 1889. Ray's

⁸George Frederick Payne, The Distribution of Churches and Church Membership in South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1966), p. 79.

⁹Thomas A. Price, Negro Store Front Churches in San Francisco (San Francisco: San Francisco State University, 1969), p. 7.

¹⁰Harmon G. Hart, The Spatial Context of the Church Buildings, in Kalamazoo, Michigan (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1967), p. 12.

¹¹Records of Deeds, Warren County, Kentucky, Vol. 14, p. 296.

Branch Methodist Church deed was recorded in 1967, although the church was founded in 1898.¹²

Several deeds, especially early recorded ones, give metes and bounds descriptions that are too sketchy to locate today, such as: "beginning at a rock in the road, running eight poles to the black walnut tree thence to the sycamore tree. . . ."

Most of the Methodist deeds read to Methodist Episcopal Church, only rarely mentioning the congregation by name. Thus, in many instances, this researcher has had to rely upon the memory of some senior citizens of the study area for information as to location and names of certain churches.

An additional problem was encountered in trying to determine the different sects of Baptist within the study area. After several frustrating attempts, the writer abandoned his efforts and for this study Baptists are considered one homogenous denomination.

¹²Ibid., Vol. 373, p. 420.

CHAPTER II

CHURCH DISTRIBUTION

It may seem a far cry from the geography to the hymnal, but it is not so far as it may appear. Churches have to be somewhere; people have to live somewhere; and the two must be brought together on the Sabbath.¹³ Where the people are located at the time a church is established is a determining factor as to where the building will be located. However, once a building is located, it seems to have a degree of permanency, and does not move as readily as the people.

Various denominations have their respective locales in which they can prosper just as certain plants will grow in sandy soil but not in loam or vice versa.¹⁴ In the study area each denomination seems to have a particular locale in which it established itself; and to a considerable degree a locale which it maintains to the present.

The area to the north and west in the study area is, for example, where the Methodist settlers established their first churches, and more Methodist churches are still located in this area than any other area of the county.

¹³William G. Mather, Jr., The Rural Churches of Allegany County (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1934), p. 10.

¹⁴M. H. Leiffer, City and Church in Transition (New York: Willett, Clark and Company, 1938), p. 225.

There seems to be a connection between population growth and church establishment. Periods of church establishment appear to lag behind periods of population growth. From 1830 to 1890 there was progressive population growth in the study area (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
POPULATION OF WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY, AT SELECTED DATES*

Date	Rural	Urban	Total	Percentage	
				Rural	Urban
1830	10,128	821	10,949	93	7
1850	-	-	15,123	-	-
1870	17,168	4,574	21,742	79	21
1890	22,355	7,803	30,158	74	26
1910	21,426	9,173	30,579	70	30
1930	21,328	12,348	33,676	63	37
1950	38,133	14,333	42,758	66	34
1970	19,675	37,757	57,432	34	66

*Census of Population of the United States.

The population growth then seemed to reach a plateau in 1890, rising again after 1930. The establishment of churches lagged somewhat behind the population growth, as the period from 1890 to 1910 saw the greatest growth in number of churches established in the study area up to that time, with 32 and 34 respectively (see Tables 2 and 3).

TABLE 2

URBAN CHURCHES BY DENOMINATION AT SELECTED DATES,
BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY*

Denomination	1830	1850	1870	1890	1910	1930	1950	1970
Baptist	1	1	1	2	6	7	10	20
Methodist	1	1	1	6	4	5	7	10
Presbyterian	1	1	2	2	3	4	4	3
Christian	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Catholic	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	2
Church of Christ	-	-	-	1	1	2	3	8
Episcopal	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Seventh Day Adventist	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Salvation Army	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Union	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Gospel	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3
Church of God	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Nazarene	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Nondenominational	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3
Pentecostal	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4
Jehovah's Witness	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Mormon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Lutheran	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total	3	5	7	14	19	25	38	65

*Records of Deeds, Warren County, Kentucky, and personal interviews.

TABLE 3
RURAL CHURCHES BY DENOMINATION AT SELECTED DATES,
WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY*

Denomination	1830	1850	1870	1890	1910	1930	1950	1970
Baptist	5	9	15	28	39	41	43	48
Methodist	1	1	3	11	21	23	23	18
Presbyterian	2	5	7	6	7	7	4	4
Union	1	3	3	4	4	4	2	1
Christian	-	1	2	3	5	6	6	5
Church of Christ	-	1	3	7	11	12	12	12
Seventh Day Adventist	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Mormon	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Church of God	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Nazarene	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Nondenominational	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total	9	20	33	59	88	95	92	92

*Record of Deeds, Warren County, Kentucky, and personal interviews.

Beginning in the 1930's and continuing until the present there has occurred a period of rapid population growth. (See Table 1.) New church establishment has again lagged behind the population growth as there were only twelve additional churches established between 1930 and 1950. Between 1950 and 1970, however, twenty-four new churches were established in the study area which appears to be a response to the rapid urbanization that has occurred during that twenty year interval.

Distribution of Population

To understand the distribution of churches, one must first analyze the distribution of population within the study area. Not unlike the general population movement within the United States, the Warren County population has shown several marked shifts in location of rural dwellers. It appears the population was concentrated away from the central part of the county during the early days of settlement. As time passed the concentration of population shifted from the outer reaches of the county closer to the urban center. In 1890 the less densely populated census districts were adjoining Bowling Green, the county seat and largest settlement. After 1890 the rural districts around Bowling Green began to increase in population relative to the outlying districts. The districts located at a distance from Bowling Green began to decline in population. This trend has continued to the present.

The 1950 census revealed that Warren County had the largest number of people in rural locations that it had ever experienced-- 28,133. Those census districts around the urban center of Bowling Green, however, contained the greater number of people showing the influence of the urban center.

By 1970 the rural to urban shift shows very well, as by now, Bowling Green contained 37,757 people with approximately 19,000 people located in rural locations. The shift in population, however, seems to be more from changing boundary lines of Bowling Green than from the population moving into the urban center.

Early Denominational Concentration

There were nine churches in rural locations of the study area in 1830. (See Plate II.) These nine churches represented three different denominations--Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist--with the Baptist the most numerous. These three denominations reflected the Virginia and Carolina origins from which the settlers had come. In turn, the locations of the churches correspond to the locations of the population at that time.

In 1850 there were twenty-four churches representing six different religious denominations within the study area; and the basic pattern of future church distribution was present (see Plate III). Since 1850 it has been more a "filling-in" process than the establishing of a pattern with each denomination seeming to have had its preferred locale.

Early settlement in the southern portion of the study area would appear from the 1850 distribution to be largely Baptist in influence; and even today with Baptist churches dispersed throughout the rural portion of the county, the greatest concentration of Baptist churches seems to have remained in the southern portion of the area.

The first rural Methodist churches were in the northwestern part of the study area, and this seems to have been their preferred locale as the greatest concentration of rural Methodist churches remain in that area.

The northeastern portion of Warren County was first settled by large groups that adhered to the Church of Christ faith. Although

PLATE II

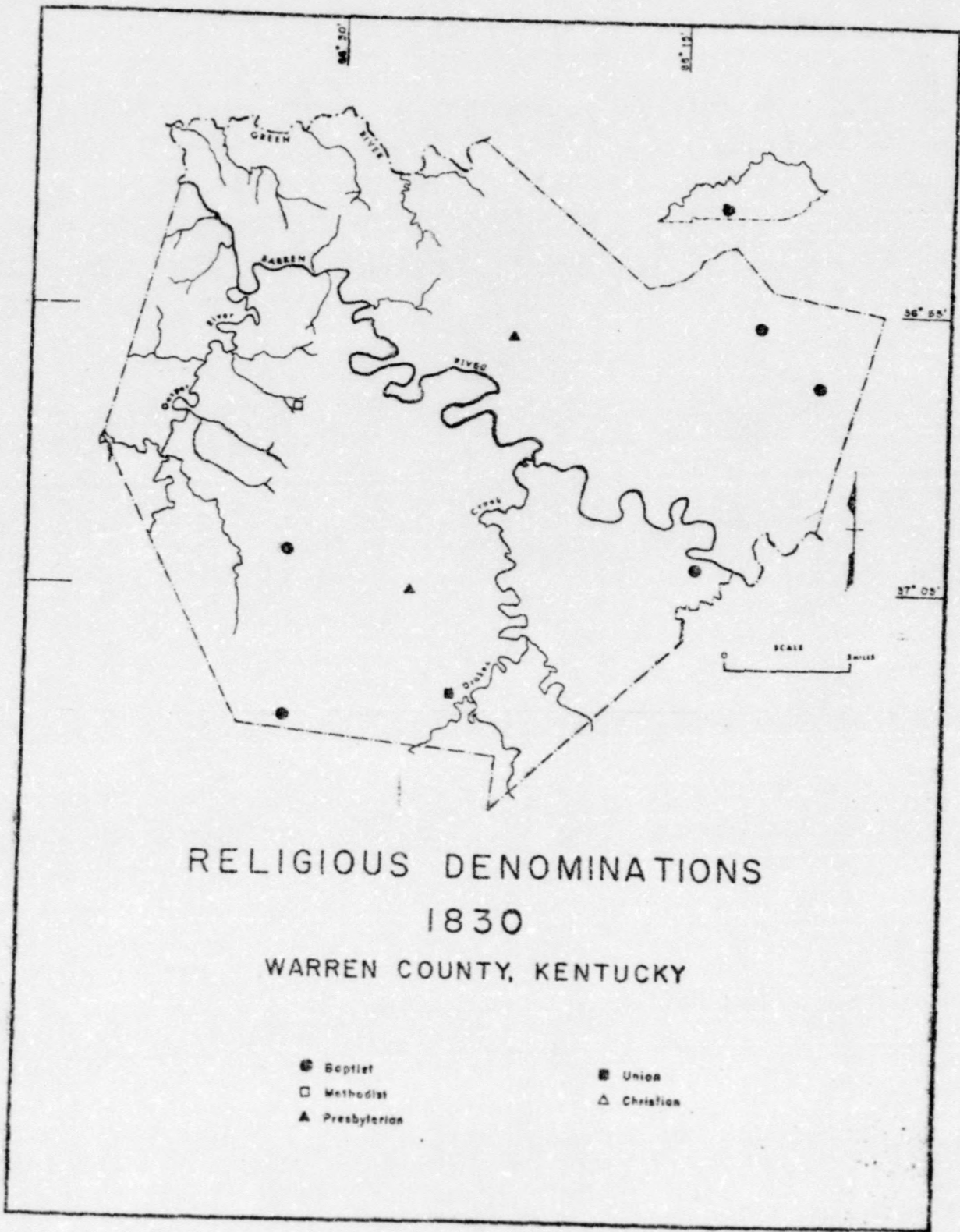
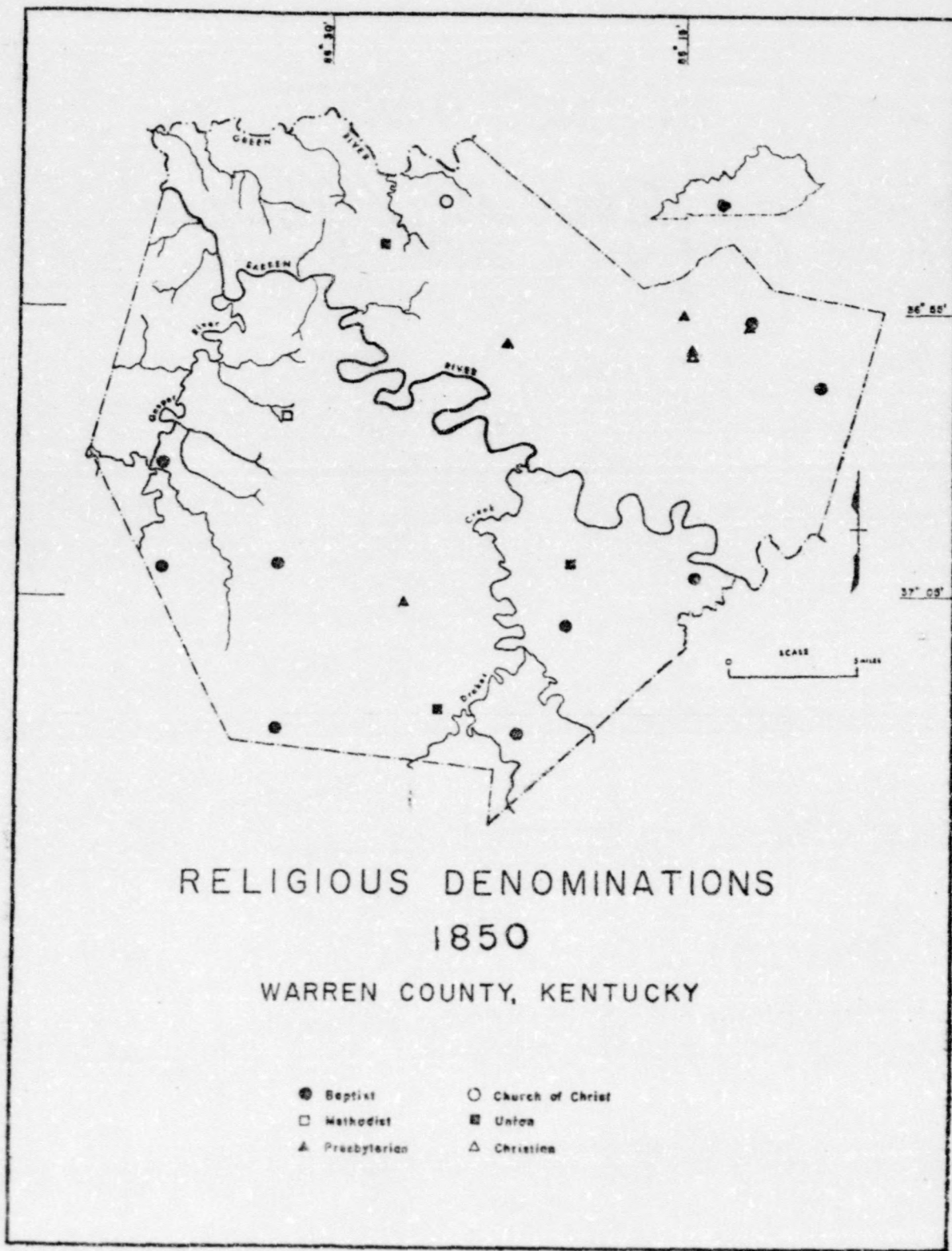


PLATE III



RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
1850

WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| ● Baptist | ○ Church of Christ |
| □ Methodist | ■ Union |
| ▲ Presbyterian | △ Christian |

they too dispersed outward, the area remains essentially dominated by that sect to the present.

Rural Baptist Churches

Of all religious sects the Baptist was most numerous in its settlement and energetic in its religious zeal. In 1830 over one-half of all the rural churches were Baptist (see Plate II). While the total number of rural churches had grown from nine to twenty by 1850, the Baptist rural churches had increased from five to nine, the largest increase of any denomination present in the study area.

From 1850 to 1870 six additional rural Baptist churches were constructed. By the end of this period Baptist churches were established over the entire study area. Even the area to the north, where previously there had been no Baptist churches, now contained one of this denomination (see Plate IV). However, the heaviest concentration of Baptist churches was still in the southern portion of the study area.

In the twenty year period from 1870 to 1890 there was an increase in rural Baptist churches from fifteen to twenty-eight. As can be noted on Plate V, there was no basic change in the distributional pattern of rural Baptist churches during this period. Most of the Baptist churches still located in the southern portion of the study area. The establishing of separate Negro churches accounted for most of the increase at this time. The rural Negro Baptist church appeared to have been established in the area where the white Baptist church had already been established.

PLATE IV

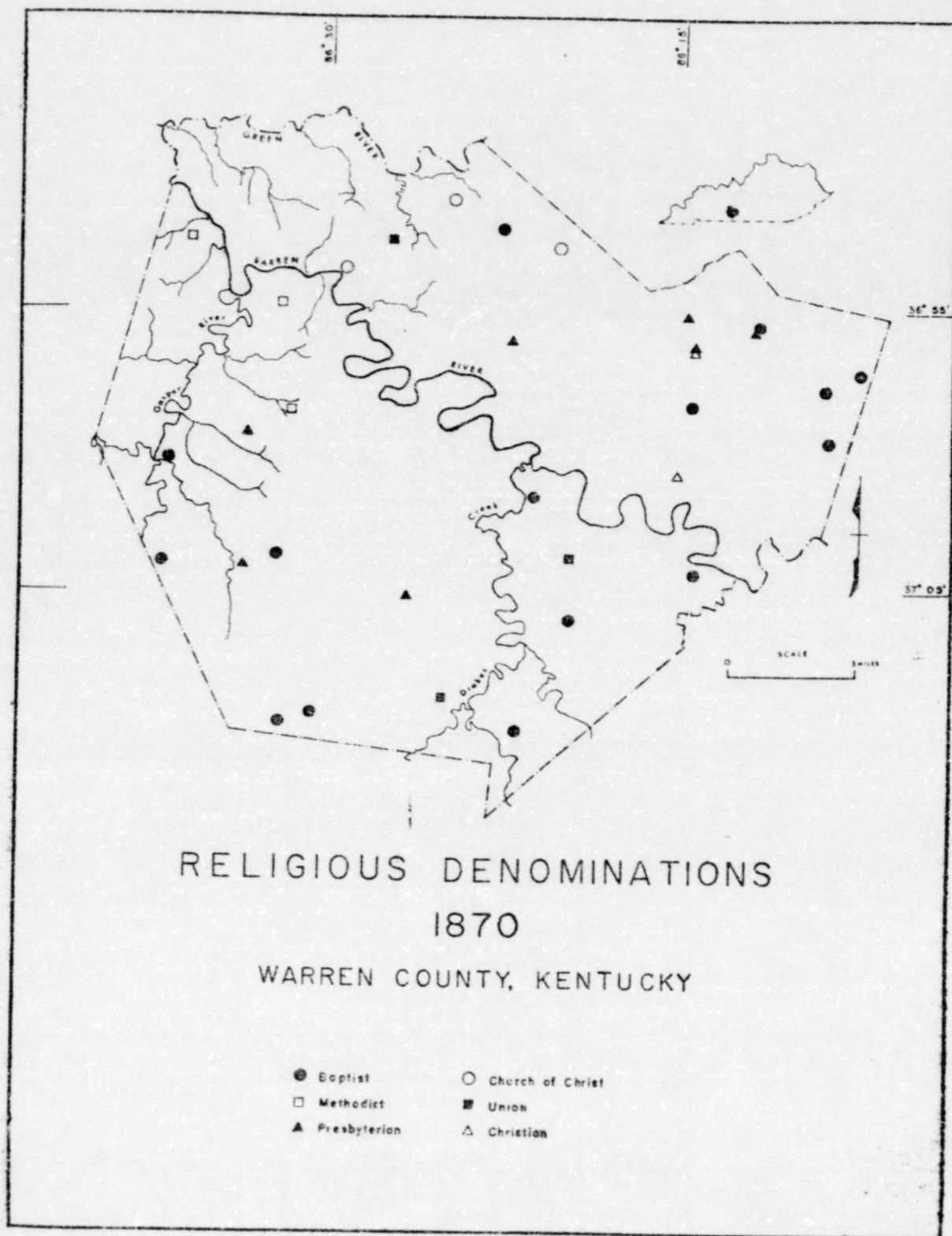
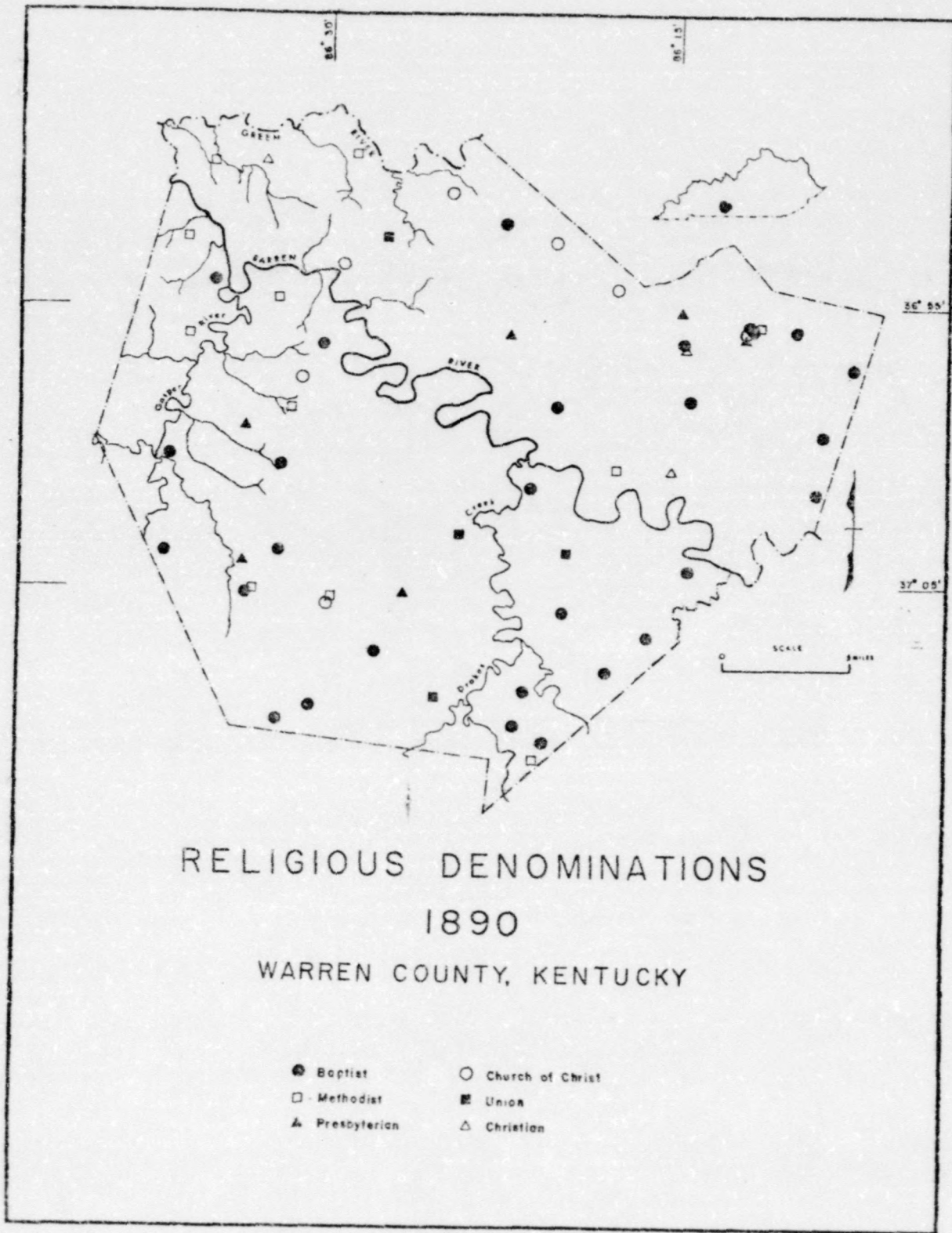


PLATE V



RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
1890

WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| ● Baptist | ○ Church of Christ |
| □ Methodist | ■ Union |
| ▲ Presbyterian | △ Christian |

From 1910 through 1970 there was an increase in Baptist churches in the rural locations of the study area from twenty-eight to forty-eight. The distributional pattern still followed past distribution except that now all rural areas of the county contained Baptist churches, with even the northern part of the county now housing six Baptist churches. The southern part of the study area, however, still contained the greatest number of Baptist churches with twenty-three churches located in this area. (See Plates VI through IX.)

Rural Baptist churches continue to be established in the study area even when other denominations are reducing their number of rural churches. More new rural Baptist churches, however, are being established around the periphery of the urban center. The Hillvue Heights and Dedicated Baptist churches are new rural Baptist churches that are in essence urban churches, as they are located just beyond the political boundary of the urban center and it appears most of their membership live in the urban center.

Rural Methodist Churches

The Methodists had an early beginning in the study area, with one church in the settlement of Bowling Green constructed in 1818 and one in the rural portion of the county by 1827.¹⁵ They did not, however, establish churches as rapidly as other denominations (see Plates II through IV). The Methodists with their itinerant preachers

¹⁵"The State Street Methodist Lead in all Big Plans," History of Bowling Green Churches (Taken from the Development of the Times Journal, 1925), p. 1.

PLATE VI

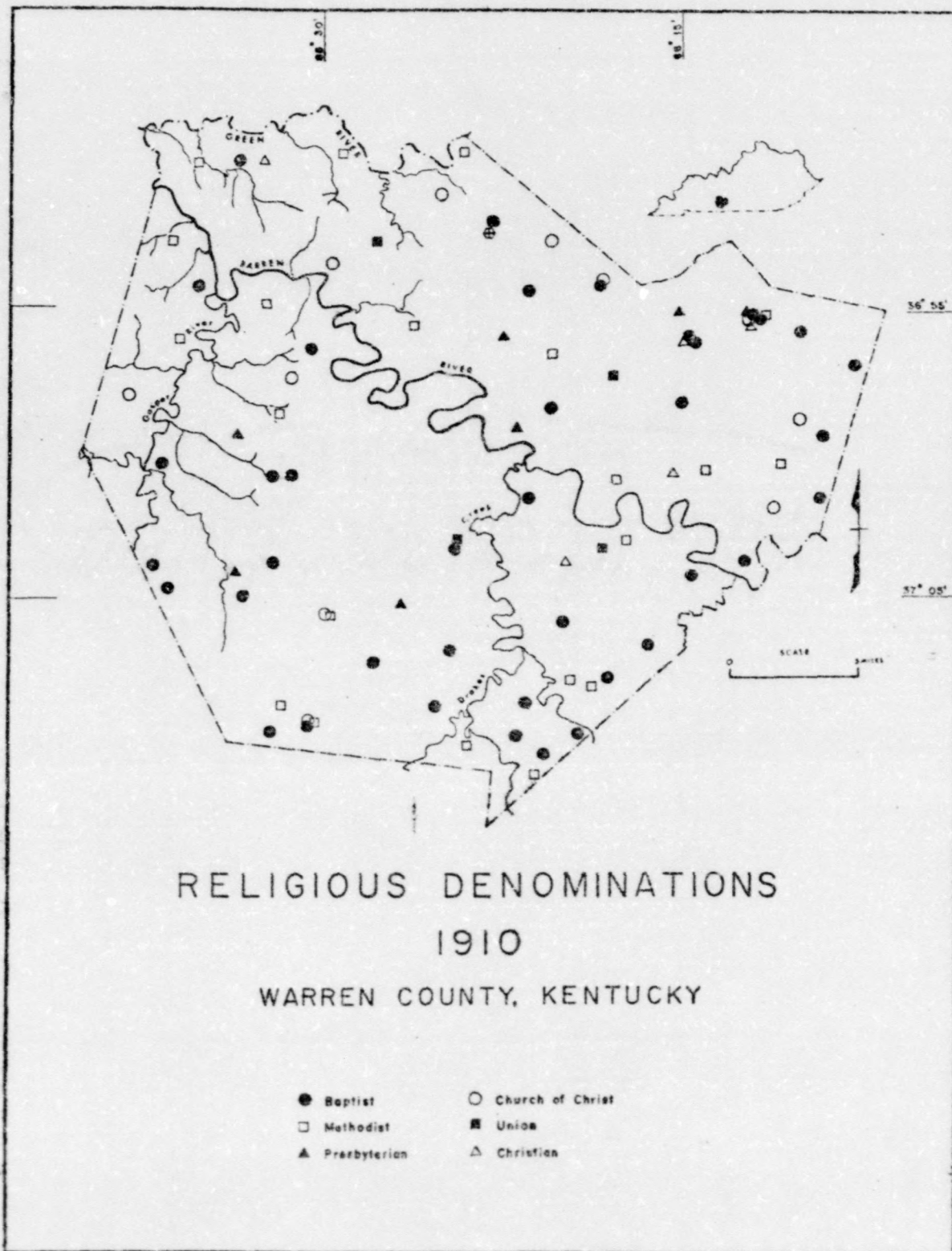
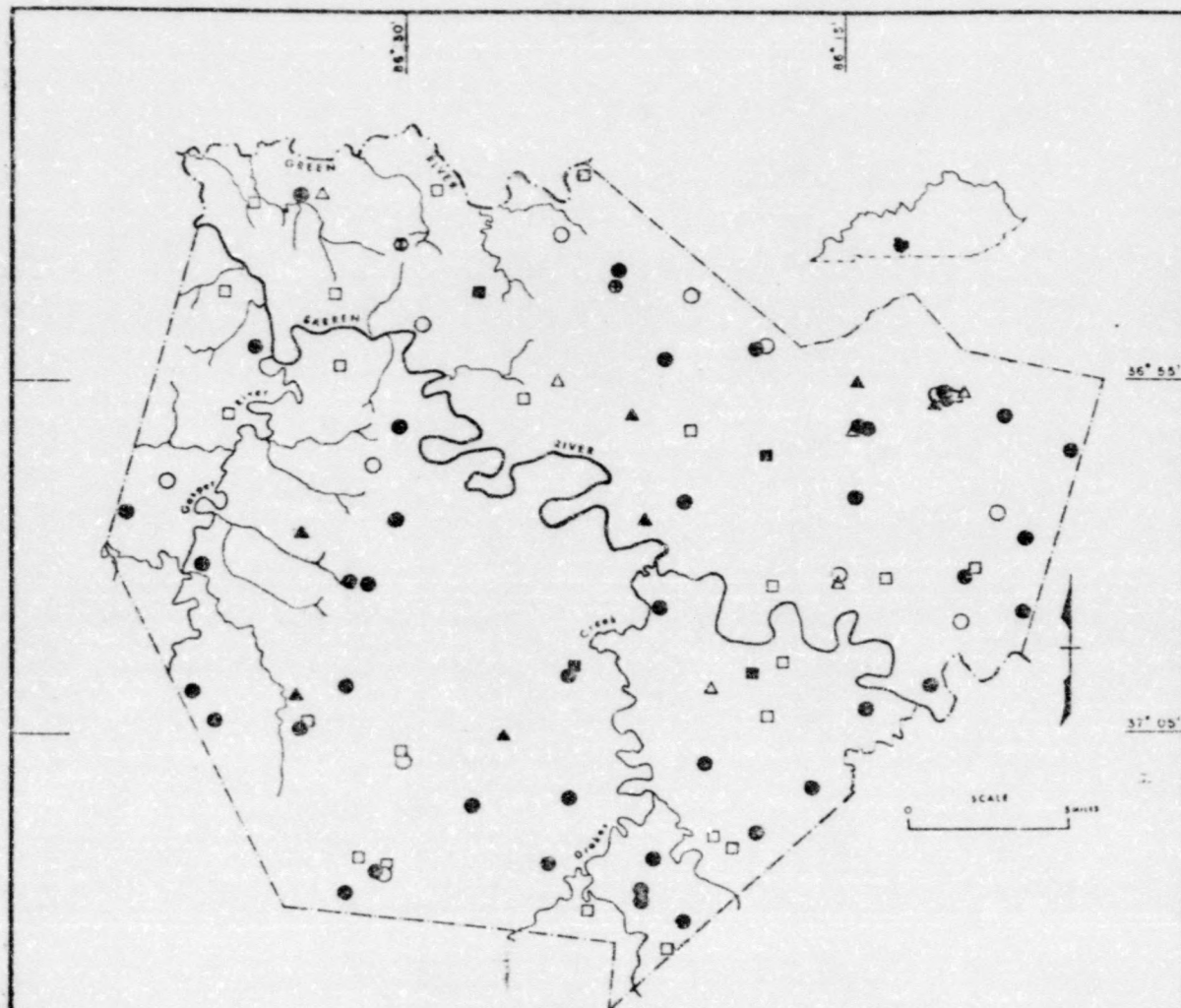


PLATE VII

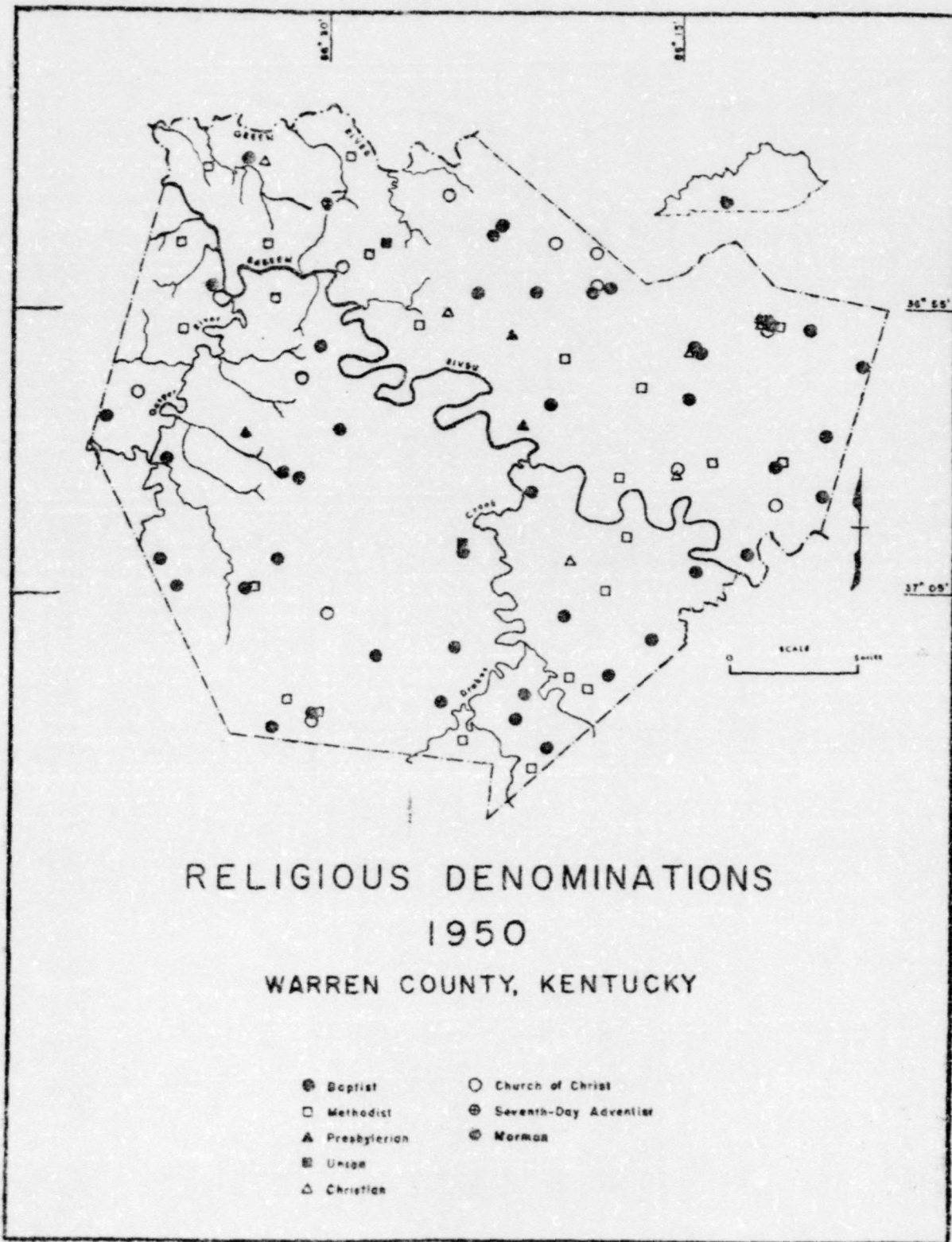


RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
1930

WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| ● Baptist | ○ Church of Christ |
| □ Methodist | ⊕ Seventh-Day Adventist |
| ▲ Presbyterian | ⊞ Mormon |
| ■ Union | |
| △ Christian | |

PLATE VIII

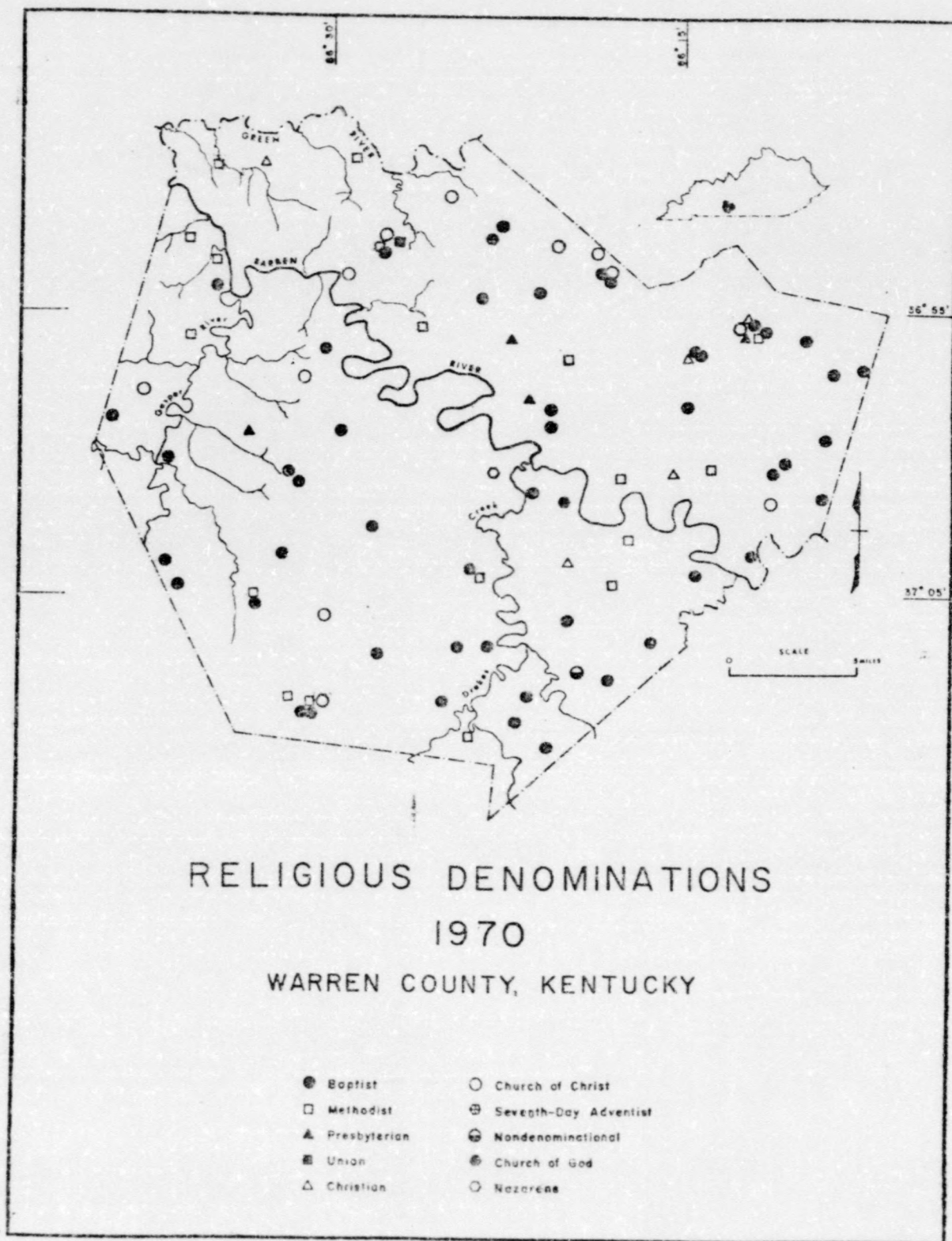


RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS

1950

WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

PLATE IX



preferred to use the Union churches and other facilities, such as homes and schools, for their revivals and preaching.¹⁶ There was no great upsurge in Methodist church establishment until after 1870, when in a twenty year period--1870 to 1890--there was an increase of from three to twelve rural Methodist churches.

The Methodist denomination showed a preference for the western portion of the study area at this time, with seven churches located in this general area in 1890 (see Plate V). By 1910 the Methodists numbered twenty-three rural churches, an increase of twenty in a forty year period. The general distribution of Methodist churches was dispersed throughout the county, with the greatest number still concentrated in the western section of the study area where the Methodists first established themselves.

The number of rural Methodist churches remained static from 1910 through 1950 with no basic change in the distributional pattern (see Plates VI through VIII). In the period 1950 to 1970 five Methodist churches closed in the rural part of the study area. The Methodists are able to close churches somewhat easier than some other denominations as it is the decision of the Bishop whether to continue to operate a church that is unable to support itself.¹⁷

Rural Presbyterian Churches

The Presbyterians were one of the first denominations to establish in the study area with two churches located in the county

¹⁶Sweet, Our American Churches, p. 92.

¹⁷The Book of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1968), pp. 460-487.

by 1830. Within twenty years the number of churches had increased to four. In addition, there were three Union churches that usually housed a Presbyterian congregation. The Presbyterian denomination had constructed six churches by 1870, four of which were located in the Smiths Grove area.

With a total of seven churches in 1910, the Presbyterians reached their greatest number ever obtained in the rural part of the study area. It has been said that the Presbyterians were in the best position to move into the western frontiers.¹⁸ However, they were never able to establish themselves in Warren County as strongly as the Baptists or Methodists. It seems that the schism of 1810¹⁹ took away some of the zeal of the frontier ministers and the Presbyterians were never able to establish churches at the pace of some of the other denominations.

The last new Presbyterian church to be established in the study area was in 1894--Mt. Hebrew, a Negro Cumberland Presbyterian church located east of Bowling Green. By 1950 two rural Presbyterian churches had closed, leaving only five still operating. This number was reduced to four by 1970. The Presbyterian denomination never was dispersed throughout the study area, with only two ever located south of the Barren River.

¹⁸Sweet, The Story of Religion in America, p. 303.

¹⁹This schism was over the use of untrained ministers on the frontier, and resulted in the breaking away of a group and the formation of the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination.

Rural Church of Christ Churches

The Church of Christ denomination is a split from the Christian denomination and the first church of this denomination was not established in the study area until 1854. This denomination had its preferred locale in the northern part of the study area. By 1890 there were seven Church of Christ churches in the rural part of the county. There has only been an increase of two in the number of churches of this denomination in the rural portion of the county since 1910 and the original area of concentration still seems to be *dominant*.

Other Rural Denominations

Other denominations have been, or still are, located in the rural part of the study area. The Seventh Day Adventists have had a rural church at Sand Hill since 1900 and they have only recently rebuilt this church. It is the only one of this denomination located in the rural part of the study area.

The Mormons had a church near Richardsville, Kentucky, that was established in 1927. It was closed in 1954 and the congregation moved their membership to the Mormon Church in Butler County.

In recent years other denominations have moved into the rural portion of the study area, with the Church of God and Nazarene each establishing here in the past ten years. However, these churches are on the periphery of the urban center and are not truly rural churches.

Urban Churches

The first churches in Bowling Green were concentrated around the Public Square. These churches were the same denomination as those found in the rural areas of the county--Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian (see Plate X). By 1850 there was an increase of two churches in Bowling Green. This also represented an additional two denominations in the village (see Plate XI). From 1850 until 1870 there was an increase of only two churches in the city and one of these was a new denomination to the area--Roman Catholic (see Plate XII). Thus, in the forty year period from 1830 to 1870 there were seven churches established in the urban center and these seven churches represented six different denominations.

A period of rapid church growth began in the urban center about 1870 and lasted until 1890 and one of these was another denomination (see Plate XIII). Overall, there was an increase of seven churches during this period, with the Methodists showing the greatest gain. This was the same period of rapid growth for Methodists in the rural area. However, the Methodists suffered a period of decline in number of churches in the urban center from 1890 until 1950. (See Plates XIII through XVI.) But between 1950 and 1970 there was an increase in the establishing of Methodist churches, three of which were built on the periphery of the urban center and the other built in an urban renewal project.

The Baptist denomination did not establish churches as rapidly in the urban area as it did in the rural locations until after 1890. But by 1910 the Baptists began to establish new churches

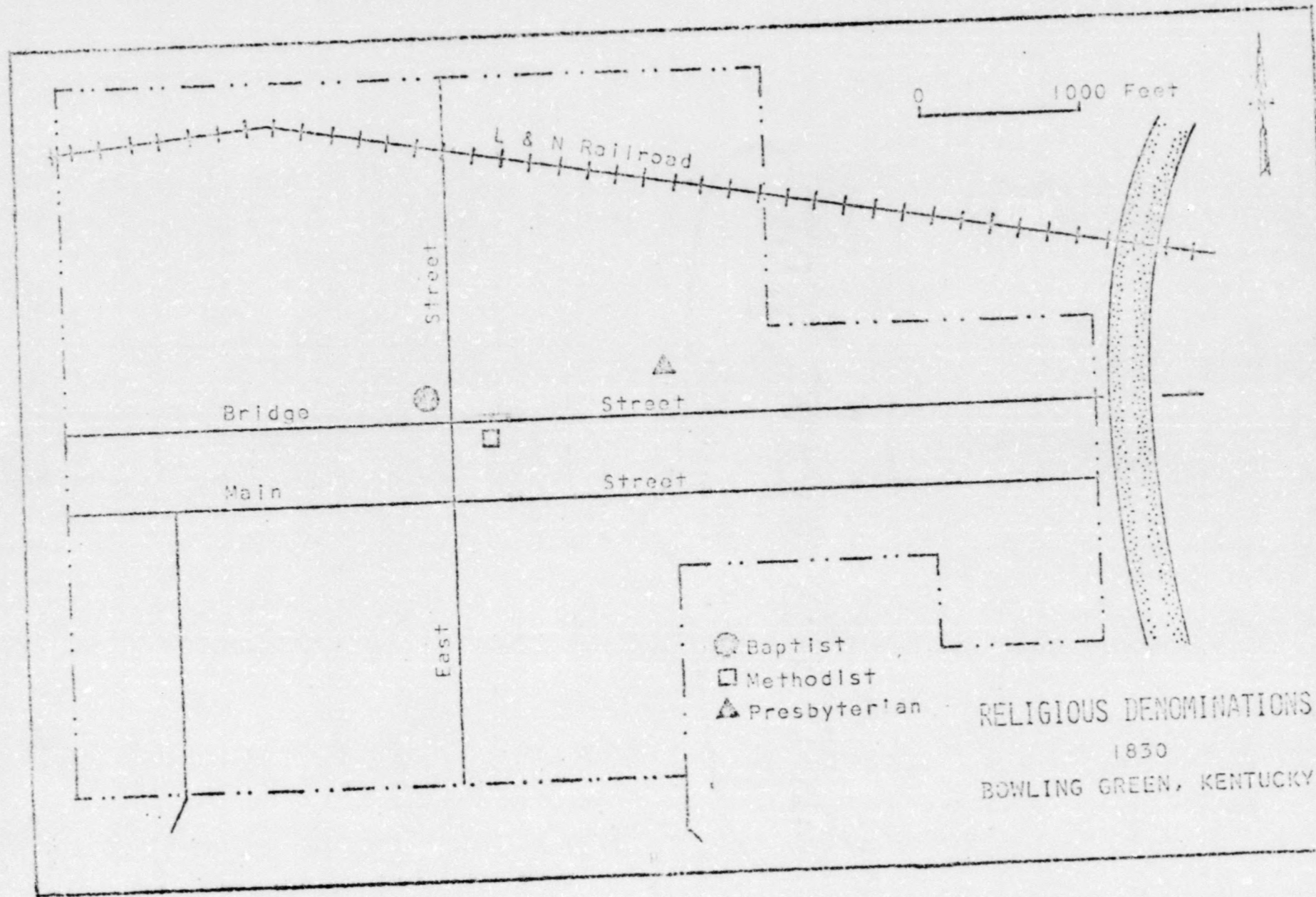


PLATE X

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
 1830
 BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

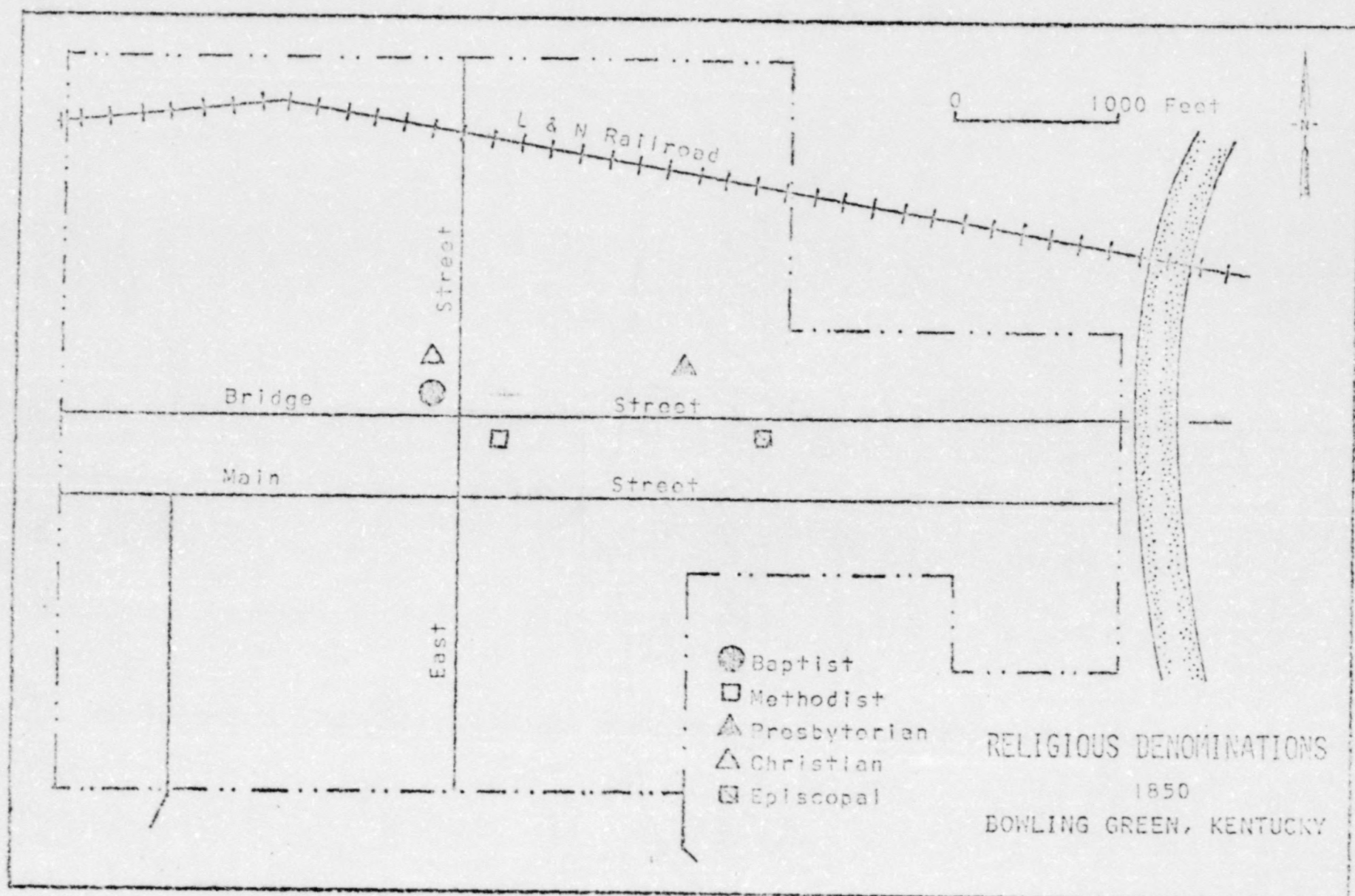
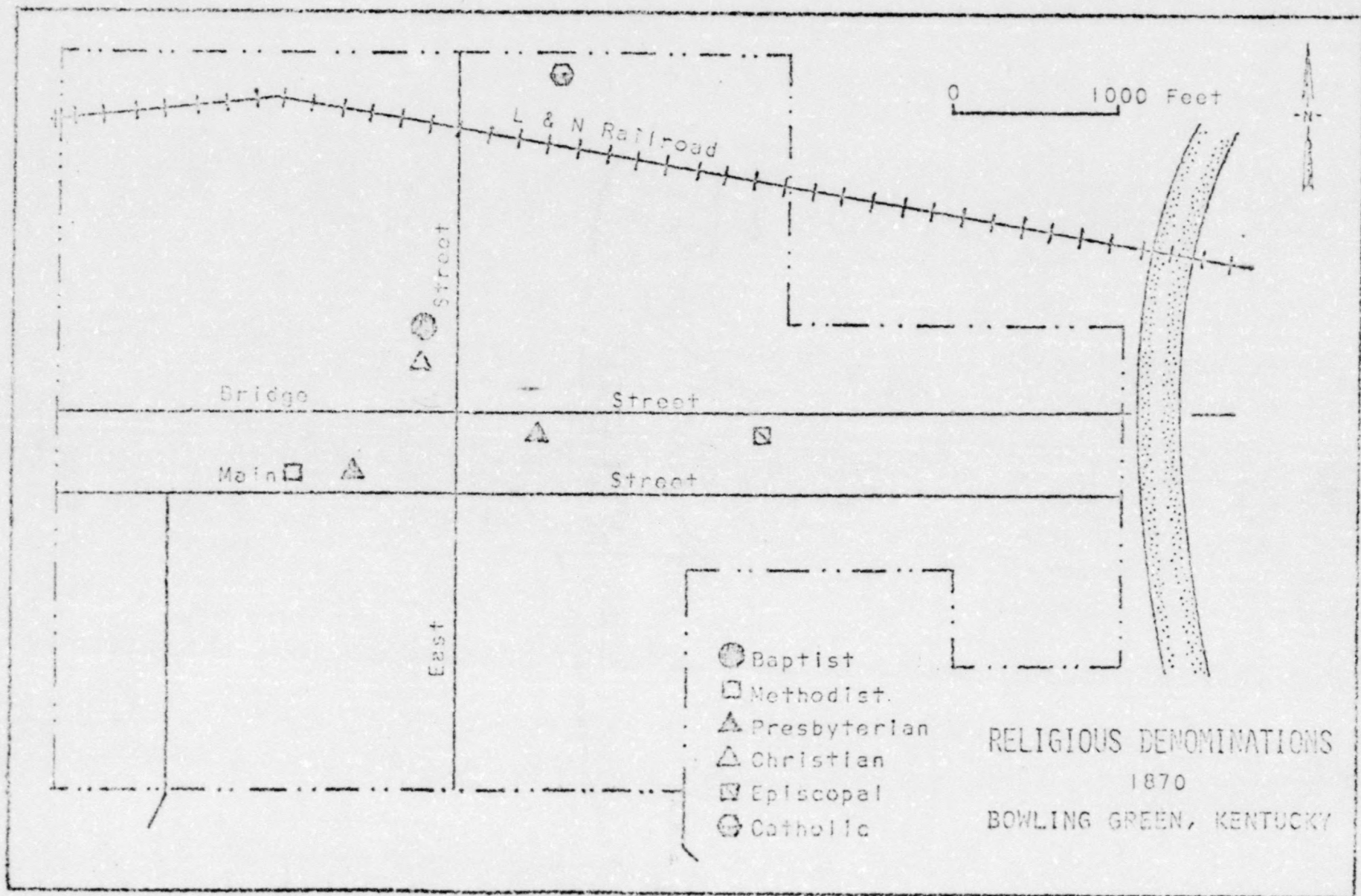
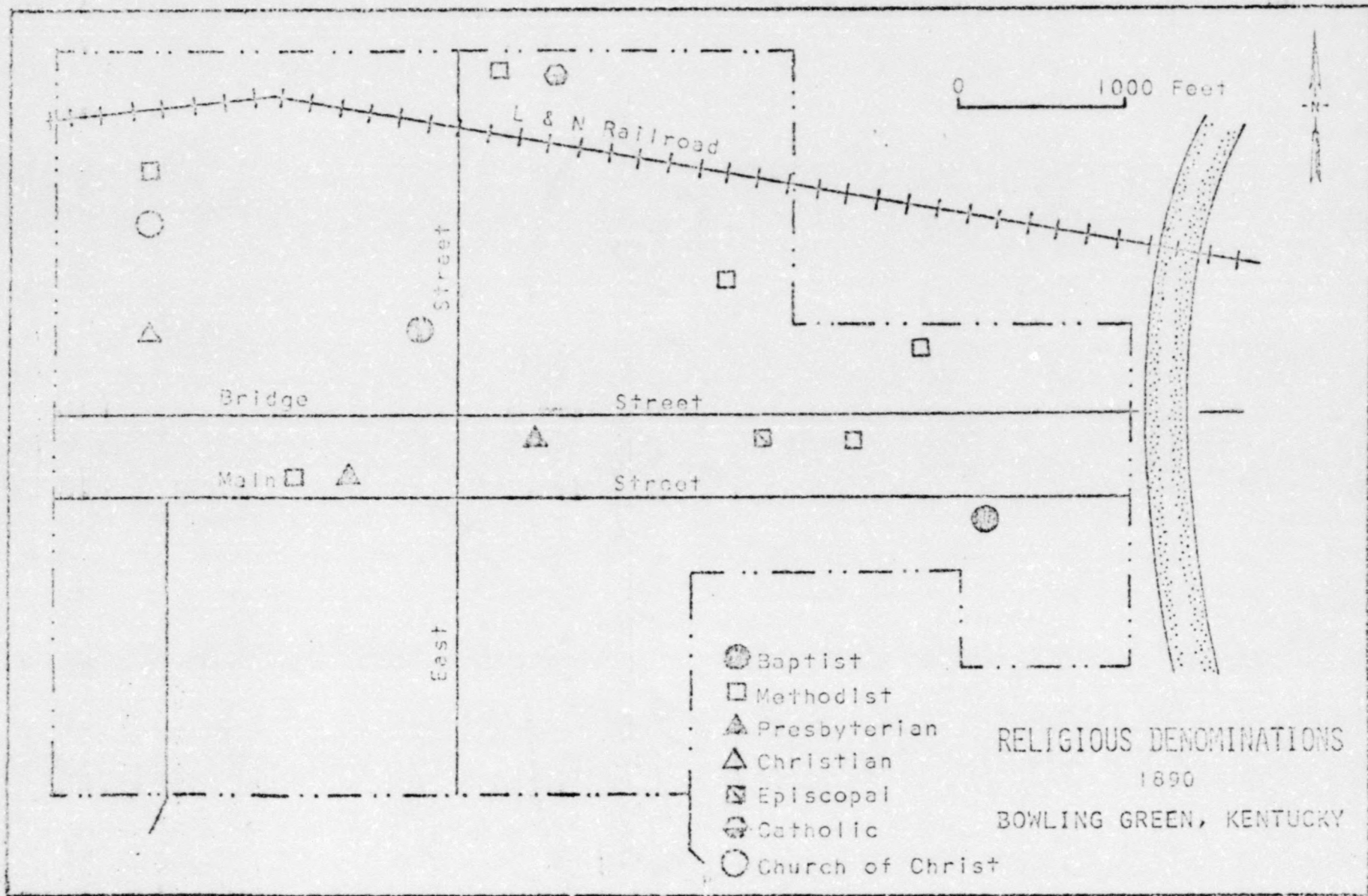
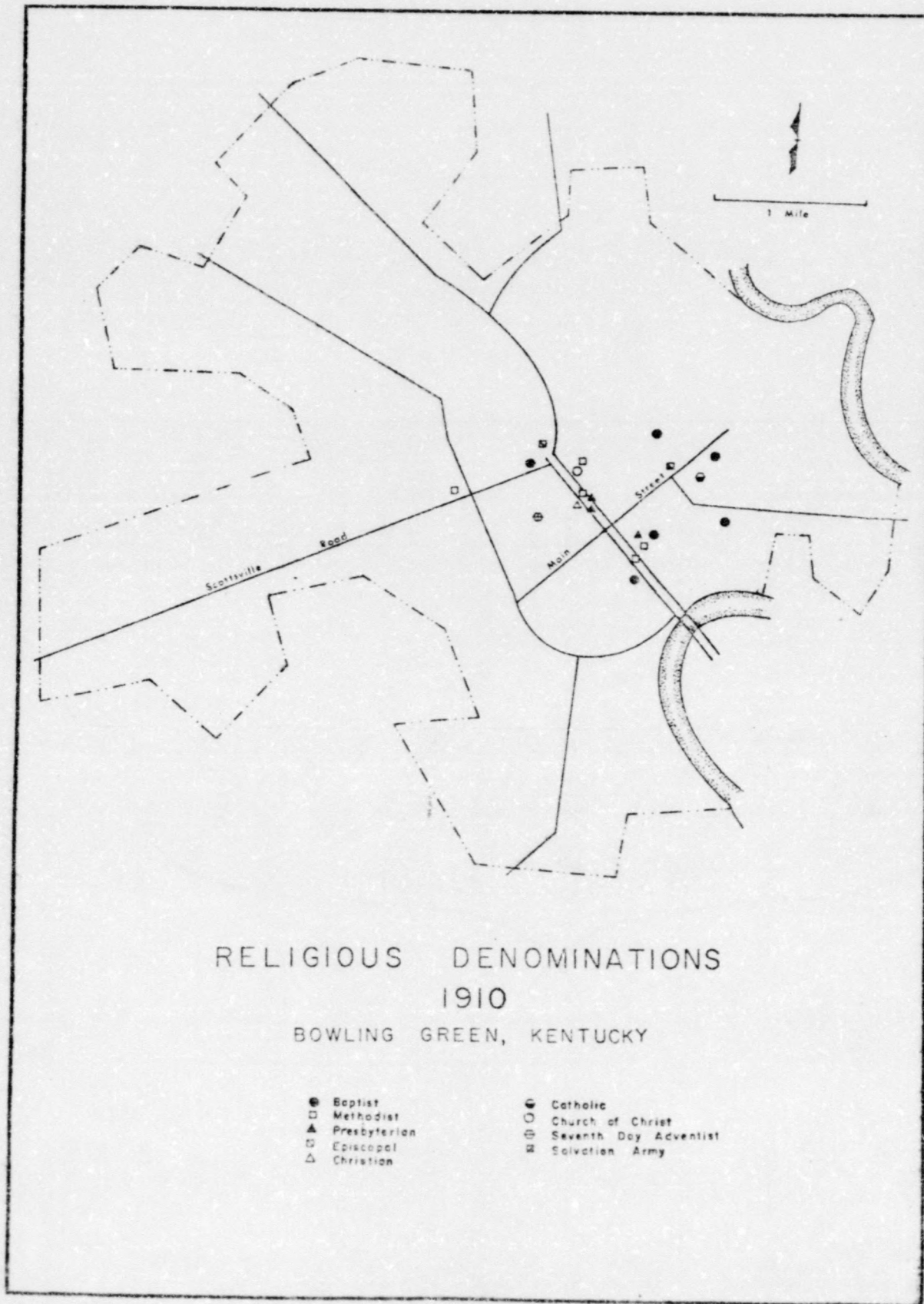


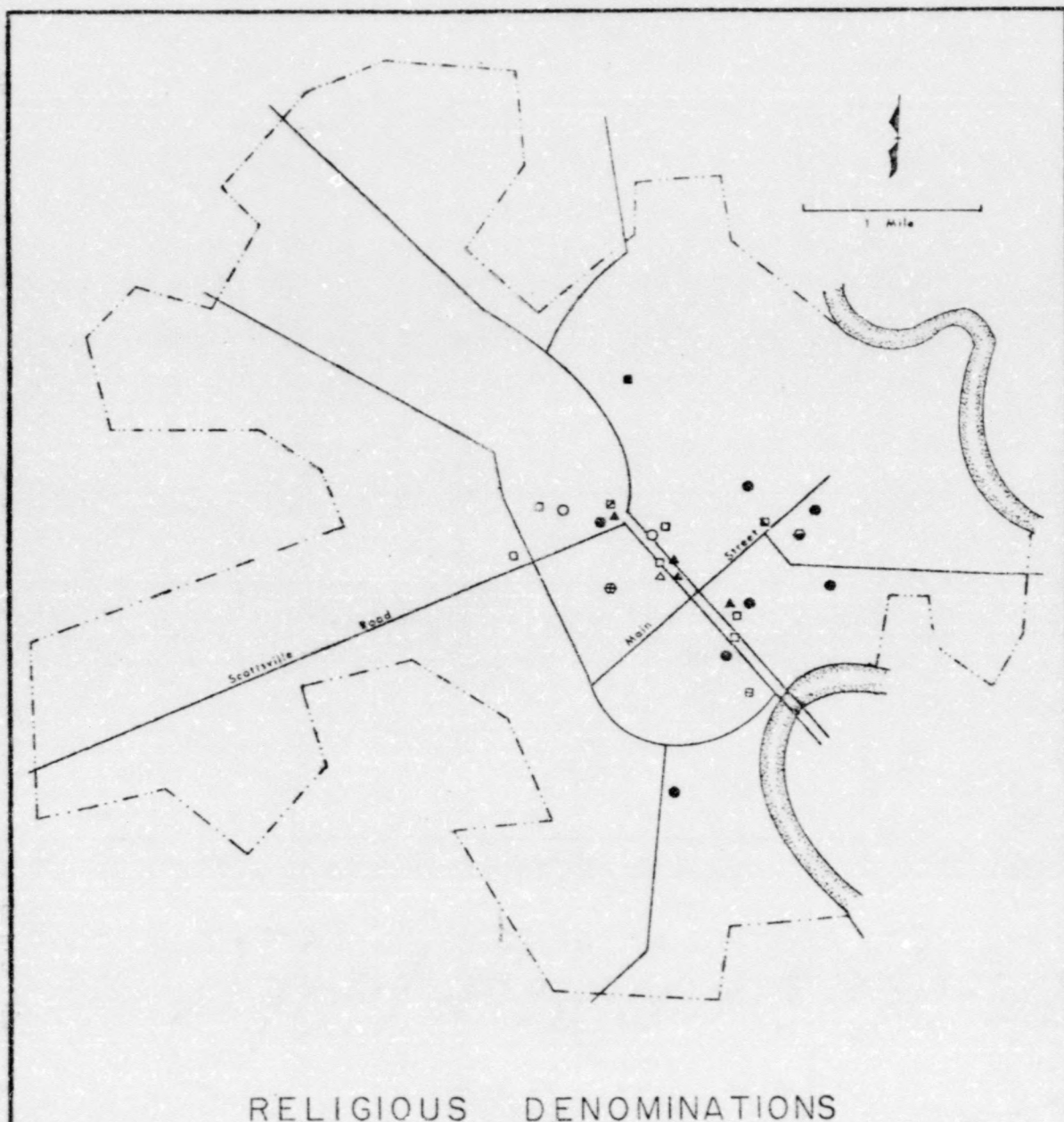
PLATE XI

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
1850
BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY



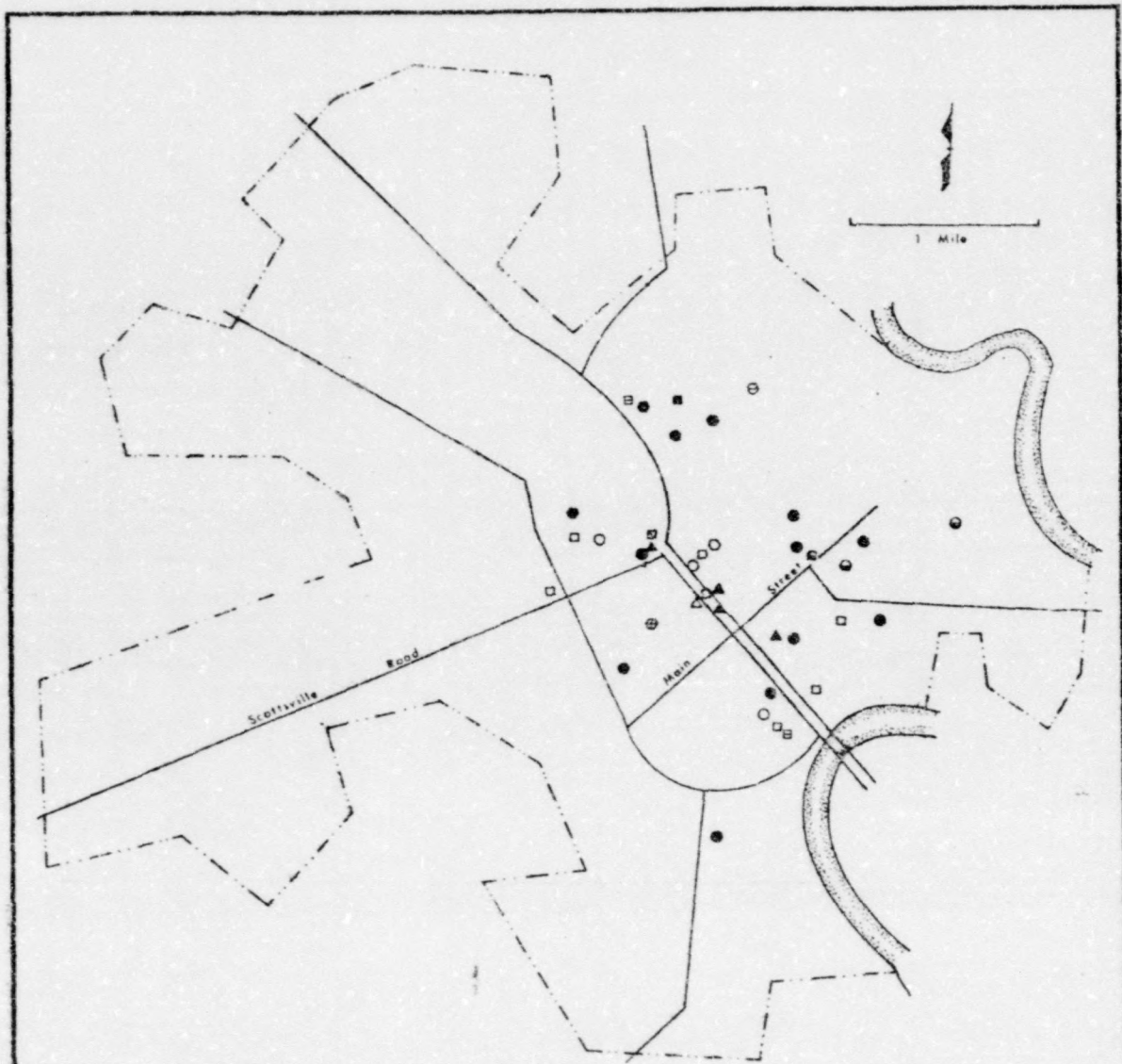






RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
1930
BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| ● Baptist | ☒ Salvation Army |
| □ Methodist | ⊙ Catholic |
| ▲ Presbyterian | ○ Church of Christ |
| ⊞ Episcopal | ⊕ Seventh Day Adventist |
| △ Christian | ■ Union |



RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
1950
BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| ● Baptist | ☐ Salvation Army |
| ☐ Methodist | ● Church of God |
| ▲ Presbyterian | ○ Nazarene |
| ☐ Episcopal | ⊙ Non-denominational |
| △ Christian | ⊠ Pentecostal |
| ⊙ Catholic | ⊞ Jehovah's Witness |
| ○ Church of Christ | ■ Union |
| ⊕ Seventh Day Adventist | |

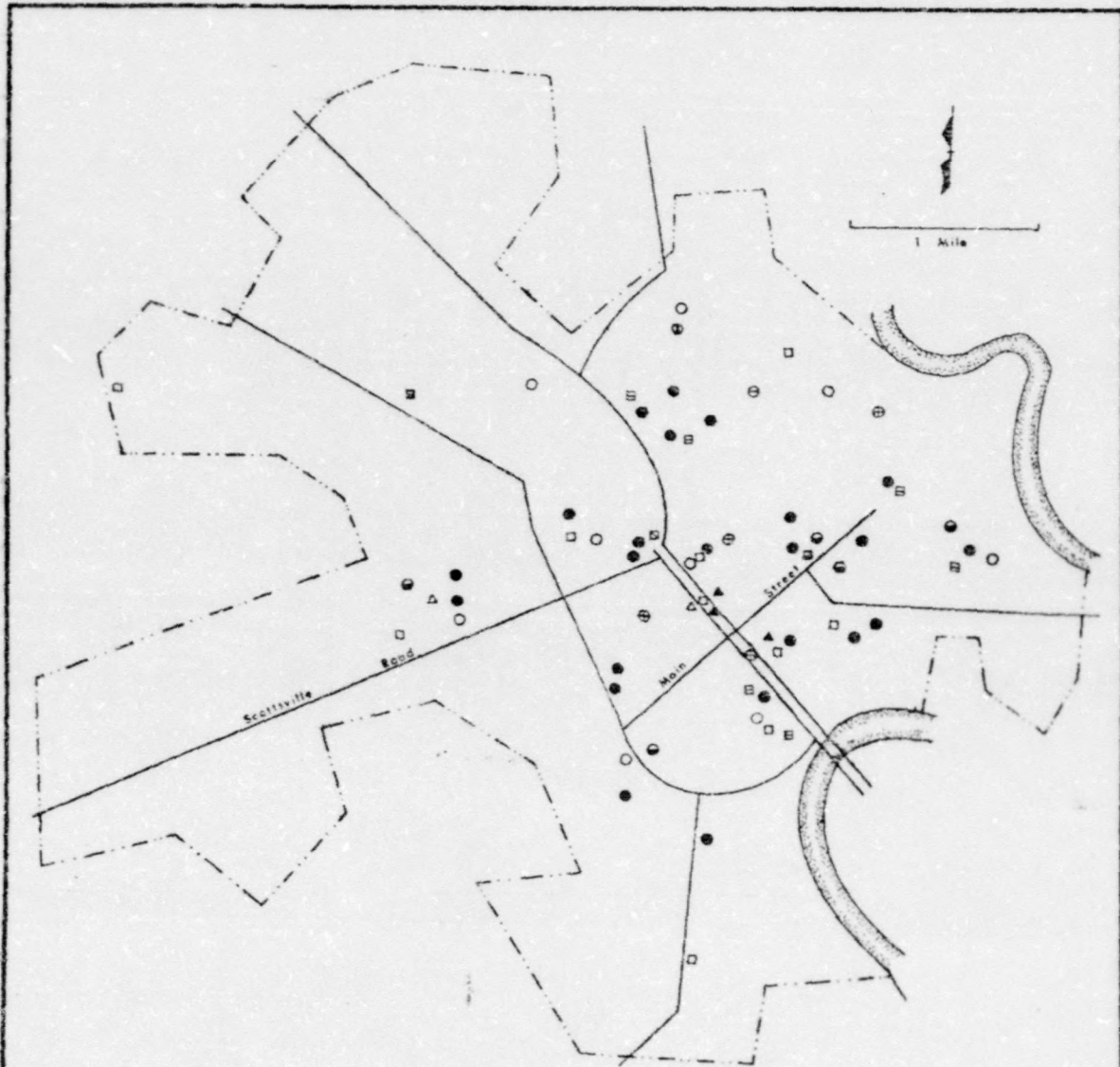
very rapidly and had more churches than any other denomination, a distinction they still hold today. The greatest growth period for Baptist churches in the urban center took place between 1930 and 1970 when twelve churches were established (see Plates XV through XVII). Most of these were established on the periphery of the city.

In 1853 the first Catholic priest was assigned to Bowling Green and the first church of this denomination was opened in 1858. In 1970 a second Catholic church was dedicated in Bowling Green. All the Catholic churches of the study area have been located in the urban center, as is true of the Episcopal denomination, whose only church was established in 1831 and is in Bowling Green.

The first Church of Christ established in the urban center was erected in 1880. Only two more churches of this denomination were established until 1950. Between 1950 and 1970, however, an additional five were established. All of the newly established churches of this denomination were erected on the periphery of the city.

Beginning in 1950 a host of smaller religious sects--Church of God, Gospel, and Pentecostal--began to locate in Bowling Green. These denominations, for the most part, were located in blighted or low income areas near the core of the urban center (see Plate XVII). It is noticeable that these smaller sects seem to prefer urban locations as only one has ever been established in a rural location in the study area. All of the others are in the urban center.

Those churches that located in the urban center when it was first established are still located within the core of the urban center. Few new churches choose to locate in the core area because



RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS
1970
BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| ● Baptist | ⊕ Gospel |
| □ Methodist | ⊗ Church of God |
| ▲ Presbyterian | ○ Nazarene |
| ⊠ Episcopalian | ⊙ Nondenominational |
| △ Christian | ⊠ Pentecostal |
| ⊙ Catholic | ⊕ Jehovah's Witness |
| ○ Church of Christ | ⊙ Mormon |
| ⊕ Seventh Day Adventist | ⊠ Lutheran |
| ⊠ Salvation Army | |

of the high cost of property and distance from residential neighborhoods. It seems that the only denominations that choose core locations are the religious sects that frequently rent a building and establish a "store-front" church,²⁰ not usually catering to the established middle class.

Recently established churches generally choose periphery locations, possibly because land is relatively cheaper and more readily available. The location is closer to residential areas that do not already have an established church.

The distribution of churches in the study area shows each denomination with its own locale from which it grew. Rural churches seem to have reached their maximum extent and the few new rural churches being established today are generally located close to the urban center. New urban churches seem to locate on the periphery of Bowling Green reflecting the movement of population within the county.

This areal arrangement also can be noted in the style of church architecture, which is examined in the next chapter.

²⁰Churches that occupy a vacant or abandoned commercial building for a place of worship.

CHAPTER III

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

Every religion must communicate itself by symbols. The Protestant symbols were born in the Reformation during that period of revolt against one form of religion and the formalizing of another. One result of this changing of symbols was a change in attitude toward the outward architectural symbols of the previous centuries. A simplified architectural style replaced the large ornate medieval cathedrals; and the emphasis was placed on worship rather than on elaborate symbolism. Forms of Protestant worship as well as style of architecture were carried to the New World by the Western European immigrants. The essential simplicity of Protestant architecture that manifested itself in the American landscape was, to be sure, a consequence of both design and necessity. Generally the hard life of the frontier did not lend itself to excess in material expression.

Church architectural style as found in the landscape appears to take on a non-denominational character. The evidence would indicate that all denominations tend to copy conventional styles in accordance to the whims of the architects, the building committees, and the donors.²¹

²¹Hotchkiss, Areal Pattern of Religious Institutions in Cincinnati, p. 93.

Within the study area, little difference in architectural designs can be observed among those churches built by one denomination compared to those built by another. A difference can be observed, however, between those churches built at one period in time as compared to those built during another period. In this chapter an attempt will be made to categorize and explain these style differences. Because there has been a difference in the type of architectural designs used in rural churches as compared to those in the urban setting, the rural and the urban church will be considered separately.

Rural Church Architecture

Rural churches, for the most part, are conservative both in the philosophy of their members and in their visible architectural form.²² During the period of earliest settlement church architecture is usually simple and functional in design. As an area develops the architecture reflects the changes of the area, generally by becoming more ornate and elaborate in design, even if the design has no functional purpose.²³

Rural church architectural design changes can be noted in the study area at different time periods. In this study changes will be discussed in five chronological periods. The first period is that of the earliest church construction, and is characterized by basic functional simplicity. The second and third periods' focus will be

²²Kenyon L. Butterfield, The Country Church and the Problem (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1911), p. 75.

²³W. Lloyd Warner, Social Life of a Modern Community (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 108.

on design change and the use of sawed lumber. The fourth period is most noticeable by the advent of non-functional additions and ornate gingerbread. The last period is that of what might be called "modern" architecture.

Earliest Church Architecture

The first churches in the study area were, undoubtedly, of log construction, as the oldest known church in the study area (Old Union) was originally a log structure.²⁴

One log church building (Oak Forest Baptist) is still in existence in the study area (see Figure 1). Although the outside of this structure has been covered with aluminum siding, the interior is of exposed hewed logs with mud chinking. The pulpit is located in the center of the rear of the room with the mourners bench situated to the side of the pulpit (see Figure 2). This church is approximately 28 feet wide and 36 feet long. A church of this type is limited, both in width and length, by the length of available logs.

This church building with the exception of the exterior siding and the electric lights is still very much as it was at the time of construction. It typifies early church architectural design used in the study area during early settlement and in a somewhat modified form remained popular until the 1860's.

The second period of church architecture is characterized, in part, by the use of sawed lumber. It followed, generally, the same basic design as the log building. These churches were narrow and

²⁴H. C. Vanderpool, History of Old Union Missionary Baptist Church (Tompkinsville, Kentucky: Monroe County Press, 1966), p. 11.



Fig. 1.--Exterior view of Oak Forest Baptist Church. A log building that has been covered with a siding. (near Richardsville, Kentucky).

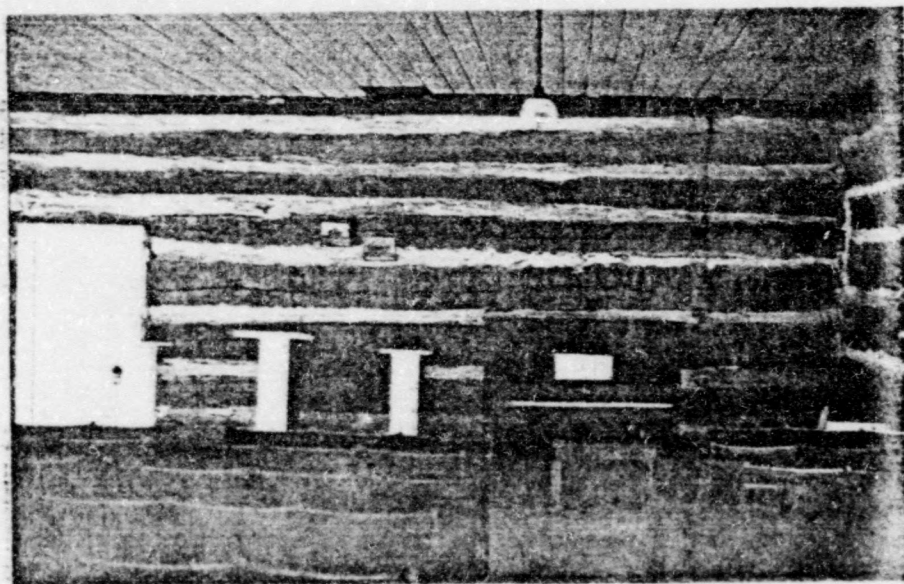


Fig. 2.--Interior view of Oak Forest Baptist Church, with exposed logs and mud chinking. (Near Richardsville, Kentucky.)

relatively short in length (32 feet by 40 feet) with a low sloping roof, requiring a minimal amount of constructional material. They were designed to seat from thirty to forty people. The Old Zion Baptist Church is a typical example of church architecture during this period (see Figure 3). It followed the basic design used by rural churches in the study area from about 1860 through 1870.

The third period of distinctive architectural style began in the late 1870's and continued through the decade of the 1880's. The most noticeable feature associated with this period was the addition of a second front door (see Figure 4). Two doors were located in the church front spaced at an equal distance from the center. Some churches, however, did have their doors located at a distance from the center of the front, which allowed access into and out of the church via two aisles, whereas the churches with the doors situated along either side of the center permitted access to only one aisle. During this architectural phase, the church structures were wider and somewhat longer (38 feet wide by 50 feet long), to accommodate a larger congregation. The roof was constructed with a steeper pitch, although this change in pitch seems to serve no useful function.

The rural churches of the study area constructed during this period adhered to this common architectural form although many have been altered in recent years by addition of appendages.

The fourth period of rural church architectural style is characterized by a more ornate design consisting of spires and sculptured gingerbread adorning the front eaves (see Figure 5). Generally, there were more than one room to the structure. An office

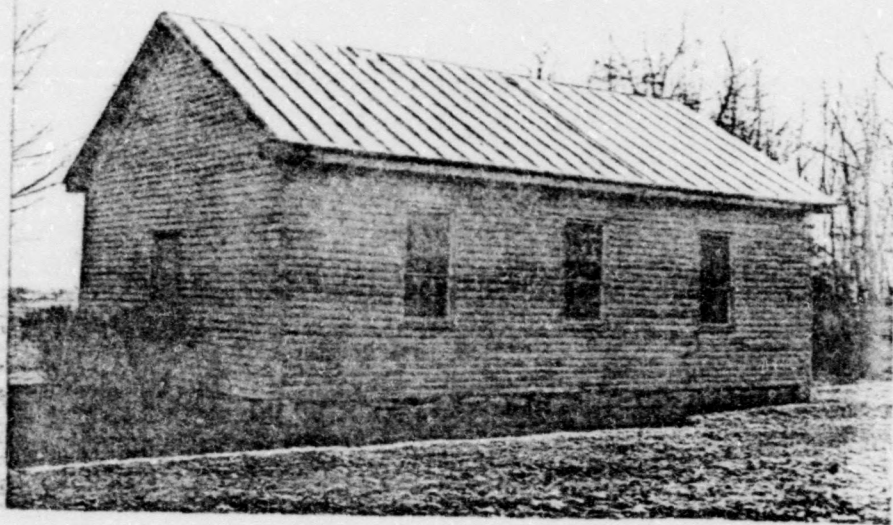


Fig. 3.--Old Zion Baptist Church, constructed in 1868 (near Woodburn, Kentucky).

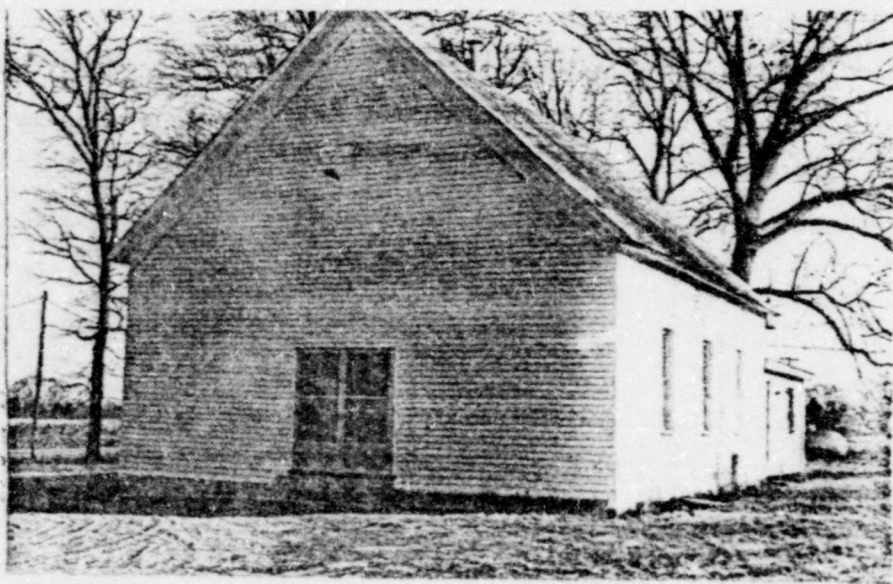


Fig. 4.--Lewis Chapel Methodist Church. Constructed in 1880, it has a greater pitch to the gable (near Hadley, Kentucky).

or school rooms jutted off the main part of the building at the rear giving the structure the shape of a "L."



Fig. 5.--Bethel Methodist Church constructed in 1892. Note the bell tower and window designs (near Polkville, Kentucky).

Modern rural church architecture is characterized more by the building materials than the outward design, as there seems to be no noticeable or special architectural design that is representative of modern rural architecture. But there has been a change in the materials used in the structure. Rural churches are being built of a more permanent material such as brick and aluminum siding, as well as native stone (see Figure 6).

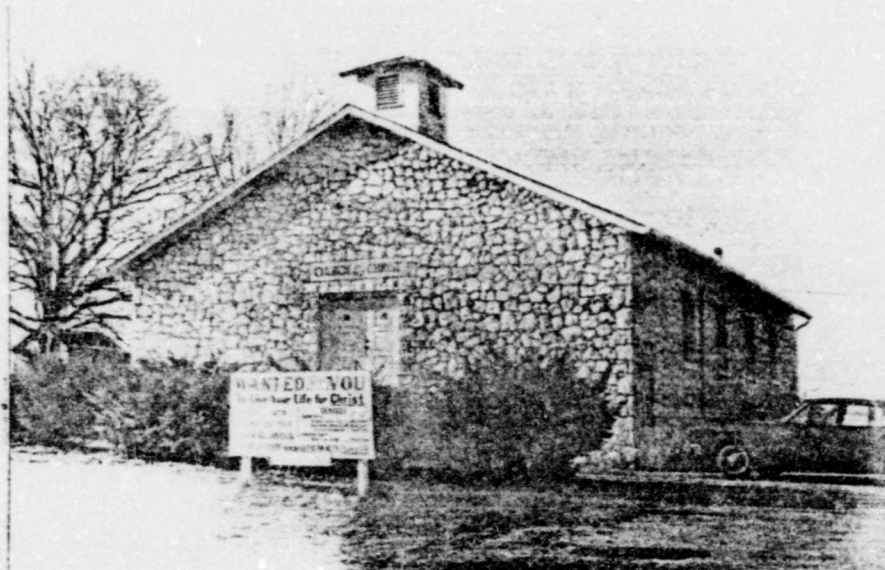


Fig. 6.--Richardsville Church of Christ constructed in 1957 of native stone. (Richardsville, Kentucky.)

Rural Negro Church Architecture

Most rural Negro churches in the study area were erected between 1879 and 1914. Their construction followed the common white architectural design of the day (see Figure 7).

Though the Negro borrowed his architectural design from the white man there is one feature that stands out on rural Negro churches--the bell tower. Although it is not necessarily large, it seems to be a very noticeable feature regardless of denomination or period of construction. The same phenomena was observed in Montgomery County, Tennessee.²⁵

²⁵ Neilam D. Adams, "An Enumeration of the Churches of Montgomery County, Tennessee" (An unpublished paper, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee, 1969).



Fig. 7.--Mt. Union Baptist, a typical Negro church with a bell tower (near Martinsville, Kentucky).

The bell has a strong symbolic meaning to the Negro and it seems to have had its origin in slavery. The slaves were not allowed to assemble unless permission was granted by the slaveholder. Tolling of the bell signified to the slaves as well as the slave overseers that permission had been granted for an assembly of the slaves.²⁶ As a consequence the bell, being more a feature of the rural Negro churches, continues to be used for funerals, Sunday School and Sunday services as well as to note other mass assemblies for the Negroes.

²⁶This theory was advanced by Rev. J. E. Jones, a Negro minister, Pastor Seventh Street Baptist Church, Associate Coordinator of Intercultural Studies, and Director, Afro-American Studies, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, in a private interview in February, 1971.

Dual-Purpose Church Buildings

A different architectural design than those previously mentioned is the dual-purpose church that was constructed during the 1860's and 1880's. These structures were designed to serve as a house of worship as well as a lodge hall. This design is very distinct from other designs in that the structure is of two stories, or a story-and-a-half with the lower portion being the church sanctuary and the upper level serving as the lodge hall (see Figure 8). There was an entrance at both the front and rear of the structure, with the front opening into the sanctuary and the rear entrance leading to the upper floor. The Green River Union Church, a story-and-a-half design that also served as a lodge, is shown in Figure 9. The church's former design is not readily noticeable today, as it has only one floor. This is due to a remodeling that removed the upper floor, extended the windows and closed one of the front doors.

Urban Church Architecture

Bowling Green, Kentucky, with a population in 1970 of 37,757,²⁷ is the only urban center within the study area. Within the city church architecture seems to have no particular style or design. It is as one writer described, nondescriptive.²⁸ However, compared with rural churches in the study area, some generalizations can be made. Urban churches seem to have a more ornate design than rural

²⁷Park City Daily News, Bowling Green, Kentucky, February 15, 1971, p. 1.

²⁸Van Ogden Vogt, Art and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 9.



Fig. 8.--Bethany Baptist Church, a dual-purpose structure that serves as a church sanctuary and as a lodge hall (near Alvaton, Kentucky).

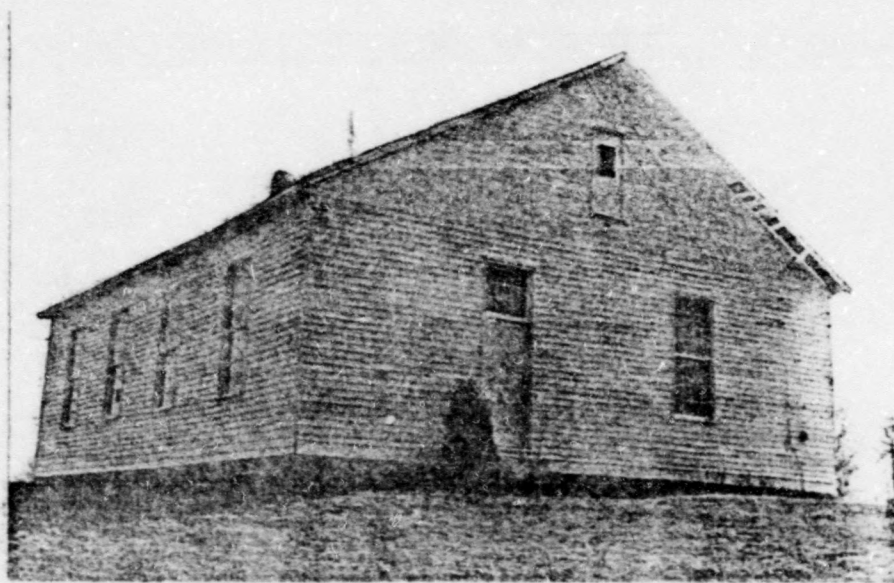


Fig. 9.--Green River Union, former story-and-a-half dual-purpose structure, that has been remodeled into a single story building (near Richardsville, Kentucky).

churches. Urban churches appear to be larger than rural churches and urban churches appear to be constructed of more durable building materials than rural churches. The "store-front" church is a feature found only in the urban location.

Little is known of the architecture of the first churches of Bowling Green. The first meeting house was known as the United Baptist Meeting House and was located on the northside of the Public Square (see Plate X). This structure was, undoubtedly, similar to those churches located in the rural areas of the county as Bowling Green was only a rural village with a population of 821 in 1830.

In 1818 the Methodist church was located on the east side of the Public Square. This church has been described as an unpretentious brick building.²⁹

The oldest known church building still in existence in Bowling Green was the first Catholic church--a weatherboard structure that was used from the construction date in 1858 until 1863 when the newer brick sanctuary was completed (see Figure 10).

By 1870 the population of Bowling Green had grown to 4,574 people. The city had now developed a distinct urban character and this became reflected in the architectural designs of the churches. The Presbyterian church was now located at the corner of 10th and State Street and had been completed in 1866 (see Figure 11). This

²⁹"The State Street Methodists Lead in all Big Plans," History of Bowling Green Churches (taken from the Development of the Times Journal, 1925), pp. 1-2.

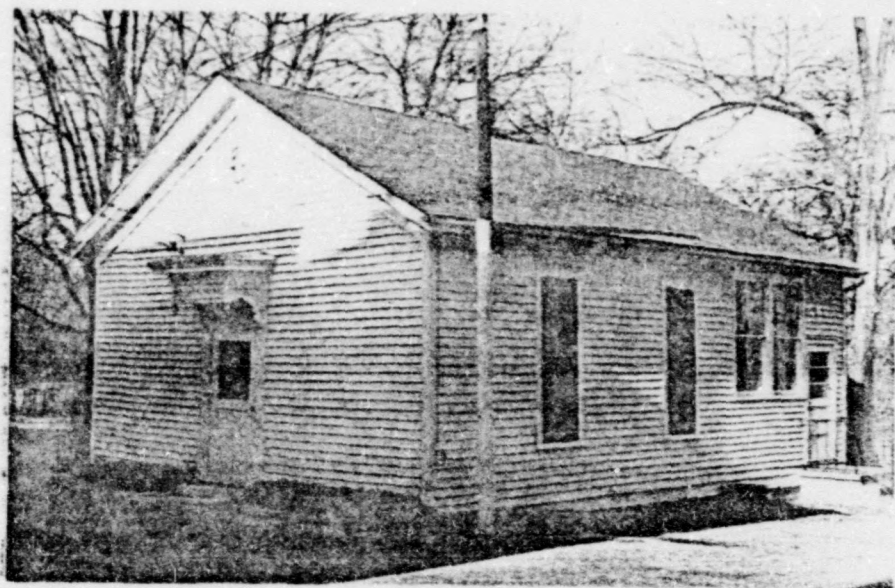


Fig. 10.--The first Catholic church within the study area. Constructed in 1858. Still stands on Church Street today.

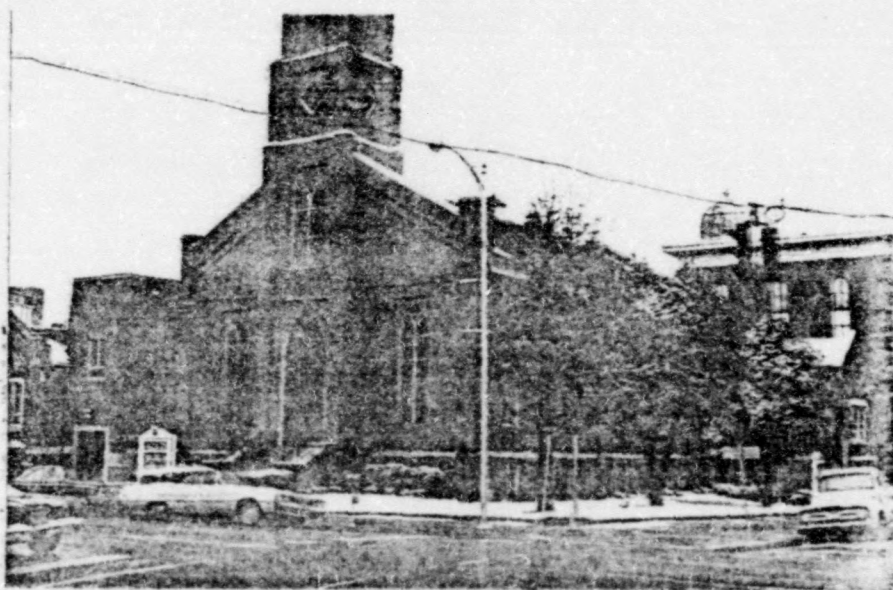


Fig. 11.--The Presbyterian church of Bowling Green, Kentucky. Note the spire and ornate design. Constructed of brick in 1866.

church demonstrates an obvious fact that the "regular" denominations³⁰ within the urban setting constructed larger structures with many non-functional features such as large spires and ornate design. State Street Methodist Church constructed in 1852 was, for example, a much larger church than those built in the rural areas during the same period.

There is little difference in the urban center between "regular" churches built in the 1860's and those built in the early 1900's. There seems to be no noticeable difference between the architecture of Negro urban and white urban churches.

There is, however, an observable difference in the architectural design of modern churches--those erected in the past twenty years--and those erected prior to this time. The design of the modern churches shows less mass and tends toward greater utility. Even where spires are used they are not of the bulk mass type but thin in design (see Figure 12).

³⁰A "regular" denomination, as classified by Hotchkiss, must have five out of the six following marks: (1) historical--a regular denomination is one which has been established long enough to assure its continuance in the immediate future; (2) ecclesiastical--it is recognized by the United States Census as a denomination or as belonging to a non-denominational statistical group; (3) theological--it does not claim a different source of primary revelation than the Bible (this distinguishes it from Christian Scientists, Mormons, Spiritualists, and so forth); (4) administrative--it practices a regular enrollment of members and keeps at least elementary statistics; (5) psychological--it is governed under a recognized system, not by the personal authority of a founder or prophetic leader; and/or (6) relationship--it belongs to one or another of the recognized national associations of churches, whether middle of the road or conservative. Any denomination which does not meet the above requirements is regarded as "irregular."

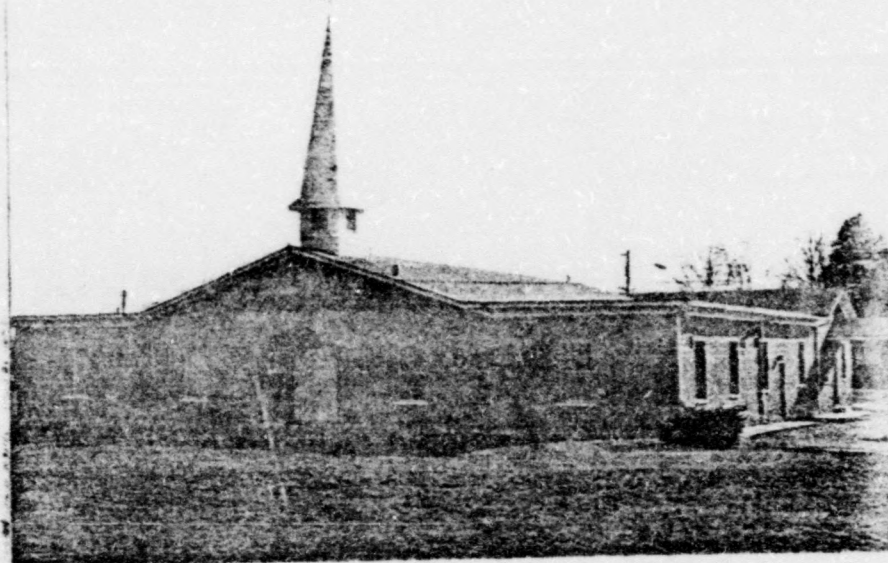


Fig. 12.--West End Church of Christ. Typical modern urban church architectural design. Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Store-front Churches

A structure found in the urban center of the study area and not found in the rural location is the "store-front" church.³¹ These churches frequently rent their building, as they are not generally affiliated with other institutions, usually have a small congregation and are classified as an "irregular" denomination. These churches must rely upon their congregation for all their funds. Therefore, they cannot afford the high cost of building a new structure.

Most store-front churches are located in the blighted areas of a city.³² The availability of a building that will serve the

³¹Refers to churches that occupy a vacant or abandoned commercial building for a place of worship.

³²Thomas A. Price, Negro Store-Front Churches in San Francisco (San Francisco: San Francisco State University, 1969), p. 7.

purpose of a church, generally determines its architectural design (see Figure 13).

Another feature noted of the store-front church in the study area is its temporary nature. This writer noted four store-front churches in the study area in June 1970. By January 1971, when a check was conducted on these four churches, two had closed and were no longer in operation, while one new one had opened (see Figure 14).

Rural church architecture within the study area has developed from small functional structures in the beginning to larger more ornate designs. Building materials have changed from logs to bricks and stones. Urban churches generally are larger and more ornate than rural churches and the urban center is the location of various store-front churches.

The distribution of churches appears to have been affected by schisms within the different church denominations of the study area. This topic will be discussed in the following chapter.

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Fig. 13.--Seventh Street Full Gospel Church. A "store-front" church in Bowling Green, Kentucky.



Fig. 14.--A recently established "store-front" church in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

CHAPTER IV

SCHISMS THAT HAVE AFFECTED CHURCH DISTRIBUTION

It would appear that as long as there has been organized religion there has occurred organizational fragmentation. It has been noted in the scope of this study that most of the organized denominations within the study area are a consequence of religious fragmentation and such fragmentation or schisms have had a direct effect on the distribution of churches. In many instances two churches are situated within close proximity of each other as a result of such a schism. Schisms will be considered in the various religious denominations as they occurred chronologically in the study area.

The Presbyterian-Cumberland Presbyterian Schism

It appears that the first religious fragmentation in the study area occurred in 1810 as a schism between two factions of the Presbyterian church. One faction that had been active in spreading the gospel in the frontier areas of Kentucky and Tennessee was made up of itinerant uneducated ministers with little or no religious training. The other faction represented the old established Presbyterian doctrine that required each minister to be a graduate from college and to become apprenticed under an ordained minister for

a period of two years.³³ These requirements placed an undue strain on the frontier as few trained and educated ministers chose to seek frontier churches. In addition, the itinerant ministers did not preach the doctrine of "fatalism" that was taught by the Presbyterian discipline. As a result, in 1810 the first group broke from the established Presbyterian church, held their first meeting in Dickson, Tennessee, and decided to set up their own synod. Feelings ran high within the Presbyterian churches of the Cumberland Territory of which the study area was a portion, and many of the Presbyterian churches chose to join the new synod that was formed. The new frontier synod became known as the Cumberland Synod. It was, however, not accepted into the Presbyterian hierarchy and so today it is known as the Cumberland Presbyterian church.

Most of the Presbyterian churches that were affected by this division were in rural locations. In the urban location of Bowling Green most of the ministers were trained in Presbyterian doctrine and were able to hold their congregations in line with the established views.

One of the oldest Presbyterian churches (Mt. Olivet) chose to join the Cumberland Synod as did the church in Smiths Grove. Eventually there were six Cumberland Presbyterian churches in the study area; in addition, some Union churches housed a Cumberland Presbyterian congregation.³⁴ By 1888 the Cumberland Presbyterian closed their church in Smiths Grove, and later the one located at

³³T. C. Blake, The Old Log House (Nashville: The Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House, 1897), p. 3.

³⁴Various interviews with older citizens of the study area.

Pleasant Grove near Rockfield was closed. At present there are only four Cumberland Presbyterian churches in the study area--two in rural locations and two in Bowling Green. In each case one is Negro and one is white. No new Cumberland Presbyterian or regular Presbyterian congregations have been established in the study area since 1908. It would seem that the schism has weakened both denominations.

The Methodist Schism

The Methodist church formed as the result of a schism within the English Episcopal church. In later years there have been schisms within the Methodist organization itself. The first occurred in 1861 because of the growing division within the United States that eventually resulted in the Civil War. At the outbreak of this war, Methodism split into two different sects known as Methodist North and Methodist South.

Each of these groups had followers in the study area, and each formed separate churches. The schism was not healed at the end of the war, and the distribution of Methodist churches within the study area shows the results. This schism caused the distribution of Methodist churches to frequently be located in pairs, such as Friendship and Farview; Mt. Pisgah and Cherry's Chapel, or Bethel and Flat Rock (see Plate XVIII). Until these churches were united into the United Methodist Church in 1935 one was a Methodist North and the other a Methodist South church. The same phenomenon was present in Bowling Green, with State Street Methodist being a Methodist North church and Kerr Memorial a Methodist South.

In 1921 there developed another schism within the Methodist church over the ruling authority of the hierarchy and how much power they should exercise over the congregation. One group favored the congregation having absolute authority, while the other favored the discipline of the Methodist church as set up by John Wesley. The disagreement was too serious to be resolved and resulted in the breaking away by the first group which formed the Free Methodist denomination. This group is Methodist in doctrine, yet free from the discipline of the central authority. The splinter group also found followers in the study area with three Free Methodist churches being established. Only two churches remain in operation at the present--one in the rural sector and the other in Bowling Green.

A third schism in the Methodist church was confined within the study area. Within the Methodist congregation at Rolling Springs, Kentucky, a dissident group formed over literature being used in the Sunday School classes. Rather than continue in disagreement the group chose to build Valley View Free Methodist. Although the church is called Free Methodist, it is not a member of the Free Methodist Union, nor does it rely upon this organization to provide them with a minister. It also is not a part of the United Methodist District which governs the other Methodist churches.

The Negro-White Schism

The first Negro church in the study area was formed in 1872, despite the fact that there were Negroes in Warren County for a number of decades. In 1830, for example, there were 800 Negroes in the

study area and this number had increased to 4,346 by 1850.³⁵ One ought not conclude that Negroes had no religion or at least no place for worship before the appearance of their own churches. Prior to 1870, Negroes were received into the same churches as the Whites and were extended the same privileges and punishments as the White members as can be noted in the selections from the minutes of Old Union Baptist Church:³⁶

July 18, 1849: The church granted the request of brother Nelson, a black man, that he no longer be a member of the church.

September 14, 1850: The case of Sister Lucy, a black woman, was taken up and dismissed by excluding her from the church.

February 21, 1852: The church voted to investigate the case of Tony, a black brother.

April 17, 1852: The case of Tony was taken up he is retained in full fellowship, the charges not being sustained which Brother E. H. Merrit brought against him.

April 17, 1853: Henry and Anner, black people, were received by Baptism.

Negroes not only attended the White Baptist churches but Methodist churches as well. State Street Methodist Church in Bowling Green had a gallery where the Negroes sat. The gallery was not removed until 1867.³⁷

Why the Negro had not broken from the white church and started his own prior to 1872 when the Negro obtained his freedom is

³⁵Fifth Census of the United States: 1830, p. 119, and The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850, p. 158.

³⁶Vanderpool, History of Old Union Missionary Baptist Church, p. 74.

³⁷Sallie A. McElroy, History of the Churches of Bowling Green, a typewritten paper, 1947, p. 13.

a matter of tradition and economics. With the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the Negro could not make the sharp break with tradition nor was he forced to by his white brothers. Political freedom did not provide for the Negro an occupation nor the financial assets to build and maintain a place of worship. For almost a decade he continued his association with his former slaveholder's congregation. As the Negroes gained some economic freedom, with ownership of land and possession of jobs, and with the idea of separate but equal schools, the Negro made the break in 1872 and began to establish his own churches in the study area.

The Supreme Court of the United States ruled in 1954 that racial segregation was constitutionally and morally wrong. Since that time many institutions have been integrated in the study area--schools, hospitals, businesses as well as governmental services. Churches, however, remain largely segregated. Within the study area there has remained a religious separation of black and white congregations--Negroes worshiping in totally black congregations and whites in totally white congregations.

The location of two churches of the same denomination in close proximity is often the result of the Negro-white schism (see Plate VII). A similar situation was noted by the author in an earlier study conducted in rural Tennessee.³⁸

Very few new Negro churches have been established in Warren County during the past seventy years, the last one being constructed in 1944. The rural Negro churches are, for the most part, in a poor

³⁸Adams, "An Enumeration of the Churches of Montgomery County, Tennessee," an unpublished paper, 1969.

state of repair. The rural Negro population within the study area is diminishing, and the reduction in membership has placed a severe financial strain on all congregations. Soon many of these rural churches must be repaired or rebuilt. When this time comes, it appears to this researcher that some of these churches will be discontinued, combined with other Negro churches to form one congregation, or assimilated with a white congregation.

Many of the rural churches have survived for a number of years while others have failed to survive. There are several factors that tend to contribute to the longevity of a rural church.

CHAPTER V

LONGEVITY OF RURAL CHURCHES

It has been observed by this researcher that the rural church often tends to continue in operation long after it has served a useful community need. The persistence of the rural church as a vibrant institution in many depopulated areas appears to be a result of one or more of the following factors: 1) the church cemetery, 2) the family association, 3) community identity, 4) members' personal involvement, and 5) the minister's involvement.

The Church Cemetery

The churchyard cemetery is one major factor favoring the retention of the rural church within the study area, even after the church seems economically and socially unnecessary. One writer reported an instance in Indiana in which a church had only one member--an elderly lady, who drove by two other rural churches of the same denomination, with the same minister pastoring all three churches, to attend the church that was at the same location as the cemetery where her deceased husband was buried.³⁹

In the study area many of the older rural churches own a cemetery. In each case the cemetery is well kept and recent burials

³⁹Everett M. Rogers, Social Change in Society (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1960), p. 214.

are evident. Cemeteries seem, therefore, to be a major contributor to survival of rural churches in the study area.

Community Identity

When asking directions in the rural area of Warren County, one is often directed to such landmarks as Rolling Springs Store, Ellis School, or Mt. Zion Church, only to not recognize the location upon arriving because the local store, school or church building has been removed and only the name remains.

Identity is a second major factor that seems to contribute to the survival of an established church in a rural location. Many family traditions are so attached to these local landmarks that they will seek to maintain them for the sake of identity long after these landmarks cease to serve the community. This problem has been encountered elsewhere when seeking to close rural schools and consolidate them into larger units.⁴⁰

Such place locations as Greenhill, Boiling Springs, Riverside, or Bay's Fork are, today, more identified by their church than any other feature. The church represents the last vestige of identity in these former rural communities.

Family Names

Family names are another form of church identity. Many of the older rural churches of the study area are named for the donor of

⁴⁰Charles Horace Hamilton and William Edward Garnett, The Role of the Church in Rural Community Life in Virginia (Blackburg, Virginia: Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station, 1938), p. 191.

the land, donor of the building, or the name of a prominent family of the community. Such names as Ray's Branch, Penn's Chapel, Cherry's Chapel, White's Chapel and Hall's Chapel all represent family names attached to churches within the study area.

Those families that carry the name frequently feel an obligation to attend their namesake church, even when it means several miles of traveling and higher-than-normal contributions,⁴¹ merely to maintain the family namesake church.

This researcher had the experience of talking with the in-law of one family whose church bears the family name.⁴² When questioned as to why and how this church continued to operate with such low membership, the informant stated: "As long as there is a Smith⁴³ alive, this church will continue to operate. The family itself feels a stronger attachment to the church than to their own family."

This writer, also, has knowledge of three families that live in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and travel a distance of twelve miles to attend the church that bears their family name.

⁴¹Higher-than-normal refers to more than the ten percent of a person's income that most Christian religions feel a person should tithe.

⁴²A private interview with an in-law member of a family with the same name as the local church who asked not to be quoted by name.

⁴³Smith is not the real name. The informant asked to remain anonymous.

Members' Personal Involvement

Religion represents a set of ideas and ideals.⁴⁴ Thus, there seems to be reasons why some people attend rural churches even when it is an imposition for them, and when the church performs minimal services for the congregation.

The Friendship Baptist Church has a membership of forty-seven.⁴⁵ A great number of these people live in Smiths Grove and Bowling Green and travel the distance of about five and eight miles, respectively, each Sunday to this small, rural church that does not have a cemetery nor does it have a family name and it is not a point of identity on the landscape.

The pastor of this church lives in Louisville, Kentucky, and is unavailable to the congregation other than his preaching services each Sunday.⁴⁶ Why would members attend a church that offers only this type service when many churches of the same denomination are available? At this church the membership is so small that each member has an official position on the governing board of the church, and each has authority they would not likely acquire at a larger church. It is simply a case of being a big fish in a small pond rather than a small fish in a large pond.

⁴⁴J. O. Hertzler, "Religious Institutions," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 256 (March 1948), pp. 1-13.

⁴⁵Annual, Warren Association of Baptists, 1970, p. 28.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Ministers' Involvement

Why do ministers continue to pastor a church that is unable to support programs necessary to increase membership to improve the church? This question was posed to several ministers of small, rural churches. Some replies were: "I feel God has called me to serve these people," or "These people need a pastor and I feel an obligation to serve them." However, when asked if they would continue to pastor these churches if it meant serving in a gratuitous status, the answer was frequently, "No."

It seems that in the rural portion of the study area a large percentage of the churches are pastored by part-time ministers who earn their basic livelihood from a non-ministerial occupation. Pastoring a church is a Sunday "moonlighting" position, and represents an additional income to the pastor. The pastor does not desire to lead his congregation to consolidation with two or more churches to form one larger unit, as it might possibly delete his position. To be sure, the pastor has a vested economic interest in the continued operation of many small rural churches.

There is a tendency for the congregation of the small rural church to place more importance on the church cemetery, church name or the church as a symbol of the community identity than to the church as a place of worship. Sometimes this is a hindrance to the adjustment to change in a rural community. The church as an institution tends to

retain old values and methods.⁴⁷ This, in turn, is a hindrance to church closure in rural areas where there is "overchurching."⁴⁸

⁴⁷Thomas Ford Hoult, The Sociology of Religion (New York: Dryden, 1958), p. 142.

⁴⁸Where there are too many churches for the number of people present to support them.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

This study has focused upon religion as a variable characteristic of man's culture. It has demonstrated that religion is manifest as a dynamic and visual landscape expression within the areal extent of the study area. An analysis of the areal pattern of the denominational church within Warren County clearly reveals the importance of initial settlement as well as the correlation, through time, of church construction and population change. The form of church architecture was observed as the visual expression of man's ideas to be both a consequence of time and place in the changing geographic landscape.

The study area has had two dynamic periods for church establishment. The first period occurred between 1850 and 1910 in the rural part of the county. The second period took place between 1950 and the present in the urban-suburban area.

Church establishment seems to lag behind population growth in the study area as periods of population growth do not directly correlate with periods of church establishment.

In the study area, it seems that the maximum number of rural churches had been reached by 1930, and since that time there has been an absolute reduction in the number of rural churches. Several factors seem to be causing this reduction. As a matter of simple economics,

small rural churches cannot continue to operate with the increase in cost of construction materials, ministers' salaries, and even maintenance of the structures. This seems to necessitate the closing of many small rural churches, although the decline is not likely to take place at a rapid rate. As was demonstrated in this study there are factors that tend to overcome this negative economic aspect. Two of the more important ones are the family cemetery and the local community.

Within the rural locations of the study area each denomination has its own locale from which it grew. This locale, with few exceptions, shows on today's distribution.

Though people come and go, and the rural population at times remains static, church establishment in the study area has continually been on the increase. The rural area, however, has declined from a maximum of ninety-five churches in 1930 to ninety-two today. This has been more than accounted for with an increase in the number of churches established in the urban-suburban core, where growth has been at a rapid rate since 1950.

What are the prospects for the future of church establishment within the study area? This researcher must conclude that for the rural church the future does not look good. It has been noted that the problems of the rural church is like that of "A dog chasing its tail."⁴⁹ First there is a drop in membership then a corresponding drop in contributions, followed by a drop in services which causes a further reduction in members and a reduction in contributions, etc.

⁴⁹Everett M. Rogers, Social Change in Rural Society (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1960), pp. 228-229.

It has been estimated by one observer that 20,000 rural churches in America closed their doors permanently between 1930 and 1955.⁵⁰ Following this general American trend, there were three rural churches that closed their doors in Warren County during the same period. There is every indication that there will be further reductions in rural churches in the study area. Perhaps the most important reason is that there simply are not enough trained ministers; and, also, the salaries are too low to attract what few trained ministers that might be available. In the study area, for example, one full-time Methodist minister pastors four rural churches to earn a salary of approximately \$4,500.⁵¹ Fewer and fewer young ministers choose to pastor rural churches. As time passes and there are fewer people to support the rural churches some will have to be closed or consolidated with other rural churches to form one larger and more efficient congregation.

It appears likely that churches will continue to be established in the urban area as long as it continues to increase in population. There will be a "spill-over" from the urban center into the rural area by some denominations, as population locates on the periphery of the urban center. It seems that there will not be any increase in churches in the core area of the urban center other than "store-front" churches securing newer "irregular" denominations. One church--The Cumberland Presbyterian--has relocated since this thesis

⁵⁰ James McCleod Carr, Bright Future: A New Day for the Town and Country Church (Richmond, Virginia: James Knox Press: 1956), pp. 34-35.

⁵¹ The Journal, Louisville Methodist Conference, 1970 Session (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1970), pp. 222-223.

was commenced, from the core area to a more suburban setting. Few of the established churches in the core area can move as they are surrounded by churches of the same denomination that are already established; thus, there is no place for them to move without their being in direct competition with one of their own churches.

Schisms within the different denominations have affected the distribution of rural churches in the study area. These schisms seem in many instances to cause two or more churches to be located extremely close together. There are several Baptist churches located in pairs caused by the Negro-White schism. Some Methodist churches have been located relatively close together in instances because of the North-South schism. Once a church is established as a result of a schism, even the healing of this schism does not reunite the congregations. The churches are there to perpetuate themselves.

This study has uncovered some areas that can be pursued for further research. There are, within the study area, various sects of Baptists, such as Southern, General, United, Primitive and Independent Baptist and this, undoubtedly, has influenced the general distribution of Baptist churches within the county. Further research could determine the degree to which this has affected the distribution.

Membership of the different denominations could be studied to determine which denominations have experienced increases and those that have declined in members. A study along this line could lead to a possible projection of future trends in church establishment.

It is hoped that what scholarly research may be contained within this study will be of benefit to future researchers within the field of religious geography.

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