Easement 1987

S-70
Coventry Parish Church Ruins
Rehobeth
public

1784-1788

The Coventry Parish Church Ruins are architecturally significant for several reasons, in addition to being an important reminder of the pivotal role the Episcopal Church acquired as the official state religion during the seventeenth and eigthteenth centuries.

The picturesque two-story Flemish bond walls survive with ten brick jack arches and constitute an impressive brick edifice. The three primary walls easily evoke the awe and inspiration often associated with abandoned structures. Measuring seventy-six feet across by fifty feet deep, this house of worship was the largest of its denomination on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Its size and prominence are directly tied to the concentration of wealthy plantation owners in Somerset County during the second half of the eighteenth century. In fact, similar construction techniques are found repeated in several key plantation houses in the immediate vicinity.

Just as the building reflects the eighteenth-century prominence of the Anglican Church, it also represents the eventual decline and loss of support for the Church, especially for a rural congregation such as Coventry. By the late nineteenth century, competition from Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and other denominations along with a static rural population severely curtailed vital growth for Coventry Parish. As a result, the ambitious eighteenth-century brick church was abandoned for more modern structures in Pocomoke City, Crisfield, and nearby Marion.

In June of 1692, by an act of first assembly under Governor Lionel Copley, the Church of England became Maryland's official church. Parishes

were laid out in several counties of the province. Vestries were elected, and ministers were commissioned. In addition, for the support and use of the Church, a tax of forty pounds of tobacco was levied on every tithable person regardless of religious beliefs.

Somerset County, then comprising the entire lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, was divided into four parishes: Somerset, Coventry, Stepney, and Snow Hill. These early parish churches were first located on navigable waterways with convenient access for their parishioners. Coventry Parish church was situated in the early town of Rehoboth (now spelled Rehobeth) on the Pocomoke River. The site of the initial building is located directly behind the ruinous walls of its replacement. From all indications, the first church was a single-story brick structure measuring 28'2" by 59', erected in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The parcel of ground on which the church was built was not conveyed officially until 1735 when Robert Jenkins Henry sold the land to Reverend James Robertson, John Dennis, Jr., Thomas Dixon, Thomas Hayward, Thomas Williams, William Lane, and Isaac Williams, vestrymen in and for the Parish of Coventry.

The first church was a brick structure which is mentioned in the vestry minutes of January 7, 1793,

> Ordered by the vestry that Thomas Bruff and Littleton Dennis call on those who have had bricks from the Old Church to pay 15p. per hundred for them and to agree with Littleton Long to plant trees in the church yard under their direction and to put blocks at the church doors.

Ten years prior to this decision to dismantle the old church, it was ordered and approved by the vestry to build a new church at Rehoboth. Eighteen months later on Easter Monday, March 28, 1785, Isaac and Stephen Marshall were bound and obligated to build,

> A Brick House seventy-two feet long and forty-six feet wide from inside to inside, with a wall of twenty feet in height--beside a sufficient foundation in the ground

with a wall as high as the Water Table of twenty-seven inches thick with a rest of three inches in the inside for sleepers.

Motions for the completing additional work on the new church were entered from 1785 until ~~mid-year 1788. Evidently, the church was completed shortly after~~ LATE 1792. THE COVENTRY PARISH CHURCH WAS ~~words but not~~ consecrated until July 17, 1803 by Bishop Clagett.

The Rehoboth Church remained in use until the late nineteenth century when the Episcopal congregations dwindled in size and no longer required the large rural brick church. It was decided to abandon the structure and join congregations with the Chapel of Ease of St. Paul's near Marion, presently the governing body of Coventry Parish. As a result of stabilization efforts initiated by Cassius M. Dashiell of Princess Anne, dedication services were held on September 23, 1928, to commemorate the ruinous edifice.

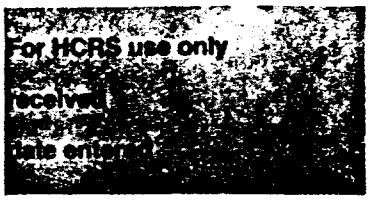
FHR-8-300 (11-78)

Easement

Survey No. S-70

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Coventry Parish Ruins

and/or common Rehobeth Episcopal Church

2. Location

street & number Vessey Road N/A not for publication

city, town Rehobeth X vicinity of congressional district First

state Maryland code 24 county Somerset code 039

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	___ occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
___ building(s)	X private	X unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
X structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	X yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	X not applicable	___ no	___ military	X other: ruin;vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Vestry of Coventry Parish c/o Reverend Percy Reese

street & number St. Paul's Episcopal Church telephone no.: (home) 968-0400

city, town Marion ___ vicinity of state Maryland 21858

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Somerset Clerk of Circuit Court

street & number Somerset County Courthouse

city, town Princess Anne state Maryland 21853

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined elegible? ___ yes ___ no

date 1967 ___ federal X state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

city, town Annapolis state Maryland 21401

7. Description

Survey No. S-70

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	_X_ original site
___ good	_X_ ruins	_X_ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Number of Resources

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	Total

Number of previously listed National Register properties included in the nomination: 0

Original and historic functions and uses: religious

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Coventry Parish Ruins

The Coventry Parish Ruins are the remnants of a two-story seven-bay by three-bay Flemish bond brick church erected between 1785 and 1788 near the Pocomoke River in the small village of Rehobeth, which is located in southern Somerset County, Maryland. The reddish-brown walls are accented by ten gauged brick jack arches which survive in place on the first floor. In addition, the structure survives with a three-row belt course and portions of the window and door frames. The site of the earlier parish church is located directly behind the ruin and is marked by four concrete piers. A cemetery extends around the east and south sides of the churchyard.

For General Description, see Continuation Sheet No. 1

NPS Form 10-900-a
(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
Exp. 10-31-84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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date entered

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Coventry Parish Ruins are located in the small village of Rehobeth, Maryland, which is situated on the west bank of the Pocomoke River. Maryland Route 667 passes due north of Rehobeth and connects US 13 and MD 413 at Marion. The two-story brick ruin faces north and is accompanied by a few aging sycamore trees, a cemetery and the site of the earilier Episcopal church.

The remains of this ca. 1785 seven-bay by three-bay Flemish bond structure measures 76 feet across by 50 feet deep. The ruin has been reduced to three primary walls since the south wall rises only a foot above ground level, except for one single story pier. Transomed entrances were located in the outer bays of the three-bay west elevation, and in the central bay of the north facade; the remaining bays held windows.

Despite its ruinous state for nearly a century, most of the first floor walls and some of the second floor walls remain, and exemplify the best traditions of 18th-century brick masonry. A stepped water table defines the base of the large rectangle, and a three-row belt course stretches between the first and second floors. Perhaps the most dramatic features of this ruin, aside from its sheer size, are the ten intact brick arches of the north and west walls. Each window or door opening has an orange-colored jack arch of gauged brick laid with a very fine mortar joint. These ten arches contrast with the reddish-brown Flemish bond walls. Each opening also has the remnants of the 18th-century window or door frames. The center window frame on the west wall is complete. Parts of wrought iron H-hinges and one keeper for the front door-bar survive on various door frames. In 1928, Cassius M. Dashiell from nearby Princess Anne funded the first stabilization efforts, which included laying a concrete floor and capping the brick walls. Iron tie rods were also implanted in the walls to help the stabilization. Against the east interior wall a brick alter was erected with a concrete cross. Along with stabilizing the 1785-1788 structure, the corners of the earlier parish church were located and identified by four concrete piers.

The cemetery with above-ground markers is located to the east. One group of markers is surrounded by an elaborate cast iron fence.

8. Significance

Survey No. S-70

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	_X_ religion	
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science	
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture	
___ 1600–1699	_X_ architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian	
_X_ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater	
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation	
___ 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ other (specify)	
		___ invention			

Specific dates 1785-1788 **Builder/Architect** Isaac and Stephen Marshall, builders

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Applicable Criteria: A, C
Applicable Exceptions: A
Level of Significance for Evaluation: local

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

Coventry Parish Ruins

The Coventry Parish Ruins are significant for their architecture, and for their association with the history of the Episcopal Church on Maryland's rural Lower Eastern Shore in the period immediately following the Revolution. At the time of its construction (1785-88), this church was the largest of its denomination on Maryland's Eastern Shore; not only its great size (76' x 50'), but also its sophisticated detailing, reflect the prominence of the Episcopal Church among the wealthy planters of Somerset County. It is especially noteworthy that this substantial house of worship was constructed in the midst of perhaps the bleakest period in the history of the Episcopal Church in Maryland: following the Revolution, many Episcopalians left the Church because of its association with England; membership declined sharply, and many Eastern Shore parish churches were abandoned. The size and refinement of the Coventry Parish church suggest an unmatched vitality and loyalty within its original congregation. Despite its ruinous condition, the structure retains sufficient integrity to evoke this association: the three standing walls clearly convey its massing, and the refinement of its Flemish bond brickwork - including such features as a stepped water table, belt course, and ten surviving jack arches of orange gauged brick - remains clearly evident.

For History and Supporting Documentation, see Continuation Sheet No. 2

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

In June of 1692, by an act of the first assembly under Governor Lionel Copley, the Church of England became Maryland's official church.[1] As a result, parishes were laid out in several counties of the province, vestries were elected and ministers were commissioned. In addition, for the support and use of The Church, a tax of forty pounds of tobacco was levied on every tithable person regardless of religious denomination.[2]

Somerset County, then comprising the entire lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, was divided into four parishes; namely Somerset, Coventry, Stepney and Snow Hill. These early parish churches were first located on navigable waterways with convenient access for their parishioners. Coventry Parish church was situated in the early town of Rehoboth (now spelled Rehobeth) on the Pocomoke River. The site of the initial building is located directly behind the ruinous walls of its replacement. From all indications, the first church was a single story brick structure measuring 28'2" by 59', erected in the late 17th or early 18th century.[3] The parcel of ground on which the church was built was not conveyed officially until 1735 when Robert Jenkins Henry sold to Reverend James Robertson, John Dennis, Jr., Thomas Dixon, Thomas Hayward, Thomas Williams, William Lane, and Isaac Williams, vestrymen in and for the Parish of Coventry,

> ...a certain part of parcell of land in Rehoboth Town in the Parish, County and Province aforesaid on which the Parish Church now standeth and next adjoining...containing and now laid out for two acres more or less... [4]

The fact that the first church was brick instead of frame is suggested by the entry in the vestry minutes of January 7, 1983,

> Ordered by the vestry that Thomas Bruff and Littleton Dennis call on those who have had bricks from the Old Church to pay 15 p. per hundred for them and to agree with Littleton Long to plant trees in the church yard under their direction and to put blocks at the church doors... [5]

See Continuation Sheet 3

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

Then years prior to this decision to dismantle the old church, it was ordered and approved by the vestry to build a new church at Rehoboth. On Easter Monday, March 28, 1785, Isaac and Stephen Marshall were bound and obligated to build

> A Brick House seventy-two feet long and forty-six feet wide from inside to inside, with a wall of Twenty feet in height--beside a sufficient foundation in the ground with a wall as high as the Water Table of twenty-seven inches thick with a rest of three inches in the inside for the sleepers... [6]

Motions for completing additional work on the new church were entered from 1785 until mid-year 1788. Evidently, the church was completed shortly afterwards but not consecrated until July 17, 1803 by Bishop Clagett.[7]

The period immediately following the Revolution was an extremely difficult time in the history of the Episcopal Church in Maryland. The Church's English associations rendered it unpopular, and membership declined precipitously. Many church buildings, lacking regular use or maintenance, began to deteriorate; a survey of Eastern Shore parishes carried out in 1820 by Reverend Purnell H. Smith at the request of the Bishop of the Diocese found many churches in ruinous condition. Despite the urgings of Bishop Kemp, the reorganization of congregations and reconstruction of church buildings did not become general on the Eastern Shore until the early 1840s. In light of the general decline of the Church following the Revolution, it is interesting that the parishioners of Coventry would undertake the construction in 1785 of such a substantial and refined house of worship.

The Rehoboth Church remained in use until the late 19th century when the Episcopal congregations again dwindled in size and Coventry Parish no longer required the large rural brick church. It was decided to abandon the structure and join congregations with the Chapel of Ease of St. Paul's at Marion, presently the governing body of Coventry Parish. As a result of stabilization efforts initiated by Cassius M. Dashiell of Princess Anne, dedication services were held on September 23, 1928 to commemorate the ruinous edifice.

See Continuation Sheet 4

NPS Form 10-900-a
(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
Exp. 10-31-84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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received
date entered

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

FOOTNOTES

[1]Torrence, Clayton Old Somerset on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Regional Publishing Co., 1979, p. 144.

[2]Torrence, Clayton p. 144.

[3]Torrence, Clayton p. 175.

[4]Somerset County Land Records, AZ 018/233, 6/18/1735.

[5]Vestry Meetings and Parish Records (1772-1821), January 7, 1793, Original volumes in hands of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Marion, Md.

[6]Vestry Meetings and Parish Records (1772-1821), March 28, 1785.

[7]Torrence, Clayton, p. 178.

See Continuation Sheet 5

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. S-70

See Continuation Sheet No 10.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1 acre

Quadrangle name Kingston, Maryland **Quadrangle scale** 1:24000

UMT References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	18	441510	4210080
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet No 10.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian

organization Somerset Co. Historical Trust **date** 1/23/84

street & number 424 North Somerset Avenue **telephone** (home) 651-1094

city or town Princess Anne **state** Maryland 21853

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

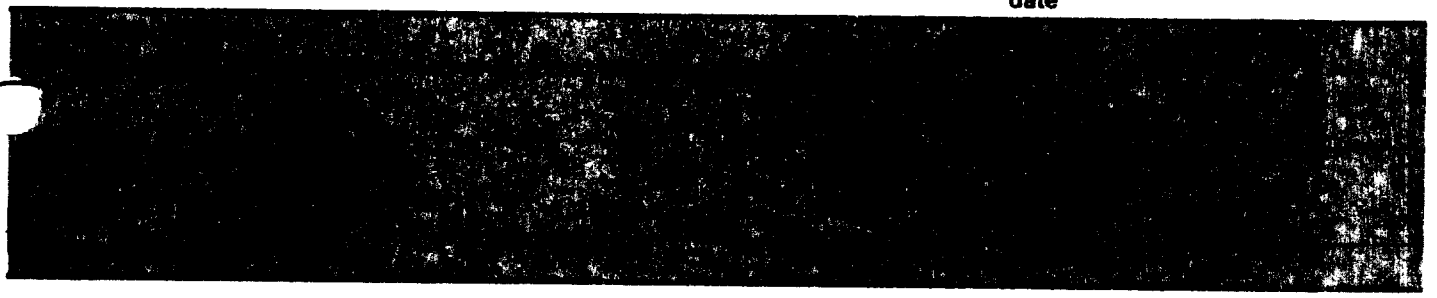
The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 7-5-84

title **date**



GPO 938 835

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Emory, Frederic. Queen Anne's County, Maryland: its Early History and Development. Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1950.

Rightmyer, Nelson Waite. Maryland's Established Church. Baltimore: The Diocese of Maryland, 1956.

Somerset County Land Records, various volumes, Somerset County Courthouse.

Somerset County Wills, various volumes, Register of Wills, Somerset County Courthouse.

Torrence, Clayton, Old Somerset on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Regional Publishing Co., 1979.

Vestry Meetings and Parish Records (1772-1821), Original volumes in the Hands of St. Paul's Episcopal Church near Marion.

See Continuation Sheet 6

NPS Form 10-900-a
(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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received
date entered

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point along the county road which passes in front of the Coventry Parish Ruins and thence in a southerly direction by and with a dirt lane of the James Harrison property for 260' to a point along the said lane and thence due west for 300' behind the aforesaid ruins to a point in the churchyard, thence in a northerly direction 260' to another point in said churchyard, thence due east for 300' to the south edge of the county road and running with said road to place of beginning, containing one acre more or less. See attached plat.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property, one acre, encompasses the resource within its immediate setting. This landscaped churchyard is regularly maintained, and is distinct in character from the open farmland which surrounds it on all sides.

2000T04108 Easement

Form 10-445 (5/62)

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND PHOTOGRAPHS MAY BE ADDED ON SHEET OF SAME SIZE

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
INVENTORY

1. STATE
COUNTY Somerset
TOWN Rehobeth VICINITY
STREET NO.
ORIGINAL OWNER Coventry ~~Rehobeth~~ ~~Episcopal~~ Parish
ORIGINAL USE Church
PRESENT OWNER ---
PRESENT USE Ruins
WALL CONSTRUCTION Flemish bond
NO. OF STORIES 2½ (?)

2. NAME Rehobeth Episcopal Church S-70
Coventry Parish
DATE OR PERIOD 1740
STYLE Georgian
ARCHITECT
BUILDER

3. FOR LIBRARY OF CONGRESS USE

4. NOTABLE FEATURES, HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND DESCRIPTION OPEN TO PUBLIC Yes

This church is now in ruins with sections of three of its walls remaining. Although the slope of the roof cannot be ascertained, much other information about the structure can be gathered from the ruins. It was seven bays wide with a central door and three bays deep. The central door had an overlight. The windows were capped with flat lintels of polished stretchers. A three string belt course runs around the building between the first and second storey. The watertable is a simple step one of two rows of protruding square bricks. All of the glazing on the bricks is of a soft green color.

The further deterioration of this ruin has been prevented by capping the walls with cement. As a ruin this still is an attractive structure and reveals much about its construction. As a complete building it must have been a superb early Georgian church.

5. PHYSICAL CONDITION OF STRUCTURE Endangered Interior Exterior

Preserved Ruin

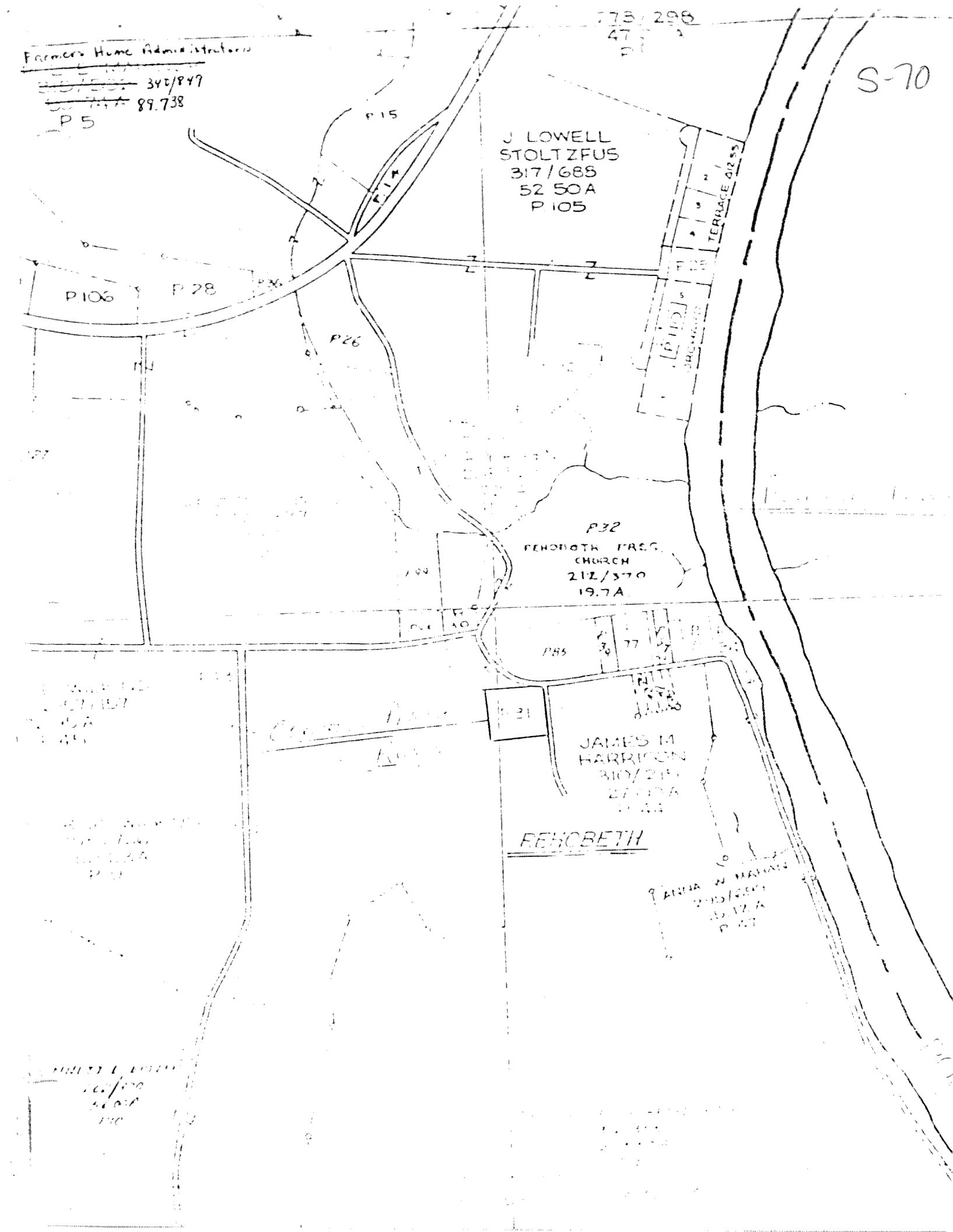
6. LOCATION MAP (Plan Optional)

7. PHOTOGRAPH

8. PUBLISHED SOURCES (Author, Title, Pages)
INTERVIEWS, RECORDS, PHOTOS, ETC.

9. NAME, ADDRESS AND TITLE OF RECORDER
Paul A. Brinkman

DATE OF RECORD 8/8/67



Farmers Home Administration
340/849
89.738
P 5
S-70
J LOWELL
STOLTZFUS
317/688
52 50A
P 105
TERRACE
P 15
P 106
P 28
P 26
P 32
REHOBOTH FREE
CHURCH
212/370
19.7A
P 85
77
JAMES M
HARRISON
REHOBETH

S-70
COVENTRY
PARISH RUINS
SOMERSET COUNTY,
MARYLAND

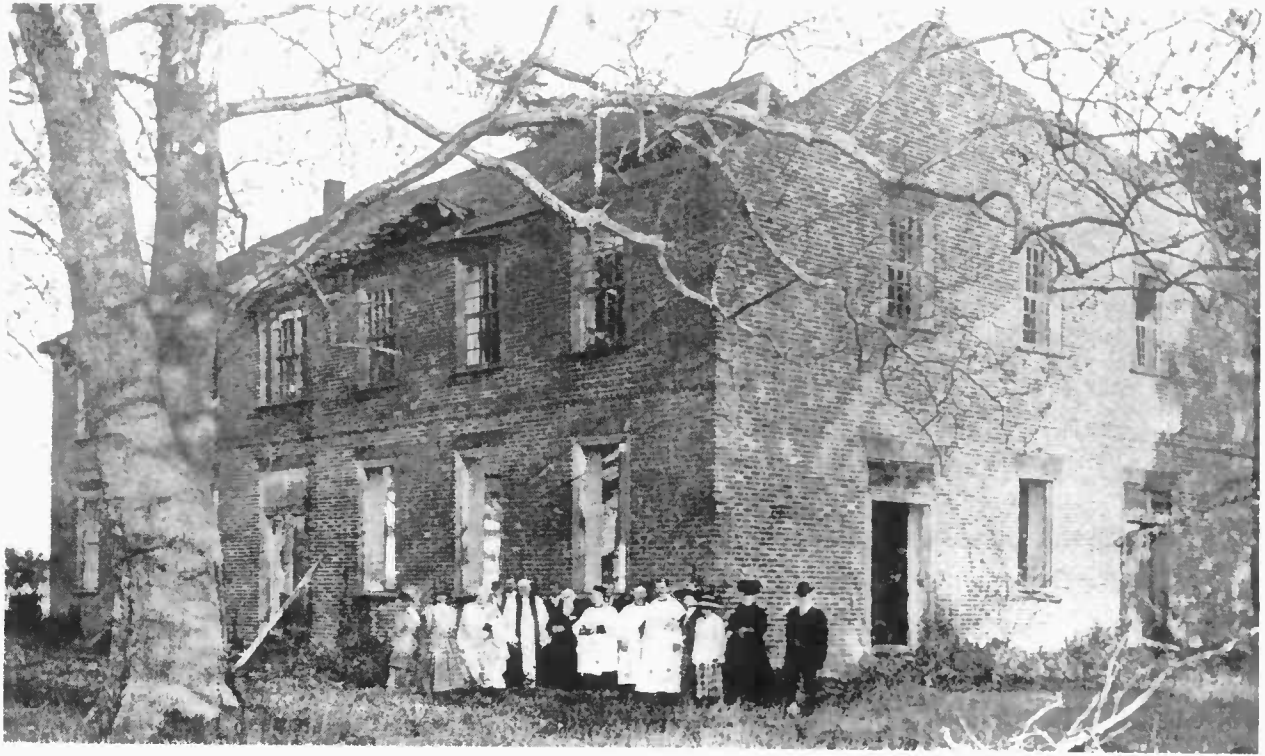
18-441510-
4210080

S-70 60%

Coventry Parish ruin, Rehoboth S-70

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
2525 RIVA ROAD
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

D. G. 1967

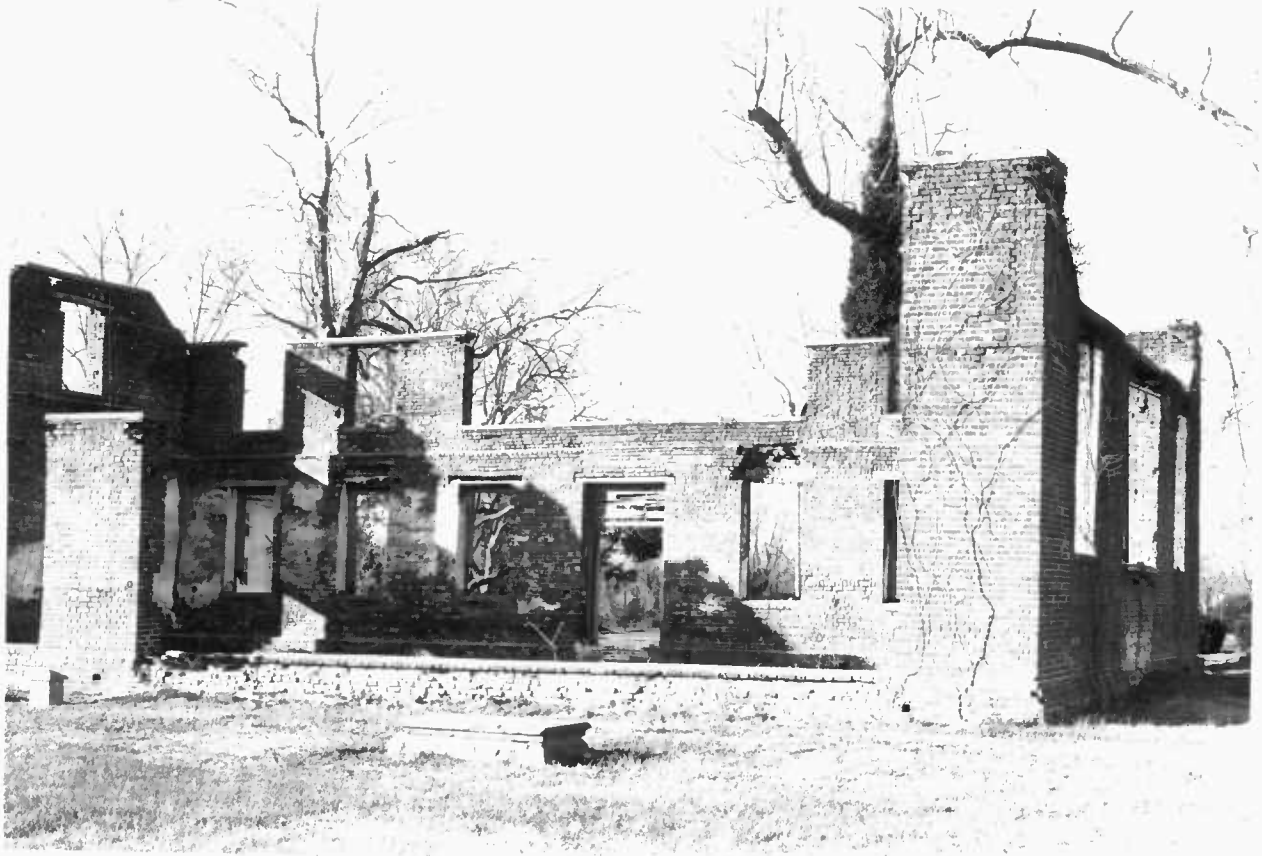


S-70
COVENTRY PARISH CHURCH RUIN
Rehobeth, Somerset County, Md
Documentary photograph, c. 1900
Collection of Rehoboth Presbyterian Church
Negative/MD Historical Trust

S-70
COVENTRY PARISH CHURCH RUIN
Rehobeth, Somerset County, MD
Documentary photograph, c. 1900
Collection of Rehoboth Presbyterian Church
Negative/MD Historical Trust

Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
west elevation
12/83 Paul Touart
negative/Md. Hist. Trust

Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
South Elevation
12/83 Paul Touart
Neg./Md. Historical Trust



Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
South Elevation
12/83 Paul Touart
Neg./Md. Historical Trust

Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
South Side of North Wall
12/83 Paul Touart
Neg./Md. Historical Trust

Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
North Door
12/83 Paul Touart
Neg./Md. Historical Trust

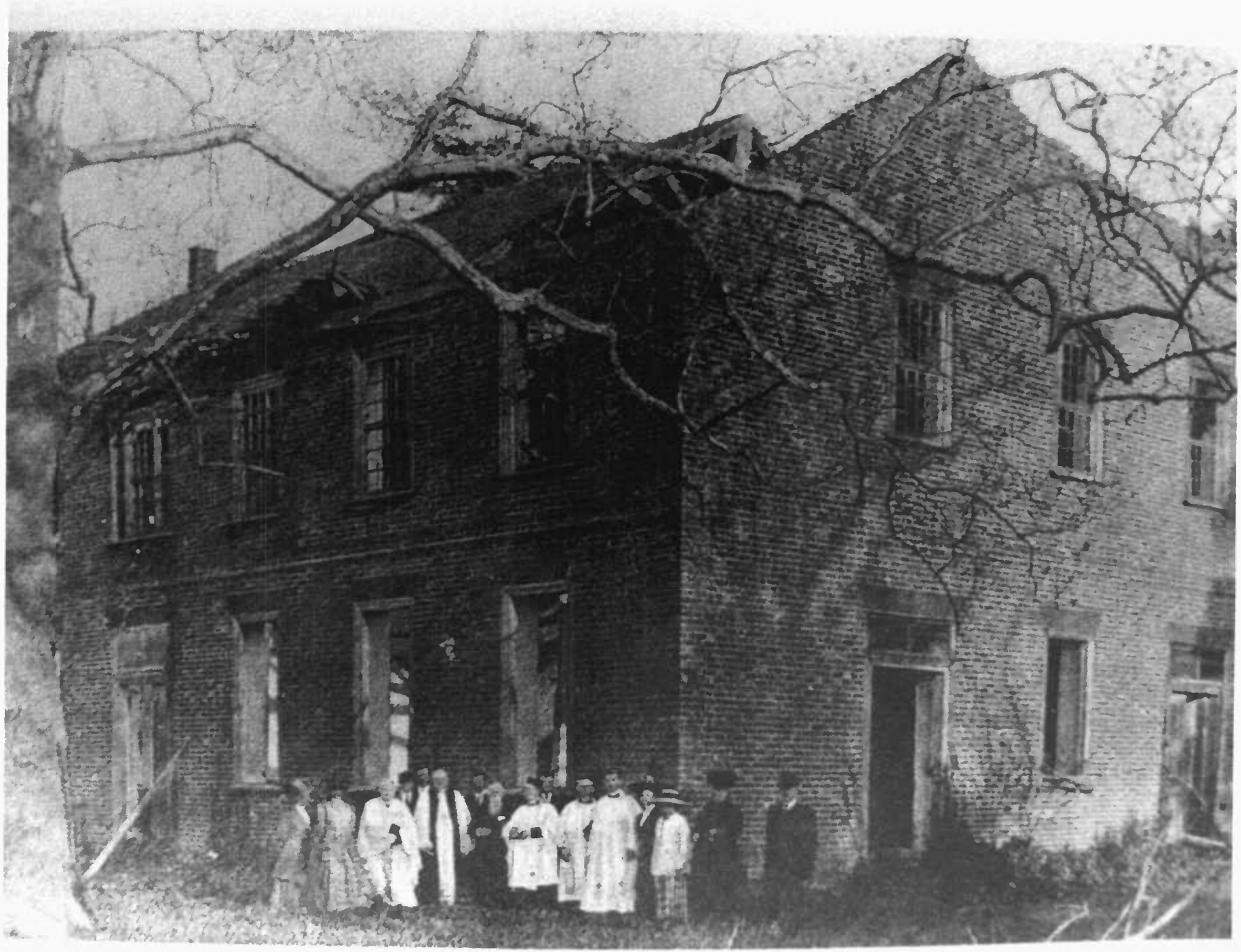
Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
West Elevation
12/83 Paul Touart
Neg./Md. Historical Trust

Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
North Door Bar Keeper
12/83 Paul Touart

Neg./Md. Historical Trust

Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
North Door H-Hinge
12/83 Paul Touart
Neg./Md. Historical Trust

Coventry Parish Ruins S-70
Rehoboth-Somerset County
North Door
12/83 Paul Touart
Neg./Md. Historical Trust



S-70
COVENTRY PARISH CHURCH RUIN
Rehobeth, Somerset County, Maryland
Documentary photograph, c. 1890
Courtesy of the Rehoboth Pres. Church
Negative/MD Historical Trust