

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

For HCERS use only

received

date entered

## 1. Name

historic Alberts Chapel

and/or common

## 2. Location

street & number U. S. Route 119/33

\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Sand Ridge \_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district Thirdstate West Virginia code 54 county Calhoun code 013

## 3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	___ agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational
___ site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	___ entertainment
___ object	___ in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	___ government
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial
		___ no	___ military
			___ museum
			___ park
			___ private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			___ scientific
			___ transportation
			___ other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name United Methodist Churchstreet & number 900 Washington Street, Eastcity, town Charleston \_\_\_ vicinity of state West Virginia 25301

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Calhoun County Courthouse

street &amp; number

city, town Grantsville state West Virginia

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes ☒ no

date \_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

### Condition

☒ excellent  
☐ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Alberts Chapel, an octagonal frame church building, stands adjacent to a small cemetery on a scenic hilltop a short distance northeast of the rural Calhoun County hamlet of Sand Ridge. The building's simple but unique form and finely carpentered details are qualities which have invested the landmark with a special status among historic properties in central West Virginia. Its preservation has been enhanced by sensitive treatment and regular maintenance during the many decades that have elapsed since the date of construction in 1903.

Vertical elements of the Chapel's design endow it with an appearance of somewhat greater height and mass than is actually the case. The vertical board-and-batten finish of the walls is partly responsible for the feeling of upward movement; but it is the triangular-headed double-hung windows which provide the most obvious reference to a building "pointing" heavenward. Each plane of the octagon, with the exception of the rear segment backing the pulpit, is centered with a tall narrow window trimmed in moulded casing and headed with triangular hoods. The muntins of each upper sash form a Latin cross. The shallow eaves, decorated with slender brackets, forms only a slight demarkation and does not break the sense of upward movement.

Each plane of the octagonal roof rises in a medium pitch to meet the base of an octagonal louvered belfry. Crowning the diminutive octagonal roof of the belfry is a soaring wooden finial. The base of the belfry is slightly battered, a clever feature which lends the belfry superstructure (which still houses the original bell) finer proportion.

The late Victorian character of Alberts Chapel may also be viewed in several details of the main entrance. Above the transom light of the doubledoor is a double-pedimented overdoor. "Gouge-work" or incised work in a circular pattern is centered within each pediment, a characteristic that is repeated in the interior treatment of woodwork and pulpit ornamentation. Centered above the overdoor is a wooden plaque with the inscription "Alberts Chapel" and the flanking letters "M" and "E".

Minor exterior modifications include the addition of a small angle-bracketed shed porch above the entrance, and the replacement of the original louvered blinds in the belfry with flat-headed substitutes. (Original openings were triangular-headed). The original roofing material was standing-seam metal, having been replaced recently with asphalt shingles.

The interior has undergone some modification with replacement of wainscoting and wall covering with late 20th century paneling. The wall treatment, however, is of the vertical board type, and wainscoting is differentiated with a wood finish facsimile. Original woodwork of the door and window casing features incised "rose blocks" (bullseyes). Finest of the original carved and highly finished interior items is the pulpit elevated on a low dais at the head of the chapel's center aisle. Pews flanking the aisle have recently replaced the original benches. The generous light filtering through the translucent dempled glass of the seven windows fills the single room (with seating for perhaps seventy-five people) with a special glow.

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Of special interest is the cemetery virtually surrounding the chapel. The burial ground contains the graves of the Polings who founded the church, and the remains of many other substantial members of the rural area community. Markers and monuments are especially ornate, and their size quite above the ordinary for so remote a cemetery. Victorian symbolism is everywhere prevalent, but nowhere perhaps more handsomely represented than in the monument to Wesley Poling. The names of Poling and his wife are inscribed upon an elaborate stone scroll suspended and attached to the marker by a minutely carved hemp rope. The marker is actually a tall tree stump with branches removed. Symbolizing in the Victorian funerary manner "the life cut off", the carver's work intended perhaps in the delicate fern rising at the base of the monument to suggest the renewal of life.

## 8. Significance

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

Specific dates      1903      Builder/Architect      Charles Poling, carpenter

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Alberts Chapel, significant because it is the only octagonal church building in West Virginia, is one of only several West Virginia buildings of such design built exclusively for human use and shelter (several octagonal barns exist). The small church building has achieved additional significance as a religious architectural form exemplifying an early Methodist idea of creating maximum space in a church, or "preaching house", with a minimum of materials. The Alberts Chapel octagon may therefore exist as a relatively rare surviving example of a religious building type in the United States. The building possesses additional historical significance as a late example of the building type advocated by Orson Squire Fowler (1809-1887), the noted phrenologist, orator, and pseudo-scientist.

The story of the creation of a small Methodist Episcopal Church in the hills of Calhoun County, West Virginia, is perhaps not unusual, for hundreds of rural church groups, from various generations, under various denominational standards, have organized and built houses of worship of common and very similar form (single-room, gable-roofed, frame rectangles). While the church built in 1903 by the Methodists at Sand Ridge was perhaps ordinary in terms of its building material, the story of its construction and the choice of its design are not.

The religious dedication and generosity of several important men of the Poling family of Calhoun County was significant in the movement of the church family to build a new church. Bearing names of great men of Methodism were Wesley and Asbury Poling who furnished lumber and land for the project. It was Albert, son of Wesley, who assumed responsibility for organization and construction as a "committee of one" appointed by the Methodist district conference. Albert Poling's zeal was recognized when the completed edifice was named in his honor. In addition to the land given by Asbury Poling, and the gift of lumber and sawmill privileges from Wesley Poling, other Polings gave freely in the enterprise. Charles Poling, brother of Wesley, was the principal carpenter. His contributions are recognized not only in the clean lines of the building, but also in the special beauty of the pulpit and chair which bespeak his skill with wood.

Various stories have been told through the years explaining why Alberts Chapel assumed its peculiar shape. One of the most interesting and enduring of the legends centers about a dream experienced by Matilda ("Tilly") Poling, wife of Asbury, who had been, it seems, greatly moved by a sermon of one Dr. T. Dewitt Talmage. Stutler, in an article about the Chapel in the August 1932 West Virginia Review, gave the following account of the dream:

"She had read one of the sermons of Dr. T. Dewitt Talmage which brought out the thought that life was a cycle, that each individual sowed

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good seed or bad, and that as the wheel of life turned each would come back to the place of sowing to reap the harvest. So impressed was she with this thought that she prevailed upon those planning the new church to carry out the idea in its construction. As a wheel-shaped church was obviously impossible, the graceful octagonal shape was accepted as the nearest substitute."

Although Wesley Poling, a Methodist preacher, was familiar with Methodist writings, and might therefore have known of the works of an individual such as Bishop Charles H. Fowler (1837-1908), the noted Methodist orator and publisher, it was not this Fowler but Orson Squire Fowler (1809-1887) whom Tatterson in her History and Genealogy of the Poling Family, is referring to as the originator and proponent of the idea of the octagon as the ideal mode of construction.

Orson Squire Fowler was a 19th century counselor, speaker, writer and popular figure associated with numerous semi-philosophical and scientific ideas. His convictions were known to large segments of the American population, including the Polings of Calhoun County. Fowler is often remembered for his unusual and rather bizarre opinions on building that are expressed in his book A Home for All; or, The Gravel Wall, and The Octagon Mode of Building (1849). ~~Advantages of such design according to Fowler assured the owner that a more beautiful, efficient, and compact plan enclosing more floor area than a square, was always preferable.~~

Ideas regarding maximum space with minimum expenditure and materials are known to have been expressed in the writings of John Wesley. A number of octagonal stone churches of Methodist affiliation were built in 18th century England and can be seen in Yorkshire. The idea here was to create a simple, dignified, commodious structure suitable to the needs of preaching. The "preaching house" in Calhoun County seems to embody, in a latter day example, certain of the ideas propounded by the founder of Methodism and may exemplify, if the incidence of such buildings in the United States is rare, a rather unusual and charming antique thought in wood. It must be stated, nevertheless, that while such concepts of utility may have been known to one or more of the church builders, the best explanation for the Alberts Chapel plan, at least in the minds of several of the community parishoners, is that such a building was designed "so that the devil couldn't corner you in it."

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Deed Book 30, p. 72, County Court of Calhoun, Grantsville, WV  
Interview. Rodney Collins to Dr. Emory Kemp on type of English octagons.  
"Orson Squire Fowler". Dictionary of American Biography. New York: Charles Scribners  
Sons, 1931, pp. 565-66.  
Tatterson, Clarissa H. History and Genealogy of the Poling Family. Parsons, WV: McClain

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1½ acres

Quadrangle name Millstone, WV

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A 117 491461610 41291501610  
Zone Easting Northing

B                    
Zone Easting Northing

C                  

D                  

E                  

F                  

G                  

H                  

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Includes the church building and cemetery; bounded on the east by a chain link fence (facing U.S. Rt. 33/119), bounded 40' to the north of the church by a barbed wire fence and line of fir trees, bounded on the west by the westernmost line of the cemetery which is approximately 40' to the west of the highest

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

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rodney S. Collins, Architectural Historian

organization Department of Culture and History

date December 15, 1980

street & number The Cultural Center, Capitol Complex

telephone 304/348-0240

city or town Charleston

state West Virginia 25305

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

   national   X   state    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

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 12/19/80

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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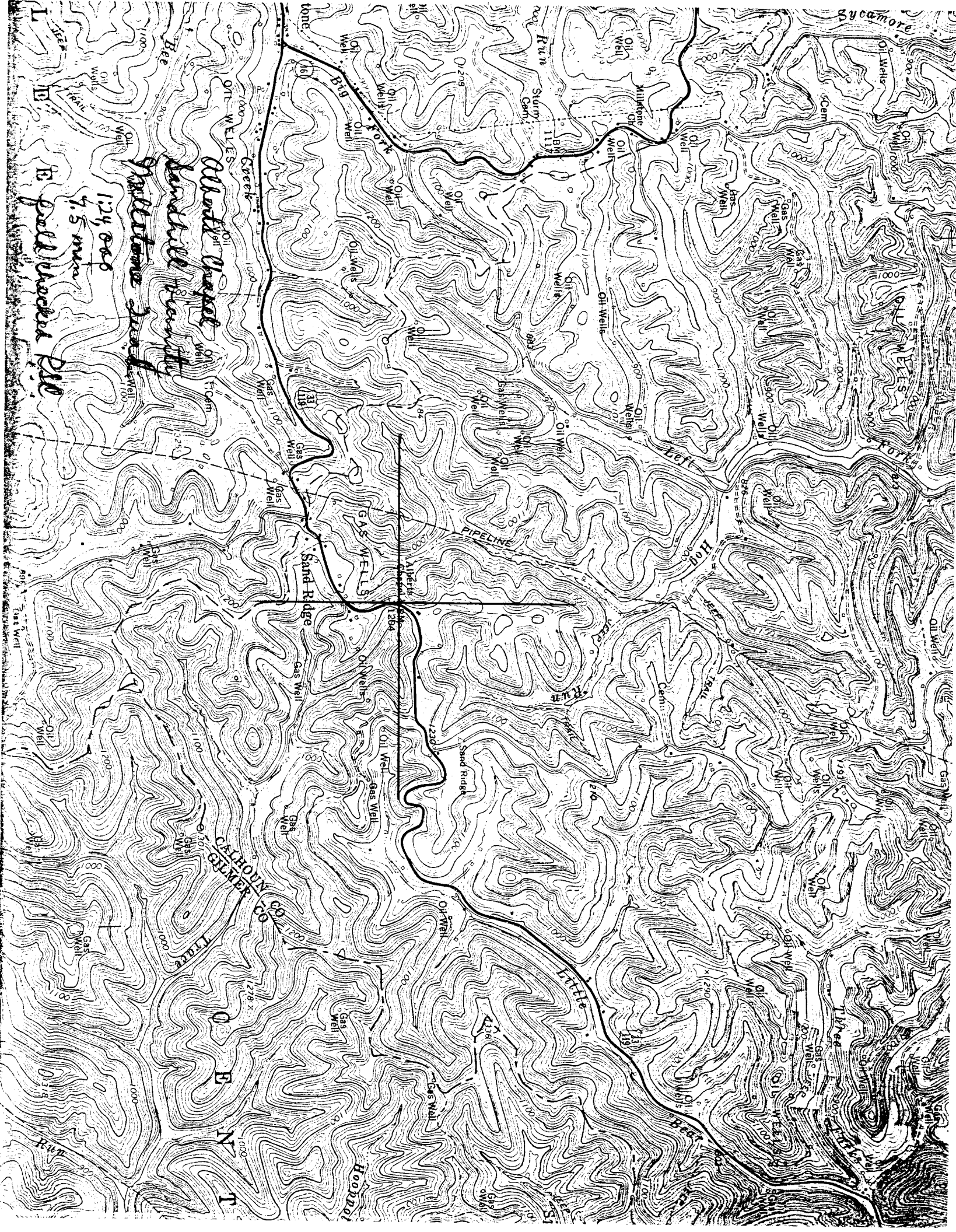
9# Major Bibliographical References

Printing Co., 1978, pp. 290-291.

Stutler, Boyd B. "The Little Round Church on the Hill". West Virginia Review. Aug. 1932.

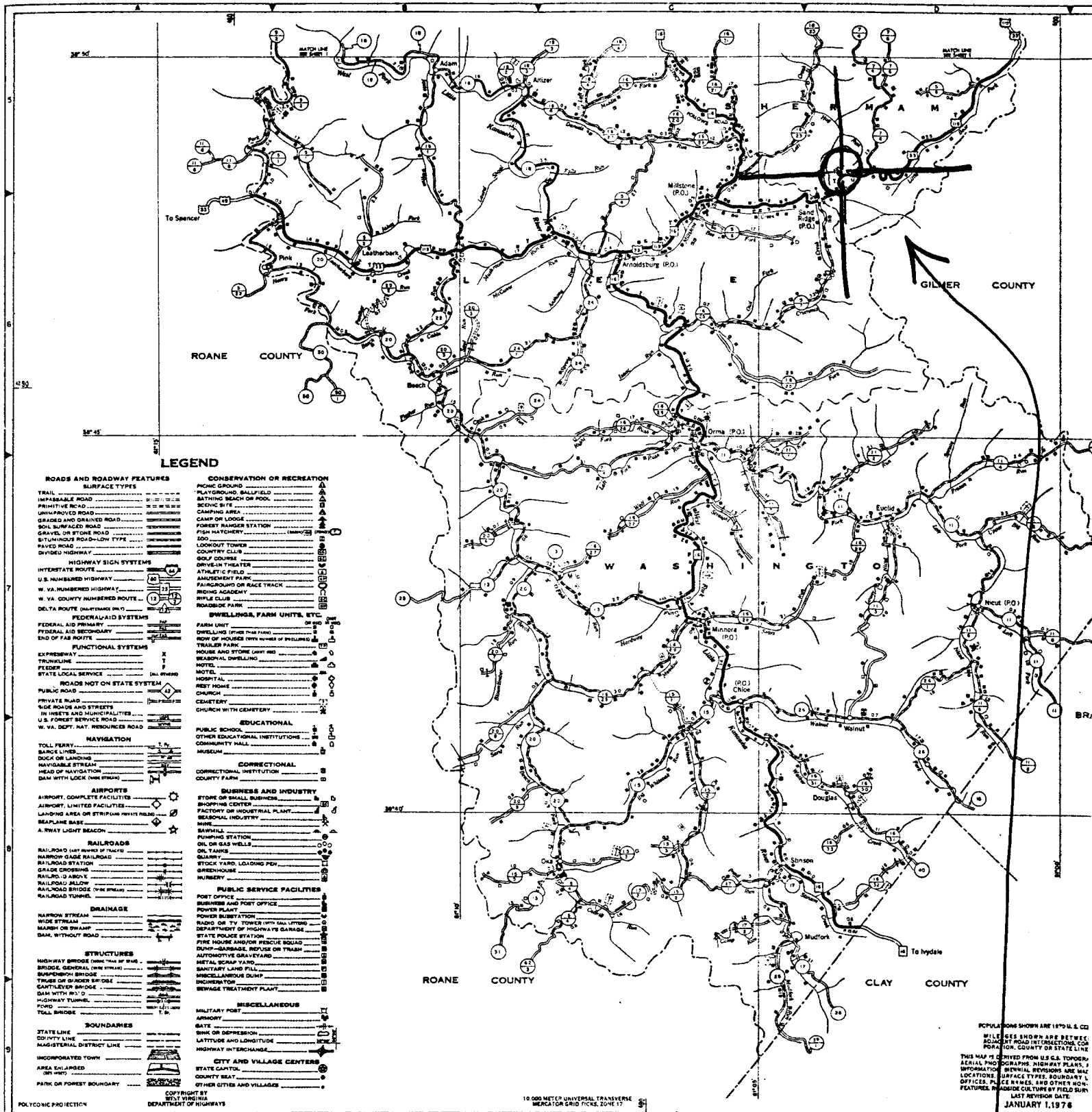
10# Verbal boundary description

USGS contour line running north-south (west of Rt. 33/119); and bounded on the south by the edge of the cemetery demarkated by a barbed wire fence running west to east to a point intersecting with the chain link fence (this point is approximately 400' south of the church building on the west edge of U.S. 33/119).



1:24,000  
4.5 min.  
Millstone Quad

E. Gold Wacker Pie



Alberts Chapel  
Calhoun County

