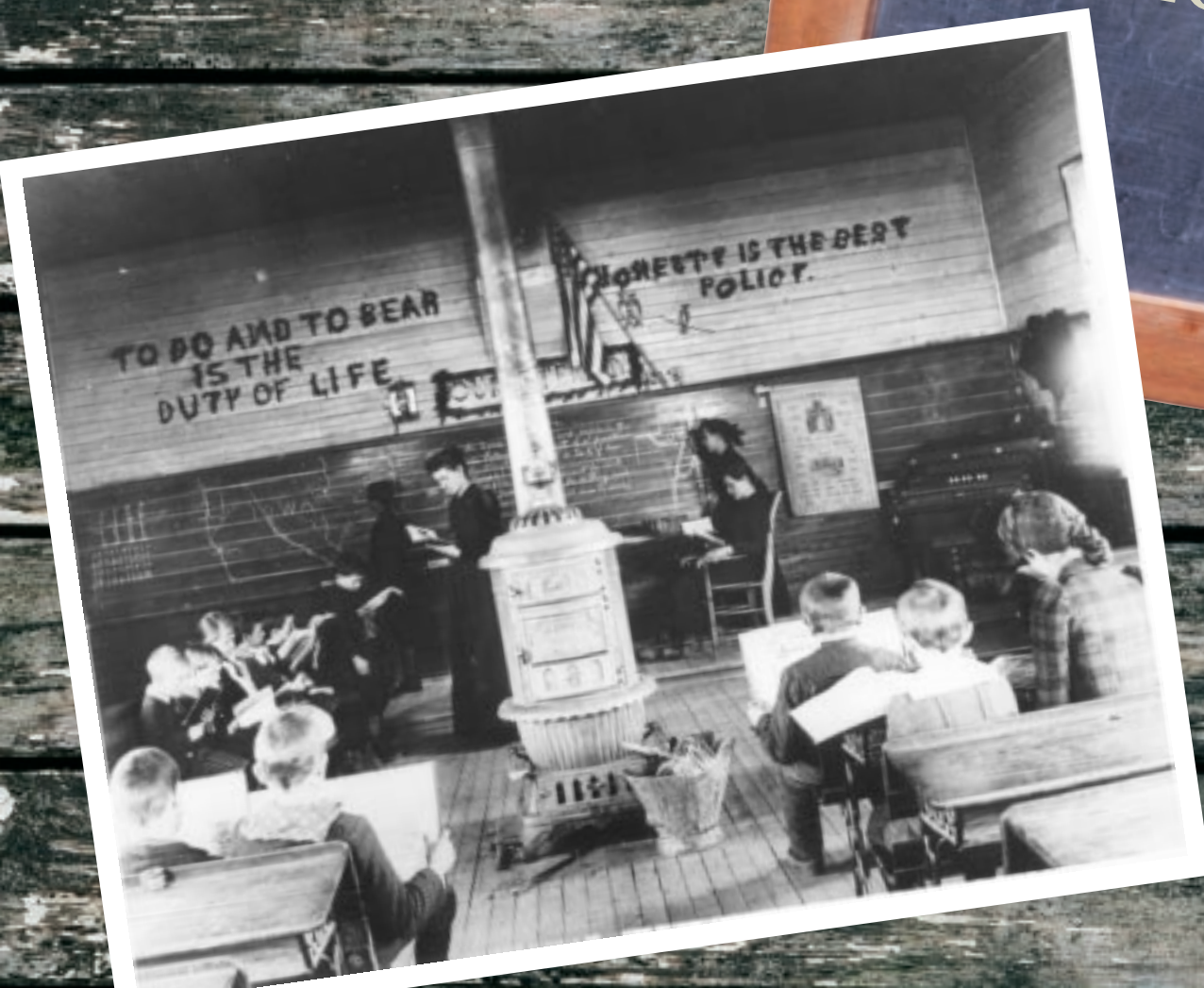


Country Schools for Iowa





To anyone traveling through pre-World War II rural Iowa, the country school was a familiar sight.

Solitary yet reassuring, the country school marked the center of rural neighborhoods, gave identity to the community, and displayed commitment to the education of future generations. Unpretentious, like the farm families it served, the country school represented the essence of rural Iowa.

Friendship School

JOAN LIFFRING-ZUG COLLECTION: STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)

Cover photo: Bear Creek School

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)



Country Schools for Iowa

by
Camilla Deiber and Peggy Beedle
The Louis Berger Group, Inc.

with special thanks to:
the staff at the State Historical Society of Iowa Library at Iowa City,
and the staff at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

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September 2002

Generations of Iowans have fond memories of their country schools:

We certainly had good times — the days weren't long enough for all we had to do.

— Mary Margaret Moninger, Marshall County country school student¹

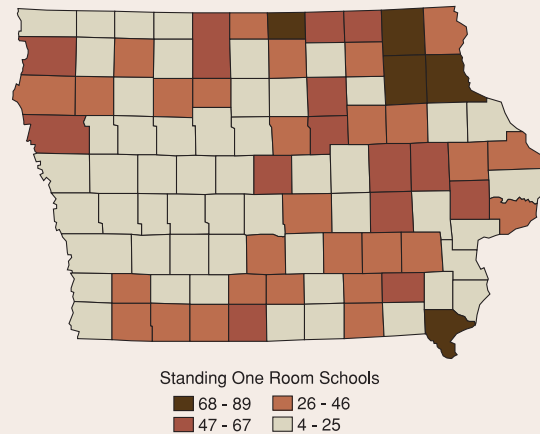
The energy and inventiveness of the teacher determined how much transformation took place in the schoolroom. It never took on the sparkle of Aladdin's cave, this open room with its dusty blackboards, dingy curtains and roll of maps and dictionary. But a teacher with enthusiasm and a few appropriate symbols could make it shine in our eyes... My years there remain in memory as some of the best years of my life.

— Poet James Hearst about a rural school near Cedar Falls in the 1910s²

Even people who never attended a country school have heard stories from their parents and grandparents, usually introduced by “In my day, I walked two miles through twelve inches of snow to get to school—all uphill!” For most, the country school was not just a center of learning; it was often the center of many activities within rural communities in Iowa—a place for neighbors to gather and socialize.

You might say the country school then had so much community interest that it was a community project, so to speak. The school was where the pie suppers and box suppers were held, also the recitals and spelling and ciphering contests. Grown-ups participated, too, and school board member John Brand could sometimes outspell a teacher.

— Harold Horton, recollecting the Brushwood School #5 in Clarke County.³



These once commonplace symbols of learning and community pride have rapidly disappeared from the rural landscape of Iowa over the last few decades. In 1901 there were 12,623 country school buildings in Iowa; in a survey conducted in 1996, the Iowa State Education Association found only 2,911 still standing. Nearly 77% of small country schools in Iowa are no more.⁴

Despite or perhaps because of the dramatic loss, the memory of the country school is treasured by modern-day Iowans. Nearly every county in Iowa tries to preserve the history of its country schools—in fact, ninety-five out of ninety-nine counties have at least one country school in use as a museum. Although none of the remaining school houses is used today for publicly funded education, as of 1998, there were forty active country schools used by various religious groups for the education of nearly 1,000 children.⁵

History of the country school in Iowa

Education was a fundamental necessity to the early settlers of the Iowa Territory. The first school opened in Lee County in 1830. Mr. Berryman Jennings was hired by Dr. Isaac Galland to teach eight students for a three-month session. The first school house was a log cabin built by lead miners in 1833—the very year they started working in the Mines of Spain area near Dubuque.⁶ By the time the Iowa Territory was organized in 1838, there already were between 40 and 50 established schools,⁷ and eight years later the state constitution made provision for a “system of common schools” under a Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In 1858, the legislature passed an education bill making the civil township the official school district. Towns with more than 1,000 residents (a number later lowered to 100) could become independent districts operating separately from the township districts. County superintendents were elected to supervise both the township and independent schools.

An official school township district included up to nine sub-districts, each containing an area of four square miles, with the school building in the

center. In this manner, no child would have to walk more than two miles to get to her school. In reality, local politics, large families, or changing demographics often dictated that a schoolhouse move to another more advantageous site in the district. Such moves became so prevalent that some schools were constructed on skids to accommodate relocations should they become necessary.

In 1872, refinements to the 1858 law allowed sub-districts to become their own independent school districts. These changes transferred control of country schools from the township to rural neighborhoods. As long as a country school had at least ten students⁸, it could remain in an independent sub-district governed by its own board of trustees, and for a time at least, education came under the control of the local residents.

School Teachers

Before 1890 most country schoolteachers had very little formal training with which to meet the challenges of an ungraded school. Although the Iowa Normal School was established in 1876 in Cedar



Agnes Samuelson visiting rural Polk County schoolhouse



*Rural School,
1952 Sioux
County.*

Falls as a teacher-training facility, its educational system was geared primarily towards preparing teachers for positions in graded, urban schools.⁹ To address this issue, county superintendents held “Normal Institutes” beginning in the 1880s to prepare prospective teachers for work in rural schools. These institutes were two-week courses designed to bring rural schoolteachers together to learn new methods and exchange ideas. Although institutes were usually held in July or August, schools

were sometimes shut down during the school year to accommodate the program.

In the 1880s legislators pushed for teacher certification standards that eventually changed the gender make-up of teachers in Iowa. Men of the period had opportunities for work in rural areas that didn’t require

additional education; while paying roles for women were few and far between. By 1905, fully 85% of the teachers in Iowa were women.¹⁰ By the beginning of the 20th century, state legislation now mandated curriculum and textbooks used in country schools, although according to several personal reminiscences, adherence to the curriculum was spotty:

...Miss Flock marched us inside, wound the Victrola, and we started the music lesson with “Old Dog Tray,” followed by “De Camptown Races.” Miss Flock joined in, a mezzo-soprano, experimenting a bit with harmony, especially when big

*DeWayne growled along in deep bass. At the end of a song she burst out laughing and sometimes even clapped. We clapped too, having more fun with the singing business than ever before...I began to feel a little uneasy lest some parent stop by and wonder if the song fest should take the place of arithmetic and spelling. But of course no parent would visit unless invited, and none of us were driven to school by car, so there was no chance of a parental glimpse into our life there. We walked from our farms even in winter when snowbanks closed the roads; we traveled in a group, gathering neighbors along the way. Miss Flock was in no danger of being checked on unless one of the pupils talked.*¹¹

— **Curtis Harnack**, from his book *We Have All Gone Away*

School Consolidation

Rural school consolidation began in Iowa as early as the 1890s. In 1896 the Educational Council of the National Education Association appointed a committee, headed by Iowa Superintendent of Public Instruction Henry Sabin, to conduct a

study of rural schools in the United States. The study found that “compared with the apparent efficiency and standardization of the urban schools, the rural schools ...were individualistic, inefficient and chaotic...”¹² Proponents of consolidation proposed a rural school that would teach country children “sound values and vocational skills”. The result was to be a standardized, modernized community.

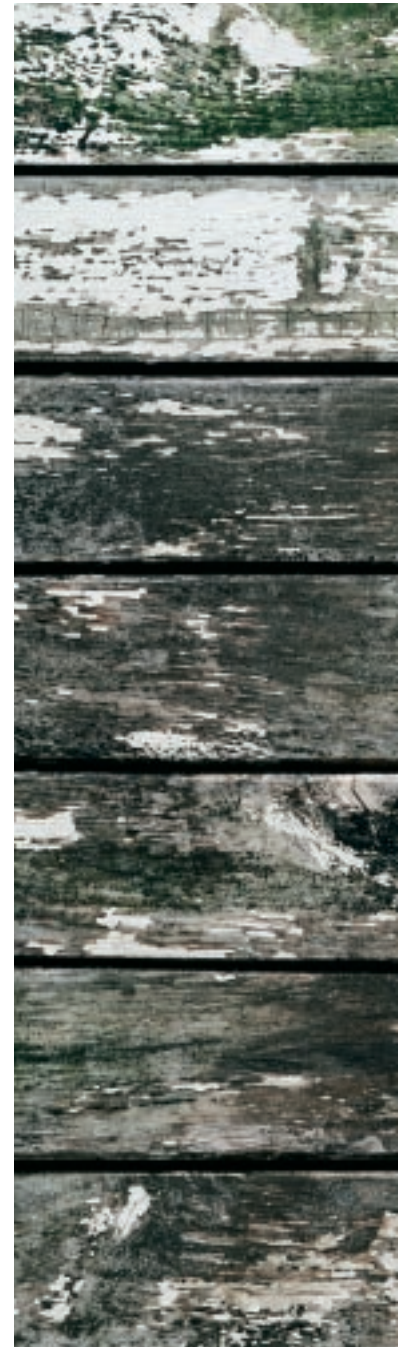
Rural school consolidation had a central role in the planned transformation of the rural Midwest.¹³ Members of the ad hoc Progressive political party of the first two decades of the 20th century were concerned that rural populations were becoming increasingly isolated from the economic and ideological changes that were happening in the nation at large. The Country Life movement

was meant to transform rural life from isolated small towns and farmsteads into a system of integrated communities, sharing ideas and improving their productivity. Consolidating rural schools was a significant step in that direction.

According to researcher David R. Reynolds, rural school consolidation “produced more conflict than any other educational issue placed before Iowa voters in the twentieth century.”¹⁴ A 1901 Biennial Report from the Superintendent of Schools Richard C. Barrett listed the potential benefits of consolidating rural schools: better teachers, reduced per capita costs, more and better supervision, better attendance, better buildings and apparatus, added courses, and better schools at less expense. Rural residents had an equally long list of objections to consolidation, including the loss of local control over the schools, the likelihood of a higher property tax burden being placed on rural residents, and the lack of good roads to get the pupils to school.¹⁵ Proponents of consolidation worked to overcome the farmers’ natural “suspicion of the city.”¹⁶ by emphasizing the superiority of education student



Children walking to school





CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL
GILMAN, IA. 651-

would get at the consolidated school over the one-room country school, a superiority that was worth any increase in taxes.¹⁷

The rural school consolidation movement in Iowa got a boost from an Iowa transportation bill passed in 1897, allowed public expenditure for the transportation of schoolchildren. One school district in Winnebago County immediately took advantage of the new law, closing down three rural schools and transporting the pupils to a new consolidated township school that had been approved by city voters in Buffalo Center but had not yet been utilized by outlying districts.¹⁸

Although the first consolidation law in Iowa was passed in 1906, the movement was slow getting started. The law mandated that a school district include no fewer than sixteen square miles; and electors in both urban and rural areas had to approve the larger district in separate votes. By 1910, there were only ten consolidated schools including Albion (Marshall County), Buffalo Center (Winnebago), Crawfordsville (Washington), Fernald (Story), Lake Center (Hamilton), Lincoln Township (unknown county), Floyd Town-

ship (Dickinson), Marathon (Buena Vista), McIntire (Mitchell), and Webb (Clay).¹⁹

In 1913, another law further encouraged the rural school consolidation movement—funding for consolidated schools. Districts could receive aid for schools if they met grounds and building requirements, had acceptable



HUFTALEN COLLECTION: STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)

*Country teachers at Institute.
Lesson on judging, 1914*

1881 Schoolhouse near Davenport

public transportation for students, hired certified teachers, maintained an agriculture experiment plot, and owned the proper equipment to teach agriculture, home economics and manual training. Schools received money for equipment and instruction according to the number of rooms in the buildings—a two-room school received \$250 for equipment and \$200 for instruction, three-roomed schools brought in \$350 for equipment and \$500 for instruction, and four rooms got the school board \$500 for equipment and \$750 for instruction.²⁰

Consolidation of country schools benefited also when a minimum attendance law in 1919 forced directors to close a school that had fewer than five students in average daily attendance or could not show the planned attendance of at least ten pupils for the following year.²¹ Country schools struggled to stay open under the stringent minimum attendance require-

ments, garnering some sympathy from local politicians. By 1925, the number required for anticipated attendance was lowered from ten to seven.

A piece of legislation that marked the impending demise of the country school system was passed in 1945. It allowed directors to close a school if the operating cost per pupil was greater than the cost of tuition at another school.²² In 1953, new legislation required the formation of community school districts to receive public funding with each district absorbing all elementary schools in the region.²³ This law effectively closed any remaining country schools. By 1972 there were only 472 school districts in the state, and not a single public one-room schoolhouse.²⁴

NINETEENTH CENTURY COUNTRY SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE

The 19th century country school resembled the country church in appearance: a long narrow rectangle, with windows on one or both sides, front entrances and a gable roof. The typical nineteenth-century dimensions for a country school were 18 feet wide and 28 feet long. For the most







*Oralabor Rural
Schools Dec. 8,
1939 Polk Co.*

part, this American vernacular type utilized commercial materials: dimension lumber, bricks, concrete block, wood shingles, and local limestone, although some log schools remained in use for many years. By the 1890s cloakrooms or entryways were part of the standard design of country schools. In the nineteenth century there was usually a bank of three double-hung sash windows on the 28-foot sides of the school building.

While there were plan books available, most country schools were

designed and built by local craftsmen. The typical building procedure was to lay a foundation of stone and mortar and the chimney, frame up the building, add the clapboard siding, sheet the roof and shingle it, and perhaps add a bell tower or a flag spar. The work was done by craftsmen and crew, but

often local people contributed labor in order to reduce the cost. The cost of a school building in 1900 ran between \$600 and \$800.

School sites were normally selected in a corner of a section, in order to minimize disruption on the neighboring farm. The sites were one acre in size, fenced off from the farmland, with trees along the property line. Except for the earliest schools, when land was purchased from speculators or the government, farmers ordinarily purchased or donated the land. If the site was abandoned, the land reverted

to the original owner. Wells were considered too expensive, and water was carried daily from the closest farmstead, a chore most often carried out by one of the students.

Playground equipment such as swings, chin-up bars, and slides did not become popular until after 1900. Outdoor games played by students were limited only by their imagination. Typical games played at Brushwood School #5 in Clay County included “Drop the Handkerchief, Fox and Geese, Blackman, Hide and Seek, and Johnny May I Cross Your River”.²⁵ Separate privies for boys and girls were set in the corners at the back of the lot, and woodsheds were near the school. While popular folklore pictured the “little red schoolhouse,” most painted the vast majority of Iowa schoolhouses white, partly to reflect the sun and partly because of tradition.

TWENTIETH CENTURY COUNTRY SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE

Until 1920, nearly all Iowa country schools had gable roofs. In the 1920s hipped-roofed structures with inset porches, influenced by the Arts &

Crafts and Bungalow styles, began to appear, with a corresponding addition in width to about 32 feet. A few flat-roofed, cube-style “International” schools were built in the early 1940s. Bell towers were uncommon on most of Iowa’s country schools built in the 20th century. Those few schools that were adorned with bell towers were usually in more prosperous communities. In the 1920s, when electricity began to appear in rural areas, some districts were willing to pay the additional cost to bring a line to the school. By the 1930s the rural electrification movement brought electric lights to all country schools.

The greatest contrast among country schools was in classroom equipment. Here the district’s prosperity, or lack thereof, and a commitment to providing quality education were most evident. There was usually a built-in bookcase to house a library. Student desks, singles or doubles, and a recitation bench varied somewhat from building to building, but it was the size and design of the teacher’s desk, and the presence of a pump

organ or piano, wall maps, globes, and curtains that distinguished schools from one another. Blackboards ranged from painted wood to

slate. While the austere exterior symbolized the practical, the interior reflected the community’s concern for the children.



*Summit Township Rural
School, Clay County*

WPA COLLECTION: STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)

Nominating a School

What is the National Register?

The National Register of Historic Places is the official Federal list of districts, buildings, sites, structures, and objects that are worthy of preservation and that are significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. Nominating a country school to the National Register raises aware-

ness of its significance to the history of Iowa. Completing a National Register nomination can be a very rewarding and intensive process. This section is intended to provide the framework and basic resources for nominating a country school to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Nomination Process—Step-by-Step

STEP ONE—GETTING STARTED

The first step in nominating a country school is to contact the National Register Coordinator at the State Historical Society of Iowa to request a National Register packet of information, and to find out if the school has been previously surveyed. The Iowa Site Inventory at the State Historical Society of Iowa contains information on historic buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts located across Iowa—information on the school being nominated may have

NPS Form 10-900
OCT 1990

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions on how to complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being nominated, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For locations, architectural characteristics, materials, and dates of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and descriptive items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name _____
Other names/alternate number _____

2. Location

Street & number _____ ☐ not for publication
City or town _____ ☐ vicinity
State _____ Code _____ County _____ Code _____ Zip code _____

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination
_____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, this property
_____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
nationally. ☐ statewide ☐ locally ☐ (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____
State or Federal Agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (I see nomination sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____
State or Federal Agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
1. eligible in the National Register.
2. recommended for the National Register.
3. determined not eligible for the National Register.
4. removed from the National Register.
5. other, (specify) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

already been gathered. The National Register packet includes instructions on how to research a property and how to complete a nomination as well as National Register nomination forms, a list of State Historical Society staff that can answer questions, and, should it be necessary, a list of consultants that can be hired to complete or assist with a National Register nomination.

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)

STEP TWO—ASSESSING YOUR SCHOOL'S SIGNIFICANCE AND INTEGRITY

What makes a particular country school worth listing in the National Register? Answering that question involves placing a school within the historic context of the development of rural education in Iowa. **Historic context** is “information about the period, the place, and the events that created, influenced, or formed the backdrop to [country schools].”²⁶ Conducting research on the country school will help determine how the particular school fits within the history of rural education in Iowa (See Step Three for Guidance on Researching A Property).

Historical significance is the way in which a property is important to the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture of a community. A school may possess historical significance in four different ways, as described by the National Register Criteria for Evaluation:

- A. Association with events, activities, or broad patterns of history
Schools may be eligible under Criterion A for their association

School children gathers around teacher at table, ca. 1915-1920

- with the development of a rural educational system in Iowa. They can also be eligible under this criterion for their importance as a social center for rural communities in Iowa.*
- B. Association with important persons

Schools that were directly and significantly associated with individuals who played an important role in the development of education in Iowa may be eligible under Criterion B.

- C. Embodiment of distinctive physical characteristics of a type, period, or





Students making walks to well and fuel house....Page County, ca. 1910.

may yield important archaeological information about the school's construction and activities and therefore be eligible under this criterion.

Historic Integrity

Can a country school represent its significance to Iowa's educational history if it no longer looks like a country school? No. A property must have historic integrity to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Historic integrity is the ability of the building to convey its history through its original material, design, workmanship, location, feeling, association and setting. Many country schools have lost their integrity—through deterioration due to abandonment or through extensive alteration. In order for a country school to have integrity, it must retain much of its original exterior materials such as wood or stone walls, foundation, wood sash windows, and wood trim—it must look like it did when it was an active country school. The interior of the school should also be as intact as possible, retaining the original floor, blackboards, wood trim and molding. A country school should also retain its original location to be eligible, although moving a country school from a rural setting to a similar

method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values

Schools may be eligible as an example of a distinctive building type—the country schoolhouse—because of their universal form—a

one-story, gable roof structure with double-hung windows on the sides and an entry on the gable end.

D. Potential to yield important information

Sites of former schoolhouses that have not been physically disturbed

rural setting may not disqualify it from consideration.

STEP THREE—RESEARCH, RESEARCH, AND RESEARCH

Where to look

Finding information on a country school can be a hit or miss process. The most common sources of information include local newspapers, historical maps, school records such as attendance reports, grade books, and summary reports; and repositories such as local and county historical societies, libraries, and county courthouses. School records, which can often be found at the local school administration office or at the local historical society, offer the most interesting and comprehensive picture of a country school's history. Summary reports, completed by outgoing teachers, included information such as a teacher's name and salary, class size, lesson plans, books used, and even notations about the schoolhouse and schoolyard.²⁷ Oral history, stories from former students and teachers, can also be a fruitful source of information. A bibliography and resource list of other helpful materials is located on page 27 of this booklet.

Historical photographs of schools can reveal much about a school's history and how it has changed over time. Local historical societies are great places to look for historical school photographs. The State Historical

Society of Iowa has a large collection of photographs of WPA sponsored projects including country schools at both its Des Moines and Iowa City archives.

*Schoolyard showing outhouses,
pump, schoolhouse, etc.*



WPA COLLECTION: STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)



*Students mending fence at
Norwich School*

*Prescott Twp. #3,
Adams County*

- What buildings, structures, equipment, etc. are on the property? Which ones were there when the country school was still active?

STEP FOUR— COMPLETING THE NOMINATION

Once background research on the school has been completed, the process of writing the

National Register nomination can begin. Completing a National Register nomination can involve writing narratives that describe the school and how it is significant at the local, state or national level and documenting the property with black and white photographs. *National Register Bulletin 16: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, which is included in the National Register packet mentioned in Step One, provides detailed instructions on how to fill out the nomination. When National Register nominations have been completed they are submitted to the National Register Coordinator at the State Historical Society of Iowa. The first review of the nomination

addresses the eligibility of the school for listing on the National Register and the completeness of the research and documentation efforts. The nomination is returned to the applicant with comments for improving the nomination. The revised second draft is reviewed by a group of staff that will make recommendations on the content of the nomination. Nominations that have been found adequate after staff reviews are submitted to the State Nominations Review Committee (SNRC), a panel of lay people and professionals with disciplines in architecture, archaeology, architectural history, and history, who may also make comments and recommendations on the nominations. Once the nomination is revised, it is returned to the National Register Coordinator, signed by the Iowa State Historic Preservation Officer, and then forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register at the National Park Service for final approval.



What to ask

Focus your research toward answering the following questions. This information is necessary for the school to be considered for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

- When was the school built?
- What was its name when it was in use as a country school?
- What did the school look like when constructed?
- What changes have been made to the school and when were they made?
- How has the school been used through its history?



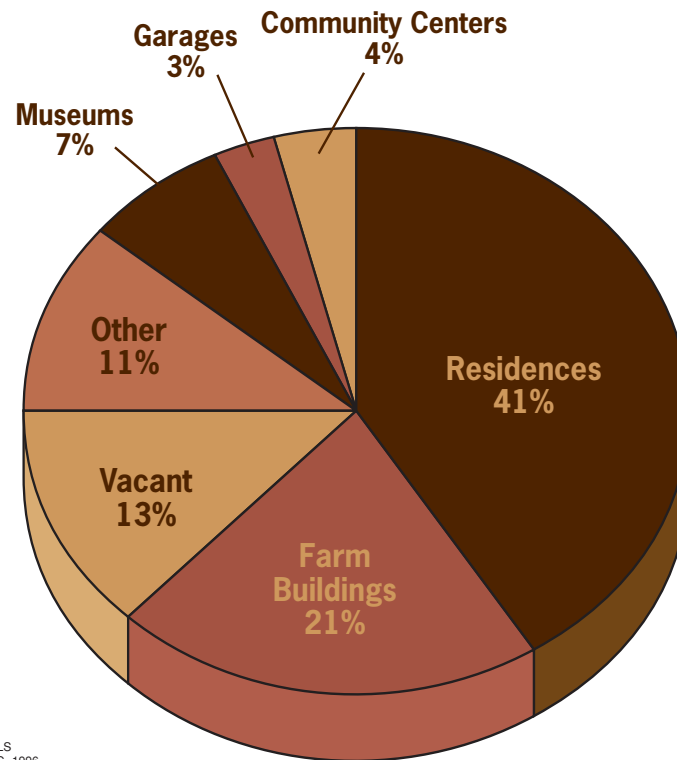
Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation brings a vacant or unused building into productive use. As illustrated in the graph below, a survey of numerous extant country schools shows that most have become residences. Nearly 25% of country schools have been converted into garages, storage sheds or agricultural outbuildings; while 11% serve community uses.

At first glance, rehabilitation opportunities for vacant country schools may seem limited. Country schools are located in remote rural areas, and are generally too small and lack modern plumbing or electricity. Unlike most town and city schools, country schools are privately owned, making rehabilitation into community type buildings more problematic. Neverthe-

less, as the graph shows, various uses are possible and, if rehabilitated in accordance with the following principles, a country school can stand as an eloquent reminder of a bygone era:

- The proposed use should be appropriate to the school building, and should minimize changes to defining characteristics such as roof shape and decorative details, siding, — size and pattern of windows, general floor plan, and interior features such as blackboards, wood trim, and wood floors.
- If the interior is to be changed to accommodate a new use, interior changes should not impact exterior appearance.
- Additions should be compatible in terms of massing, scale, and architectural characteristics with the original structure, but should not try to mimic the original or look “old”.
- Additions or alterations should not involve the removal of historic materials or elements — instead conserve elements such as finishes or construction techniques by hiding them.



WILLIAM L. SHERMAN.
IOWA'S COUNTRY SCHOOLS
LANDMARKS OF LEARNING, 1996.

*District #1, Washington Twp.,
Jackson County*

The Secretary of the Interior also has guidelines on how to preserve the most important aspects of an historic structure. The guidelines below apply to the materials most commonly found in country schools.

MASONRY
(I.E. BRICK, STONE,
CONCRETE, AND STUCCO)

Identify, retain, repair and preserve masonry features that are important in defining the overall character of the school such as brick, concrete or limestone walls, cornices, window sills and lintels, door pediments, steps, and columns, joint and unit size, tooling and bonding patterns, and coatings and color.

ROOF

Identify, retain, repair and preserve roofs and their functional and decorative features that are important in defining the overall historic character of the school. This includes the roof's shape, such as hipped or gable; decorative features such as cupolas, cresting, chimneys, and weathervanes; and roofing material such as slate, wood, clay tile, and metal, as well as its size, color and patterning.



WOOD

Identify, retain, repair and preserve wood features that are important to defining the overall historic character of the school such as siding, cornices, brackets, window architraves, and doorway pediments; and their paints, finishes, and colors.

WINDOWS

Identify, retain, repair and preserve windows and their functional and decorative features that are important in defining the overall historic character of the school. Such features can include frames, sash, muntins, glazing, sills, heads, hoodmolds,



8-2-1

paneled or decorated jambs and moldings, and interior and exterior shutters and blinds.

The open plan of the country school makes it easily adaptable to a wide variety of uses including residences, community halls, museums, and businesses. The Secretary of the Interior has some guidelines that are important to follow when adapting a country school to another use:

INTERIOR SPACES

Identify, retain, repair and preserve a floor plan or interior spaces that are important in defining the overall historic character of the school. This includes the size, configuration, proportion, and relationship of rooms and corridors; and the spaces themselves such as entryways, storage closets, cloakrooms, bathrooms, and other specialized spaces.

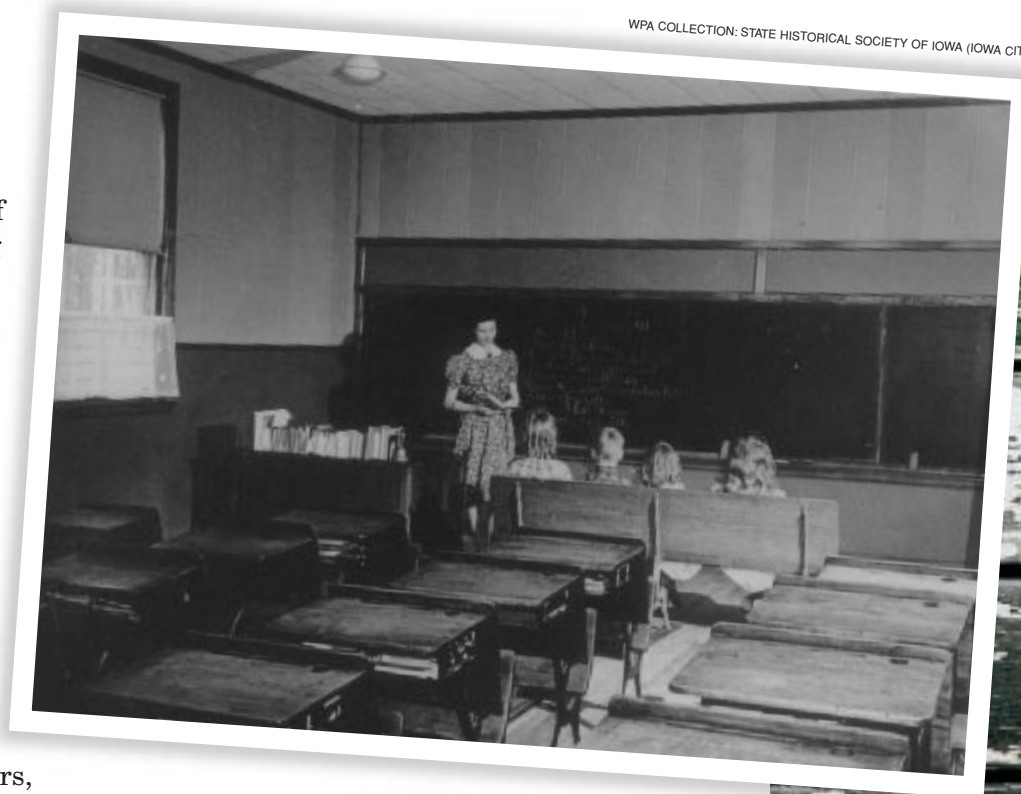
INTERIOR FEATURES AND FINISHES

Identify, retain, repair and preserve interior features and finishes that are important in defining the overall

historic character of the school, including cornices, baseboards, stoves, paneling, light fixtures, hardware, and flooring; blackboards, built-in cabinetry and shelves; and wallpaper, plaster, paint, and finishes such as stenciling, marbling, and graining; and other decorative materials that accent interior features and provide color, texture, and patterning to walls, floors, and ceilings.

BUILDING SITE

Identify, retain, repair and preserve buildings and their features as well as features of the site that are important in defining its overall historic character. Site features can include fencing, trees, playground equipment, privies, wood sheds, wells, and archaeological features that are important in defining the history of the school site.



WPA COLLECTION: STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)

*Langdon Rural School,
March 9, 1942*

Summary & Significance

William H. Drier speculates that as much as 75% of Iowa's population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were educated in a country school.²⁸ The importance of the country school to the history of Iowa cannot be overstated. These modest structures were symbols of the hopes and dreams of Iowa's rural population for a better future for their children and for themselves. And despite the non-specialized and ungraded curriculum, they did provide a better future for Senator Tom Harkin, Artist Grant Wood, Author Laura Ingalls Wilder, 4-H Founder Jessie Field Shambaugh, Governor William Larabee, former President Herbert Hoover, and many others. Iowans held on tight to their country schools because they were the center and symbol of their social life and community in a time when it wasn't just a five-minute ride into town.

Though most of the country school buildings in Iowa have been removed or modified beyond recognition, there are many which have the potential to provide Iowans with a glimpse of what it was like to attend a country school, an experience that today lies only in the memory but can still be approached with thoughtful rehabilitation and reuse.





SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

Most schools are vernacular buildings constructed of common materials such as wood, brick, concrete block, and limestone. Lack of heavy ornamentation on most country schools make them very straightforward buildings to rehabilitate. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, which are listed below, provide the framework for preserving a school's significance through the preservation of its historic materials and features.

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Several major sources were consulted for this publication and are recommended further reading. The Draft Multiple Property Document "One-Room Country Schools of Iowa" written by Robert Neymeyer, and Wayne Palmer Truesdell's thesis "A History of School Organization and Superintendence in Iowa" hold a wealth of information about the history of country schools and their architecture. Iowa's Country Schools: Landmarks of Learning by William T. Sherman provides a useful summary of the state of country schools today including a county-by-county survey of country schools. The Fall 2001 issue of Iowa Heritage Illustrated focused on country schools in Iowa, with several articles on researching country schools, funding for the preservation of country schools, and a collection of lively memoirs from former country school students. *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth-Century Iowa* by David R. Reynolds contains a great deal of insight into the consolidation movement. Curtis Harnack's book, We Have All Gone Away, is a wonderful source of touching and humorous memories of life in a country school in the early 20th century. Other resources that may be of interest are listed below by topic.

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¹Robert Neymeyer, "One-Room Country Schools of Iowa," Draft Multiple Property Document, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, Sec. E, p. 9.

²Neymeyer, Sec. E, p. 9.

³Excerpted from Harvey R. Horton's article, "You Learn About People," Iowa Heritage Illustrated Volume 82, Number 3 (Fall 2001): 101.

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