The Last of the Clay County Country Schools 1999- 2015

The Last of the Clay County Country Schools 1999 - 2015

By Fern Kaufman and Donna Gross

2015 Clay County Commissioners

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Cover Photo - Star Prairie School

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Introduction

Clay County, one of the earliest and also one of the smallest of South Dakota's sixty-seven counties, hosted South Dakota's first school: a small log cabin built in 1864 at the bottom of Ravine Hill, Vermillion. Thus began the rich history of early education in Clay County. Over time and until 1970, seventy-seven country schools were built and maintained within its borders. By state law in 1969, all country schools began the process of consolidation with a larger school offering K-12 education. Clay County would now close the last of its country schools.

The Clay County Country School Project, begun in 1999 by Fern Kaufman and Donna Gross, provides a pictorial history of sixteen of the county's remaining country school buildings. The intent of the project was to provide photographs and information of Clay County Schools while some of the buildings still remained. Although students and teachers fondly provide stories and school experiences of early country school education, the school buildings themselves also have stories to tell: their location, their architectural style, their present condition, their present use. All these elements speak or "talk" just as their human occupants have done. Sadly, many of Clay County's early schools have been destroyed or are in poor condition; however, a few have new modern uses. The goal of our project was to capture the existence of the remaining schools through photography, research, and partnerships.

Logging many miles on the county's country roads, we found remaining school structures and took preliminary photographs of them. Hours spent in Clay County Courthouse records, as well as researching old school records found in boxes at the Austin Whittemore House revealed rich details: school openings and closings, names of schools, natural disasters and rebuilding, lists of students and teachers, minutes of YCL (Young Citizens League) meetings. At this early point in the project, the idea of partnering with Vermillion High School students emerged. English teacher Sharon Ross and librarian Shari Kolbeck liked the idea. They helped us to find students and work space for the project. Utlimately six students from Ross' American Heritage class volunteered. Working with us, each student selected one of the schools to research and document history. Their projects culminated in presentations to their class and to community organizations, thus fulfilling a class assignment as well as providing additional and valuable information of their schools.

As the project drew to a close in November 2004, professional photographs provided a visual history supported by research data of the remaining school structures in Clay County. These black and white photographs now in large format, matted and framed, were displayed on the walls of the Vermillion High School Library where they were exhibited for seven years. Finally, believing that the high school exhibit had come to its natural end, we sought a more permanent venue. In 2011, the WH Over Museum accepted the photographic exhibit with its accompanying research material into its collection. With this permanent housing for all the materials, we felt the project to be completed.

However, a nagging but unfulfilled goal kept bubbling to the surface. Would a book be a fitting addition to the project? In 2014 the question was answered, and the project took on new life with a new partner joining us: the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission.

The Commission endorsed the idea of a book, agreeing to fund its printing. Thus, began another phase of research. We revisited all fifteen of the original sites to take current pictures and collect additional data; and we discovered one more site, bringing the total to sixteen. Finding interesting and often significant changes to the buildings since our initial visits in 1999, we have sought to record them with new pictures and information. We believe the changes hint at the future of these remaining Clay County Country Schools.

> *Donna Gross and Fern Kaufman* September, 2015

The Authors



Fern Kaufman and Donna Gross have lived in rural South Dakota for most of their lives. Donna attended a small town public school, and Fern attended a country school for eight years. They began their long friendship while working on their masters degrees at USD. Retiring the same year, Donna from teaching and school administration, and Fern from business ownership, and serving on the Vermillion School board, they began looking for a meaningful project to share. Interested in education, they became aware of both the changes and the loss of country school buildings in Clay County where over time there had existed 77 schools. Gross and Kaufman decided to investigate the condition of the Clay County schools and do an inventory. Their efforts led to a fifteen year project and this publication.

School Sites and Map

- A Log Cabin School
- B Bethel School #38
- C Bruyer School #8
- D Burbank School #10
- E Clay Point School #31
- F Dalesburg School #35
- G Fairview School #6
- H Frog Creek School #34
- Glenwood School #50
- J Greenfield School #18 (1st and 2nd buildings)
- **K** Greenfield School #18 (3rd and 4th buildings)
- L Independence School #1
- M Lincoln School #12
- N Marshalltown School #30
- Newdale School #43
- P Spring Hill School #2
- **Q** Star Prairie School #14

Research may be inaccurate due to duplication and name changes of individual schools. Examples: Frog Creek School has also been known as Look-Out Mountain School, as well as Look-Out Mound. Some schools were named after families: O'Connor School was also known as Valley School and Shaw School was also known as Box Elder School.

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General Historical Facts

South Dakota settlers placed a high priority on their children's education. As Dr. Herbert Schell noted in his *History of South Dakota*, they quickly located teachers and started schools in homes, sod buildings or log structures. During the winter of 1864-65, the first permanent school house was built in Vermillion. The log school house, built at the bottom of Ravine Hill, became a focal point for this small community's children as well as serving as a city hall, general meeting place, and church. Technically not a country school, this publication includes the log cabin school because of its historical importance to Clay County.

As more settlers arrived and school populations grew, the rural school buildings evolved from log cabins to frame structures. Without the aid of architectural plans and costing very little, many of these early schools were built by hatchet and saw carpenters who donated labor and supplies. Generally, the rural schools built in the 1880's consisted of one rectangular room with a number of large windows on the east or south side to provide sufficient natural light. The exteriors of the school buildings from the 1800s were usually plain with gabled roofs; however, some Clay County schools showed a flair for creativity with ornamental cupolas or bell towers. Often, a covered porch preceded the entrance which was usually located in the gabled end.

These earliest schools had few comforts, but the necessary facilities were not neglected. Within the one room, often about 18'x28', a cloak room or pegs on the wall held students' warm clothes. Close by, a water container, a single dipper, and a wash basin provided water for drinking or washing. Wood and coal burning stoves, along with sunlight, provided heat. An outhouse was situated close to the main building. Many schools had small barns or sheds to house the horses ridden by some of the students and teachers. Big changes came to South Dakota country schools in the early part of the 20th century. These changes in structure and facilities evolved gradually, often encouraged by state support. After 1900, rectangular school houses were not as commonly built but were replaced by square buildings. These schools, built from standard plans, had hipped roofs and often basements. Now students and teachers could enjoy modern conveniences. Gravity furnaces and chemical toilets were often put in around the 1920's. A basement furnance spread heat more evenly throughout the buildings, adding to the comfort of both the students and teachers. These basements could become gymnasiums in cold weather. Merry-go-rounds and swing sets had previously made it to the play grounds of many schools.

Dr. Schell recorded in the History of South Dakota that in 1918 the South Dakota legislature offered financial support for schools that met certain standards. Between 1920 and 1945, nine hundred primary and secondary schools were constructed in the state, seventy-five percent of them small rural schools that cost less than eight thousand dollars. Architect F. C. W. Kuehn was responsible for about forty percent of them as South Dakota used his standard plans for small rural schools of frame or brick built between 1923 and 1929. Other schools were built using standard plans provided in many instances by the Smith Heating Company of Minneapolis, which sold heating systems, drinking fountains, and chemical toilets to hundreds of rural schools in SD, MN, and other nearby states. The more modern country school was arriving often with blackboards, wainscoting on the lower walls, topped by plaster or molded tin on the ceiling. Finally, book cases held books, and teachers and students had individual desks.

Evolving Architectural Details

Although the earliest 20th century country schools had unique architectural details, they shared many similarities:

- All schools had bells, either hand-bells or pull bells on top of the building.
- All schools had flag-poles with students helping to raise and lower the flag.
- All schools had pegs or cloak rooms in order to hang outer clothing.
- All schools provided some type of water containers for drinking and hand washing.
- Most schools had bench-seating for students before desks became common.
- Most schools had a small, simple teacher's desk.
- Many schools had a recitation bench.
- Most schools had slate black boards.
- Most schools had large pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln on the walls.
- Playground equipment was featured at many schools, i.e. swings, merry-go-rounds, teeter-totters.
- Custodial duties were the responsibility of teachers and students.

Although built for the education of children, rural schools served many other functions:

- Many doubled as community meeting places and/or township halls.
- Some hosted church services before church buildings were erected.
- Most were used for community and school programs.
- Some became voting precincts.

Note to Readers

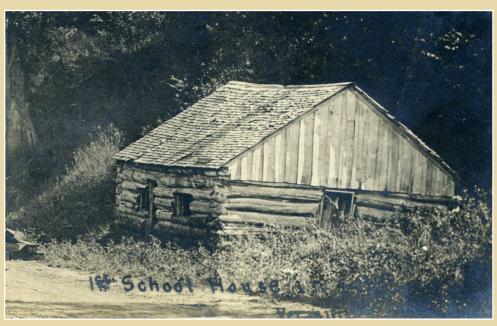
- First data collection, site visits, and photography ocurred from 1999 to 2002.
- Each school description is accompanied by dates recording the district's beginning and closure. Some districts may have been formed prior to constuction of a building.
- Second data collection, site visits, and photography occurred from 2014 to 2015. New data for each school is indicated by bold-faced italics.
- All photos are identified by the year taken.

Student Tribute

"These buildings are filled with a presence, a presence of something great. The aura remains of children who played on swings, ran around the schoolyard playing tag, or even those with the desire to learn. We hope to keep that presence alive in the minds of all those who remember the stories, the memories, and the history of the school and to awaken a certain nostalgia in all of our hearts."

> American Heritage Class Presentaton by Vermillion High School Juniors Spring Semester - 2000

The Vermillion Log Cabin School

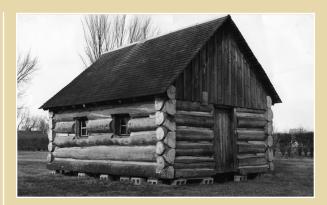


Original School located below the ravine

 Captain Nelson Miner's troop (Dakota Cavalry) constructed the first permanent school in Dakota Territory in 1864-65 at the bottom of Ravine Hill, using building materials of logs and sod, measuring about 15 x 20 feet. Technically not a Clay County Country School, the authors include it because it was the first permanent school house in Dakota Territory.

Α

- A 1939 replica stood on the USD campus.
- In 1964 the replica was returned to the original Ravine Hill site.
- In 1978 it was moved to Captain Miner Lane near the Senior Citizen Center.



Replica that stood on USD Campus at Pine and Cherry





New replica by Austin Whittemore House - 2015



Replica that stood behind Senior Citizens Center

View of desk inside log cabin school replica - 2015

In 2014 a new log cabin replica was built, using some salvageable pieces and placing it at a new site on 15 Austin Street next to the historic Austin Whittemore House. The interior contains appropriate furnishings and memorablia, providing a glimpse into the educational lives of Dakota Territory students and teachers of the mid-nineteenth century.



Interior view of new log cabin school replica - 2015

Bethel School #38



East side - 1999

• 1875-1952

Β

- SW ¼, Section 14, Bethel Township
- Also known as Bervin School
- School building still stands on the original site



Cupola - 2014

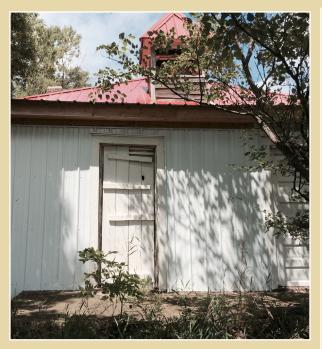


Southwest view of new metal roof - 2014

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Southeast view, east windows replaced with white metal siding - 2014



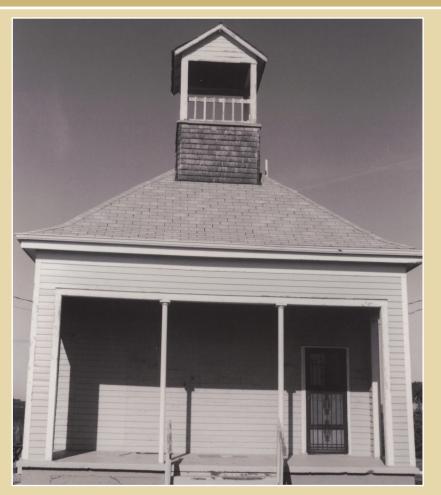
South side - 2015

December 2014: site revisit revealed restoration of the building with red metal roofing on the cupola and roof and new white siding on the east side of the building. A follow-up visit in July, 2015, shows more work having been done with metal siding on all sides of the building.



Northeast side - 2015

Bruyer School #8



Front, east side - 1999

• 1869-1962

С

- NE ¼, Section 14, Fairview Township
- Named for John Bruyer, Sr., a French immigrant who homesteaded on the land upon which the school was built
- Sometimes referred to as the Brady School in honor of a nearby homesteader named Brady
- School building still located on original site
- Various owners used it for storage, and in 1978 it was remodeled and used as an art studio





North side - 1999



Exterior view, north side- 2015

July, 2015: Site revisit revealed the original school structure incorporated into the north end of a long building which is apparently used as single or multiple living quarters. A few windows from the 1978 remodel remain on the north end along with the original roof-line minus its cupola



Exterior view, east side- 2015



Used as an art studio - 1999

Burbank School #10

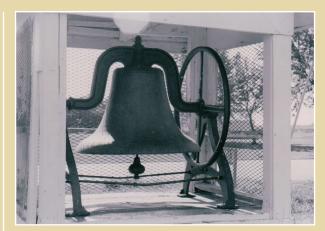


Front entrance east side - 2001

• 1874-1972

D

- NE ¼, Section 35, Fairview Township
- Located on original site in the town of Burbank, Fairview Township, sitting on about three and a half acres of land
- First structure, built in 1882, was moved and used for various purposes
- Present structure built in 1910, contained at least two classrooms with hardwood floors and a basement
- Consolidated with Vermillion School District in 1972
- Burbank Association established to preserve the school which is presently used as a Community Center
- An active historical society has maintained and improved the structure as money permitted. The stage with its original curtain is in good condition, and new windows have been installed along with a new roof.



Original school bell - 2001





Front entrance - 2015



Window above entrance doors - 2015



Playground equipment - 2015



Wood floor and pine wainscoting - 2015

The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996 (See <u>Guide</u> to National Register of Historic Places in Clay <u>County, South Dakota</u>, Clay County Historic Preservation Commission, 2011, p. 30). This guide provides additional school details.

July, 2015: site revisit reveals building in good condition with original flooring, plaster and lathe walls. Ceiling, pine wainscoting, chalk boards, and built-in bookcases are still in place



Storage cupboards - 2015



Clay Point School #31



Photo of original school, taken from newspaper clippings Courtesy of Marion Kryger.

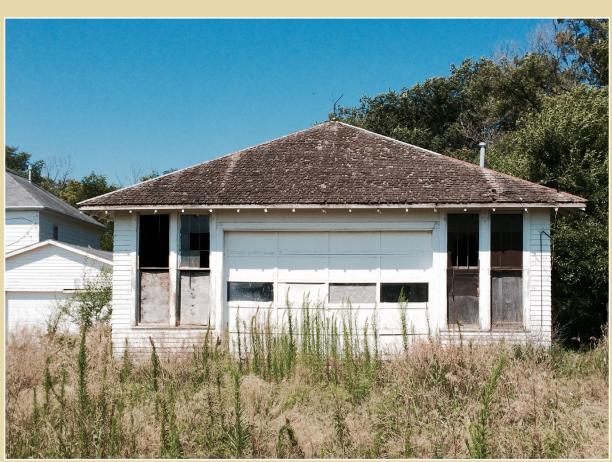
• 1871-1943

Ε

- Named for Clay Point Community
- Early location at SE ¼, Section 8, Prairie Center Township
- Later location near the center of Section 5, Prairie Center Township
- Present location at the southern ½ of Section 9, Prairie Center Township

July, 2015: A rare find , thanks to Arlene DeVany, was Clay Point School #31. Her childhood country school had been moved several times and had not been found by the researchers during their first school searches in 2000.





East side original windows and roof - 2015



Original water cooler - 2015

This school building, in poor repair and sitting as one of the out-buildings on a vacant farm, appears to have been used as a garage; however, the roof-line and windows still clearly mark it as a country school. Arlene DeVany has memorabilia from the school.



Original door fixtures - 2015

Dalesburg School #35



Front entrance, south side - 2001

• 1872-1974

F

- School building located on SW ¼, Section 8, Garfield Township
- School building destroyed by fire in January, 1926
- The rebuilt, two-classroom brick building, constructed in 1926, stands on the original site
- A formal dedication, attended by many state notables, commemorated the new school; State Superintendent St.John declared the building to be the finest of its class in the state
- In 1969 the school district was divided between Centerville and Beresford with classes being held in the building until 1974
- Currently remodeled and used as a home
- Many of the school's original doors, windows, and wooden floors remain in the home. The fireplace in the remodeled house is faced with ceiling wood from the original outhouses.

July, 2015: site revisit reveals the school to be in excellent condition and still used as a home.



West side - 2001





Front entrance, south side - 2015



Oak entrance and steps - 2015



The fire place faced with original ceiling wood from the outhouse - 2015

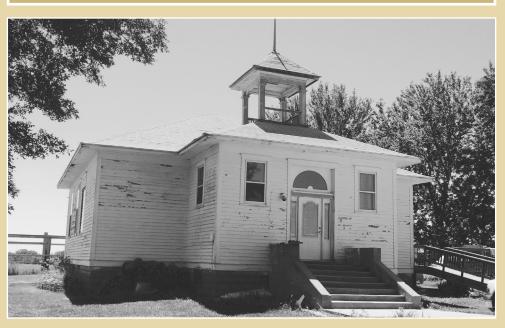


Original doors and windows stored in the basement - 2015



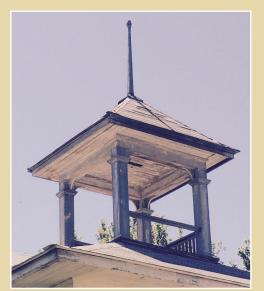
Original door in basement - 2015

Fairview School #6



Front entrance, north side - 2002

- 1869 1969
- NE ¼, Section 21, Fairview Township
- Originally located in a field across the road from its present site on land owned and donated by Franklin Taylor who laid out the plan for all the school districts in Clay County



Cupola - 2015

- A number of families took refuge in this school during the flood of 1881
- School rebuilt in 1903 on its current site
- Presently occupied as a home
- The only Clay County rural school district that operated continuously for 100 years



Original ceiling fixtures on tin ceiling - 2015





Front view - 2015



New main floor kitchen with original brick chimney - 2015

July, 2015: site revisit reveals the school continues to serve as a home and is owned by the Ufford family. The building still has original wood floors; the ornate metal ceiling has recently been sand-blasted and repainted; and some original light-fixtures are still in use. The main floor has been divided into several rooms, including a new modern kitchen. Large original, oak doors have been used as dividers in a great room area. The basement also has several rooms with a new kitchen and tiled floors. The interior restoration continues.



New basement kitchen - 2015



Original ceiling tile in entrance - 2015

Frog Creek School # 34



View from Frog Creek Road - 2000

• 1871-1964

Η

- SW ¼, Section 8, Riverside Township
- Prior to the early 1900's the school was sometimes referred to as Lookout Mountain school and/or Lookout Mound School, possibly due to sharp rise of land west of the site
- School building located on original site and cared for by local residents



The sign shows Frog Creek designated as a standard school - 2000



Schoool entrance - 2000



24



Front entrance - 2012 Photo courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. William Knutson



School and playground equipment - 2000

Working on school house - 2012 Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. William Knutson

December, 2014: In May of 2012, the owner of the land on which the school sat was Rodney Knutson. With the help and support of surrounding neighbors, the school was razed and buried in four holes. Attempts were made to rescue various school objects, including an old flag found behind a second story dormer. William Knutson tried to save the piano which fell from a tractor bucket. William and Judy Knutson found and use cups from the school.



Original cups found in the school - 2012 Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. William Knutson

Glenwood School #50



School entrance - 2001

- 1875-1942
- NW ¼, Section 11, Glenwood Township
- Named for the Glenwood Post Office
- Building is in poor condition and still stands on the original site

November, 2014 and July, 2015: No remaining evidence of the school was found after several searches. Local residents confirm that the school had been demolished, burned and buried sometime after 2001.



Photo shows Venetian blinds on the interior of windows - 2001

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East side view - 2001



Second entrance missing steps - 2001



Flag pole and swings - 2001

Greenfield School #18



2nd building - 2000

• 1870 - 1968

J

- 1st School Building, 1870-1880, located in NW ¼, Section 11, Prairie Center Township, sold for use as a granary, (no photo available)
- 2nd School Building, 1881-1928, SE 1/4 Section 16, Prairie Center Township; abandoned as a school house in 1928
- Currently used as the Prairie Center Township Hall



Mainroom, original floor with raised level and blackboard, 2015

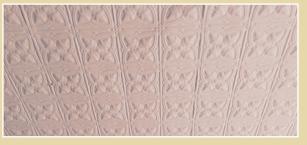


Stove - 2015





New verticle siding - 2015



Original tin ceiling - 2015

July, 2015: Site revisit reveals the school continues to be in good condition and is still used as a township hall. New metal siding has been added, and the interior has been freshly painted. The small entry room contains shelving. The blackboards still hang in the front of the main room; and the hardwood flooring, though painted, appears to be original as does the metal ceiling.



Original window with new metal siding - 2015



Interior door - 2015

Greenfield School #18



4th building, east windows of main floor and basement - 1999

- 1870 1968
- 3rd School Building, 1929-1935, destroyed by fire (no photo available)
- 4th School Building, 1936-1968, NW 1/4, Section11, Prairie Center Township,
- Standing although in poor condition



Side door - 2014

October, 2014: site revisit revealed the 4th building to be off its foundation with the walls, windows, and flooring almost totally deteriorated; unsafe condition. The building is not safe for entry.



School falling into basement - 2014





School deterioration- 2014



Interior view shows bookcase - 2000 Photo courtesy of student project



East side - 2014



West side - 2014

Independence School # 1



Southeast side - 1999

• 1866-1969

L

- Originally located in Vermillion Township close to the north side of town, also known as Independent School
- Later moved to its current location adjacent to University Road one mile north of town and one block west in a grove of trees near the Vermillion River: NE 1/4, Section 1, Vermillion township
- First rural school district in Clay County

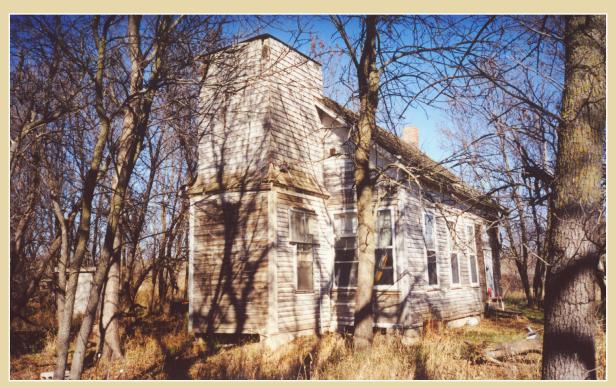


Unusual bell tower on south side - 2014

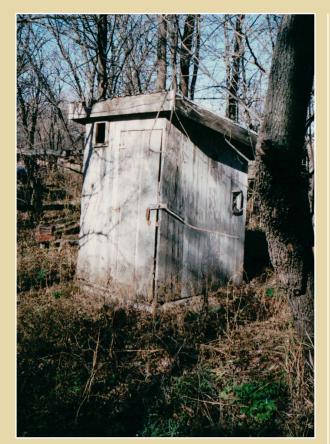


East side - 2014



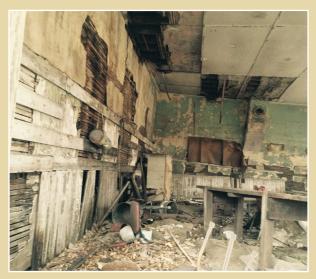


Southeast side - 2014



Outhouse - 2014

November, 2014: site revisit reveals significant deterioration with broken windows and rubbish-filled interior; however, the building still sits on the foundation, and the unusual bell-tower on the south side is in remarkably good condition.



Rubble filled interior - 2014

Lincoln School #12



Front entrance, south and east sides - 2000

• 1870-1969

Μ

- Originally located in SE ¼, Section 8, Norway Township
- Building was sold and moved two miles NW of the original site
- The school was first named Western; later named for President Lincoln
- Currently restored and used as a guest house



Main floor furnished as an area for guests - 2000



Main floor furnished as a classroom - 2000





South and east sides with prairie landscaping - 2015



Main floor furnished as a classroom with teacher and student desks on the main floor - 2015



Replica of original staircase to basement - 2015

July, 2015: site revisit reveals many significant and historically accurate changes have occurred since the 2000 visit. Ron Lindahl, the present owner, has revitalized this country school and its contents, featuring historically accurate memoriabilia. The windows are new but with historically accurate replacements. The flooring on the main floor is original down to the scorch marks from the potbellied stove and the ink spills. The chalkboards and main room doors are also original. The basement staircase, doors, and trim are historically accurate with the staircase being an exact duplicate of the original. The basement has been remodeled into pleasant guest quarters, featuring many country school items. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2000. (See Guide to National Register of Historic Places in Clay County, South Dakota, Clay County Historic Preservation Commission, 2011, p. 29). This guide provides additional school details.

Marshalltown School #30

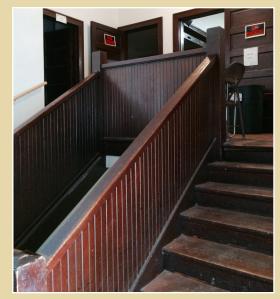


Old roof with two chimneys - 2000

• 1874-1969

Ν

- SE ¼, Section 29, Garfield Township
- Named for the Marshalltown post office
- Original schoolhouse was moved to the village of Dalesburg
- Present school building was built on the original site



Entrance and dual stair steps - 2015



Original interior windows - 2015

18	17 HUB	16 CITY	и 15 Ю	14	ALSEN
6 ity Road	G ²⁰ A	21 R F	22 IEL	D ²³ D	24
30 Universit	29 N	28 308th St i	27 reet	26 26 26	25
31	32	33	34	35 X 35 X	36



New metal roof with one chimney - 2015



Vaulted ceiling entrance - 2015



Upper story rooms of Legion Hall - 2015

July, 2015: site revisit reveals a new metal roof, changing the original roofline and structure, which is now identified as the Westlund Peterson American Legion Post 44. The school retains its original flooring and wood work. The building is actively used and cared for by the veterans belonging to Post 44.



Sign on interior entrance - 2015

Newdale School #43



Front entrance - 2002

• 1870-1969

Ο

- Center of Section 11, Garfield Township
- Organized by the Swedish community in 1870
- Became part of the Beresford School District in 1969
- School still stands on its original site



Side view - 2002



Front entrance with remaining bell tower base - 2002

6	5	4	3 ROAD	2	1 1
7	DALE 8	SBURG 9 305th Str	10 10 reet BBB 15	NEWDALE	469th A
18	17 HUB	16 CITY	НЭ 15 О	14	ALSEN
19	20	21	22	2 ³ Q	24



Side view - 2015



Side view - 2015

July, 2015: site revisit reveals the building still sitting solidly on its foundation; however, significant deterioration has occurred with several holes in the roof, broken basement windows, and one entrance door open to vandals and/or wildlife; main floor windows have been boarded, and the front entrance is obscured by encroaching bushes and trees.



Basement entrance - 2015



Basement stairs - 2015

Spring Hill School #2



Original structure - 2001

• 1873-1957

Ρ

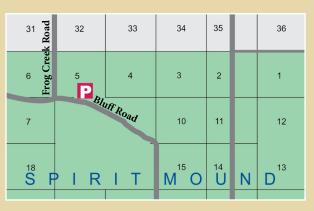
- NW ¼, Section 8, Spirit Mound Township
- Named for a nearby fresh-water spring
- School located on original site in Spirit Mound Township
- Became the second district established in Clay County



Entrance door and stairs - 2001



South side - 2001





School as a family home - 2014



Original light fixture - 2014



Main floor; furnished great room - 2014

November, 2014: site revisit reveals a lovely and unique family home.

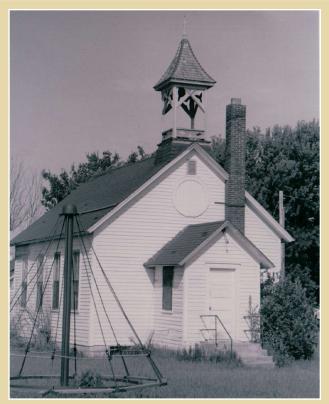
Restoration started in 2004 by owners Brian and Jill McBride who kept the original wood floor, most of the original window placement, one original ceiling light, the main entrance, and the bell tower with its functioning bell rope which can be pulled from inside.

1880 cornerstone for this building was found during restoration.

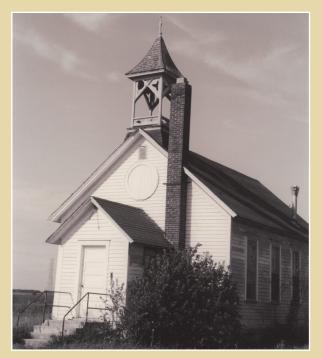


Great room with stairs to bedrooms - 2014

Star Prairie School #14



Front entrance with merry-go-round - 1999

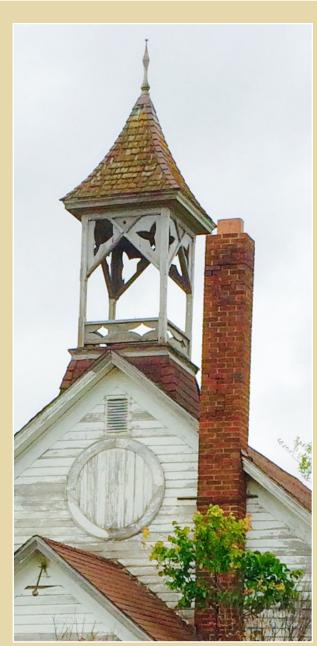


Q

East and north side - 1999

- 1870-1968
- NE ¼, Section 36, Spirit Mound Township
- Named by community at a meeting on a bright starry night
- Building still stands on original site





Unique cupola - 2014



School at sundown - 2014



East side - 2014

September, 2014: site revisit reveals continued building deterioration although the merry-go-round and swing set are still in place



Merry-go-round remains - 2014

People Involved in the Project

Project directors, researchers, writers and photographers: Fern Kaufman and Donna Gross

Photographer of the original black and white photographic exhibit: Beth Kerr

> Printing, mounting, and framing of the original black and white photographic exhibit: *Sarah Hanson*

Three Project Partnerships:

Vermillion High School (1999 - 2011)

American Heritage Class, Instructor – Sharon Ross High School Librarian – Shari Kolbeck Students – Shane Manning, Tabitha Hubert, Natalie Tuetken, Don O'Connor, Sarah Mollet, Tim Broderson

W.H. Over Museum

Photographic exhibit and all research materials accepted into the permanent collection (2011)

Clay County Historical Preservation Commission

Sponsor of the printed publication (2015)

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and to the local residents who loved their country schools.

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Clay County Courthouse: Records of Clay County Country Schools

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Further project information:

Vermillion Plain Talk, Friday, June 14, 2000

Vermillion Plain Talk, Friday, November 26, 2004

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