

NDCRS SITE FORM  
ARCHITECTURAL SITES  
Page 1

SITS # 32 WA 257

Field Code \_\_\_\_\_ Site Name HOFF SCHOOL  
Field Code \_\_\_\_\_ Site Name \_\_\_\_\_

Map Quad LANKIN  
Map Quad \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. N½
- 2. E½
- 3. S½
- 4. W½
- 5. NE¼
- 6. SE¼
- 7. SW¼
- 8. NW¼
- 9. C

LTL	<input type="checkbox"/>	Twp	<u>156</u>	R	<u>67</u>	Sec	<u>5</u>	QQQ	<u>5</u>	QQ	<u>5</u>	Q	<u>5</u>
LTL	<input type="checkbox"/>	Twp	_____	R	_____	Sec	_____	QQQ	_____	QQ	_____	Q	_____
LTL	<input type="checkbox"/>	Twp	_____	R	_____	Sec	_____	QQQ	_____	QQ	_____	Q	_____
LTL	<input type="checkbox"/>	Twp	_____	R	_____	Sec	_____	QQQ	_____	QQ	_____	Q	_____
LTL	<input type="checkbox"/>	Twp	_____	R	_____	Sec	_____	QQQ	_____	QQ	_____	Q	_____
LTL	<input type="checkbox"/>	Twp	_____	R	_____	Sec	_____	QQQ	_____	QQ	_____	Q	_____

City \_\_\_\_\_

Street # \_\_\_\_\_ Street # \_\_\_\_\_

Street Name \_\_\_\_\_ Street Name \_\_\_\_\_

# of Features 1

<u>0.1</u> Feature #	<u>0.9</u> Feature Type	<u>7</u> Condition
<u>1.8.85</u> Construction Date	<u>0.9</u> Context *	<u>5</u> Plan Shape *
<u>2</u> Feature Date	<u>2.6</u> Primary Exterior *	_____ Secondary Exterior
<u>2.5</u> Structural System **	<u>2.8</u> Style *	_____ Architect/Builder
<u>0</u> Ethnic	<u>0.7</u> Fieldwork Date	_____ Other Information
<u>0.7</u> <u>17107</u> <u>Classical Revival details</u>		

_____ Soil Association	<u>1.6</u> Ecozone	<u>2</u> Area Signf	_____ MS Number
_____ Soil Association	_____ Ecozone	_____ Area Signf	_____ MS Number
<u>2</u> CR Type	<u>1</u> Verified Site	<u>0</u> Non-Site	<u>1</u> ECF <u>1</u> T F
<u>3</u> State Registry	<u>2</u> National Register		

Coder Mary Kate Ryan

Date Coded 13Feb08

Reconnaissance Survey \_\_\_\_\_

Intensive Survey

Manuscript/Report Title: NPHP: Dist. No. 70, Hoff Rural School

Author(s): Steve Martens

SITE DATA

FEATURE DATA

SHSND USE

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

## 1. Name of Property

historic name District No. 70, Hoff Rural School

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number Fire Number 6591; 123<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NE not for publication \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Norton Township between Adams and Lankin vicinity X

state North Dakota code ND county Walsh code 099 zip code 58210

## 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, the 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]  
Signature of certifying official

2-14-08  
Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

District No. 70, Hoff Rural School  
(Property Name)

Walsh County, North Dakota  
(County and State)

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	<b>Total</b>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Education Sub: Schoolhouse

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: Museum

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals;  
Vernacular rendition of Classic Revival

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Site-Cast Concrete

roof Asphalt shingles; 3-tab

walls Wood clapboard lap siding

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets

District No. 70, Hoff Rural School  
(Property Name)

Walsh County, North Dakota  
(County and State)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education  
Social history

**Period of Significance**

1885 to 1957

**Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)**

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Significant Dates**

1885

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)**

See continuation sheets.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Carnegie Regional Library, Cavalier, ND

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1  
District No. 70 Hoff Rural School; Walsh County, North Dakota

District No. 70 Hoff Rural School  
Norton Township, Walsh County, North Dakota

### 7. Description:

Built in 1885, the country school building for Walsh County District No. 70 (locally known as Hoff School) is typical of many one-room school buildings. It is situated very near the boundary line between Norton and Vesta townships, in a sheltered area close to the juncture of two coulees, or drainage swales, feeding the north branch of the Forest River. Where the coulee slopes upward toward the north, the school building is tucked into the trees adjoining a belt of natural timber land along and through which school children once walked a distance of up to a mile or two to attend school.

Inside and out, the school building is in a near-original state of maintenance and preservation, although the surrounding context has been altered a bit by re-grading the adjoining access road. Two related buildings (one behind the school serving as outdoor toilets and the other a small school barn to the east, where teams of horses were stabled) were removed or demolished after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. The school barn is pictured in early photos (from about 1915), but the outhouse is known only based on verbal descriptions, consisting of a frame building about 8-feet tall, containing boys', girls', and teacher's dry closet toilets, along with a coal storage bin.

The platted school site is part of a parcel approximately 46.7-acres in area, defined by the township line on the north, a graveled county road along the east, a tree-lined minor drainage channel of the river along the south, and a dense row of trees along the west, separating the school property from an unused farmhouse about 30-yards to the west, where teachers at the school once resided. Other features of the site include a swingset east of the building, a flagpole, and a merry-go-round, all in good, restored condition.

The school is a rectangular, gabled one-story with an attic and is generally symmetrical in its massing, except for two interior toilet rooms added to the west side of the entrance after the outdoor toilets were demolished. Overall dimensions are approximately 27-feet along the north-south axis and 19-feet east to west, with the entryway projecting an additional 8-feet to the south. The interior finished ceiling is set at about 13 1/2-feet. The school is of wood-framed construction with corner trim-boards and exterior material of 6-inch cedar lap-siding having 5-1/2-inches exposed to the weather, painted white. The pattern of window openings follows the overall formal symmetry of the building. There is no dormer or projecting belltower/cupola above the roofline. Roofing material is gray, 3-tab asphalt shingles installed for weather protection after the period of significance, replacing badly-deteriorated original cedar shingles. The building sits upon a concrete foundation with an inaccessible crawlspace.

On the exterior, the only trim embellishments are shallowly-gabled window hoods above the 2:2 double-hung windows, which function to benefit drainage and also give the building its only stylistic pretense by conveying a vernacular sense of the late Gothic-revival style, associated with spreading Midwestern cultural patterns. The double-hung windows are protected by matching, removable and vented exterior storm panels. Nearly all glazing in the windows and storms is original. The sloped hood also appears above the single, three-panel entrance door with two lites of vision glass and a two-panel glass transom above. Three wood steps with non-historic handrails provide access to the south-facing entrance. A bronze plaque providing information about the school and its preservation has been placed to the right of the entrance door.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2  
District No. 70 Hoff Rural School; Walsh County, North Dakota

The south, principal elevation is a gable of about 12:12 slope projecting about 8-inches over the siding material. The entrance vestibule follows the same pattern and roof pitch, with a flatter shed roof covering the toilet dependency that was added to the west of the entrance late in the historical period (exact date uncertain, but in about the 1940s). A projecting electrical light is positioned above the entrance door with exterior surface-mounted electrical service access and attic venting visible on gable-end of the main classroom element.

East and west (side) elevations mirror one another, composed of three equally-spaced windows, with each window measuring about 29- by 58-inches. Eave ends of the roof project about 8-inches over the exterior wall surface. On the west elevation a small gravity vent is visible near the top of the toilet room addition. The gabled north (rear) elevation is windowless and unadorned by trim of any sort, although the eave overhang extends somewhat further (about 14-inches) over the north wall, presumably for weather protection. The brick chimney is contained inside the north wall, extending about 3 feet above the roofline at the central ridge point of the gable.

One enters the school through the south-facing door into an entry vestibule about 8-feet square. Interior wall finish is flush horizontal-jointed board "car-siding" painted white, with gray-painted floorboards. Coathooks along the east wall were used in colder weather. Along the west side of the vestibule two dry-closet (unplumbed) toilet rooms were added in a shed-roofed addition during the 1940s. Each of these two, discrete "one-holer" conveniences is enclosed by a 4-panel door. Interiors of these two dry closets are painted beige and unadorned, with the underside of the sloping roof exposed overhead. A second, interior door separates the entryway from the classroom. A well-worn wood threshold is a notable feature of this interior doorway.

The classroom interior retains nearly all of its fixtures, features, and furnishings from the period of historical significance, essentially as it was configured in 1957, shortly before the school closed. Several early furnishing items that were removed in earlier periods have been returned, enabling the school to be accurately interpreted through much of the period of its historic significance. Interior of the classroom is horizontal wood wall finish, painted pinkish-color in the area of wainscot, moldings, chair-rails and window trim, with pale green walls and ceiling finish. Floorboards are painted gloss gray throughout the interior. The flat ceiling of the classroom is of pale-green painted boards, with two surface fluorescent lighting fixtures supplementing bracketed wall lamps (sconces) between the windows. Several of the wall-sconce lamps, which may have been converted from kerosene at the time of rural electrification (1948), remain in place, supplemented by a few ceiling fluorescent ceiling fixtures from about the same time. Three windows are located on each side of the classroom, both for ventilation and because natural daylight was regarded as an important aspect of schoolroom design in order to assure cross-lighting sufficient for reading and penmanship.

A brick chimney at the center of the front (north) wall is supported above head height by a projecting bracket. The heating stove – a well-described and often-remembered feature of nearly all one-room country schools – was located variously at the center of the north wall, or nearer the northwest corner and served by a surface chimney-pipe. Originally, the stove would have been a cast-iron coal stove that was relocated early-on nearer the northwest corner, and subsequently was replaced with a fuel-oil stove in about the 1920s. The heat stove was shielded from the wall at each period by surface-attached metal panels that remain in place.

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 3  
District No. **70 Hoff Rural School; Walsh County, North Dakota**

In terms of millwork, the classroom is furnished with a library closet (in the southwest corner) and coathooks for use in cold weather. Chalkboards (mostly greenboards) line the side walls between the windows and extend across the front of the classroom. Bracketed wall maps are hung in the northeast corner, near the location of a historic dry-cell crank telephone that was installed in about the 1920s. Also at the front of the classroom is located a 48-star American flag and the teacher's desk, upon which rests a hand-bell that was used to call students throughout the school's period of historic use. Framed pictures of U.S. presidents and national founders, particularly Lincoln, Betsy Ross, McKinley, and the ubiquitous, incomplete Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington are hung above the chalkboards. The library cabinet at the back of the classroom contains a great many bound books and maps original to the school's period of historic usage and associated with the school's curriculum.

Contoured wood benches and wood folding chairs supplement seating along the side walls. Upper parts of the windows have white shades to shield and disperse daylight. Lower window panels have been treated with patterned cotton curtains purposefully installed to eliminate potential distractions by shielding views of the outdoors. The schoolhouse clock is not extant inside the school at the time of writing this nomination, although missing fixtures and furnishings have tended to be returned to the school over time.

Toward the south end of the west wall is located an oak pump-organ that was used throughout most of the school's historical period for musical accompaniment. In the present day, a folded U.S. flag in a triangular case is placed above it as a tribute to Miss Thelma Rosvold's mother. (Miss Rosvold completed eighth grade at Hoff School in 1923. She and her family have had a long affiliation with the school. Her father taught at the school in 1899 and she was instrumental in the building's preservation and rehabilitation.) On the back wall, also near the southwest corner, is situated a green-painted wooden table, upon which rests a washbasin and stoneware water cooler. Because the building was never served by plumbing, water was carried each day from a nearby farm.

Three sets of single (one-student) desks are "ganged together" in rows of four (serving 12-students total). Desks are of the typical patented type with natural finished wood, black cast-iron sides, fold-up seats, inkwells and pencil trays. Double-student desks were reportedly used during historical periods of maximum enrollment, accommodating as many as 31-students (the maximum number attending Hoff School in 1908-1909). These paired desks were removed in times of smaller enrollments and are no longer extant in the classroom. Student enrollments ranged from 5 to 9-pupils in the 1950s, to peak enrollment periods in the range of 20 to 24 in 1912 and 1913, and again in the 1930s. Enrollment numbers were fairly steady in the range of 16- to 20-pupils from 1914 to 1944.<sup>1</sup> Clearly the number and arrangement of desks varied in each year of the building's historic usage, and the classroom was sufficiently flexible to accommodate this range of layouts.

The Hoff School building, its furnishings, and surrounding context are all in very sound physical condition, well-maintained in a very good state of preservation. The only visible departures from historic photos of the property are the shingle roofing material and front stair railings. Where repainting has been done, considerable care has been taken to match underlying historic colors.

<sup>1</sup> Records of the Walsh County Superintendent of Schools. "Teacher's Final Reports" (annual). Public records of School District No. 70 are on record with the Walsh County Recorder. Copies were gathered and generously provided to the author by Thelma Rosvold and Dennis Skorheim.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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District No. 70 Hoff Rural School; Walsh County, North Dakota

District No. 70 Hoff Rural School  
Norton Township, Walsh County, ND

### 8. Statement of Significance:

Walsh County School District No. 70, Hoff Rural School is locally significant under National Register Criterion "A" based on its contributions to American public school education and social history during the period from 1885 to 1960. The Hoff School building embodies a broad pattern of historical events associated with Norwegian-American immigration and acculturation, rural settlement and farm life, and changing patterns of American education from 1885 to 1960.

As an individual property, Hoff School has local significance in terms of education and the culture of local settlement patterns. Statewide, need for a multiple property thematic resource category for one-room rural schools is suggested by the patterns of evidence in Walsh County. Many rural schools sit abandoned in the process of decay on the landscape, and other school buildings have been converted to pragmatic utilitarian purposes; for example, recycled as agricultural storage sheds. Hoff School retains sufficient integrity and visibility to justify a sustained local effort for its careful preservation by local residents. Hoff School is typical of some few rural schools in the state that retain the power to convey the experience of past historical events. The school is a significant example of a typical local school that delivered a form of public education that scarcely exists today, reflecting the national shift in educational priorities that occurred from 1900 to 1960.

Over its history, the school is associated with about 51 families residing nearby. The student roster is characterized by predominantly, but not exclusively, Norwegian-American surnames. The large majority of students attending the school were also members of the nearby Hoff Lutheran Church about one mile to the south. Hoff School was one of four, independent rural schools in Norton Township operating until 1960. Many students who attended the Hoff School went on to accomplish important work and contribute in many meaningful ways to sustaining the rural community in their home county. Rural agricultural development would not have been accomplished without the sound support of a well-planned and managed system of public schools sufficiently nearby to be available to children of all farm families. Rural schools are an important example of local initiative and duty to the community of one's neighbors.

The rural schools depended upon a considerable contribution of time through the volunteerism of members of the community. . . . The school boards themselves were composed of unpaid volunteers. Those board members set the taxes, bought the textbooks and instructional supplies, paid the teachers, and ordered coal and wood. Often they performed the routine maintenance of the buildings and grounds. At their best they were solid supporters of the educational system. At their worst, they were stingy and backward. More often, they were the former.<sup>2</sup>

Local control of foundation education in grades 1 through 8 was clearly a civic and cultural priority, particularly among Norwegian-Americans who populated the majority of farmsteads in western Walsh County.<sup>3</sup>

Rural schools have traditionally been tightly linked to their communities. In earlier years, the process of schooling reflected local values, local mores, local ways of being in the world. Well into this century, rural places had their own ways.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Leight, Robert L., 1999; p.5.

<sup>3</sup> see Sherman, William and Playford Thorson. *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History*, pp. 190-213.

<sup>4</sup> Theobald, Paul and Paul Natchigal. "Culture, Community, and the Promise of Rural Education", in *Phi Delta Kappan*, (October, 1995), p. 132.



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The Hoff School building was constructed on school land donated by G. H. Garnaas at a cost of \$276.00 for lumber and materials, plus \$110.00 for labor. Based on interviews with longtime residents who recall firsthand accounts told by original schoolboard members, the school is believed to have been built by a construction contractor building other schools in Walsh County at about the same time. The Hoff School building was constructed according to standardized design drawings, probably furnished to the local independent school board by the county superintendent or state public schools office. Insulation was added to the school in 1945.

The school's name comes from the family of Herman Hoff, the nearest occupied neighboring farmstead adjacent to the school when it was built. Hoff School was established as a rural school district on March 11, 1884. A.G. Bylin, Herman Hoff, Henry Mathison, and Eristen Erickson served on the school board in 1884, at the time the school was planned and constructed. During the school district's first year, while the school was being built classes were conducted at a nearby farmhouse of S. Tresing, who was paid \$3 per month rent. The first school term began June 23, 1884 with 21 students in the district, taught by Miss Minnie Gutridge.<sup>5</sup>

The 75-year life-cycle of Hoff School as an active center for rural education reflects broad patterns and changes over time in public policy and community perception about foundation learning. Walsh County is fairly typical of the pattern established in eastern parts of North Dakota where Scandinavian-American immigrant families extended the (Jeffersonian) Midwestern tradition of independent rural education coordinated at the local level. In forming townships, either one- or two-sections of land (out of 36) were typically allocated to locating or funding a rural public school. Schools established in Norton Township were on smaller parcels, and more closely spaced, but from a 21<sup>st</sup>-century perspective it is remarkable to note the names of 118 autonomous rural schools established and maintained in the county.<sup>6</sup>

The informal science of school building design was disseminated in educational journals and popular literature.<sup>7</sup> Physical environment for learning should take into account comfort and convenience in planning for heat, light, ventilation, acoustics, and hygiene. Over time, technological changes to the one-room schoolhouse took place in the form of rural electrification, installation of the dry-cell crank telephone, relocation of outhouse privies to a more controlled interior location, replacement of the coal stove with fuel-oil heaters, electric lights to supplement daylight, and removal of the school barn when automobiles had sufficiently displaced horse travel.

Perceptions of American country schools are clouded by two contradictory myths. One is that country schools are the poor stepchildren of American education – primitive buildings where, under intolerable conditions, young, inexperienced teachers try to instill in their students a modicum of knowledge. Another is the myth of the little red schoolhouse pleasantly situated beneath shade trees and full of bright young students eager to learn their lessons and please their teacher. Neither view is wholly true nor wholly false. In some country schools, discipline was lax and learning incidental, but other schools were orderly, efficient and staunchly supported by the community, offering children an opportunity for education that few of their parents had enjoyed.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Walsh Heritage: A Story of Walsh County and its Pioneers*, (v.2). Grafton: Walsh County Historical Society, (1976); p.1061.

<sup>6</sup> *The Land of Certainty, Walsh County, N.D.: where diversified farming and stock raising are synonymous*. (1920); p.6.

<sup>7</sup> An early example of popularized written piece advocating certain standardized features in the architectural design of rural schools is reproduced in Gulliford's *Country School Legacy*, p.13

<sup>8</sup> Gulliford, 1995. p.35

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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District No. 70 Hoff Rural School; Walsh County, North Dakota

Experiencing the physical setting and features interior layout of the historic country school is greatly enriched by written reminiscences shared by former students, particularly Miss Thelma Rosvold (who attended the school 1916 to 1923) and Dennis Skorheim (who attended Hoff School 1935-1941).<sup>9</sup> Though these two informants recalled differing details of the two periods, the similarities in their accounts of educational content, recreation activities, and social interactions were remarkably similar in their two eras some 20-years apart. Stability and continuity were characteristic of educational content at country schools throughout Walsh County and, in fact, throughout the rural school system statewide. In 2000, these two longstanding members of the Hoff community led local efforts to renew and appreciate the historic school. Their carefully-documented recollections of events and people supplement the physical fabric of the school. These reminiscences should be regarded as typical of many similar rural schools at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.

Students arrived at school, typically on foot from nearby farms (within about 1 1/2-miles). Hoff School was attended predominantly by students from farmsteads situated along the timbered belt running east and west, so it was natural for students to make their way to school through these sheltered woods. In winter they sometimes arrived on snowshoes carrying a lunch pail containing sandwiches or a piece of chicken, fruit (usually an apple), cookies. (Some student lunch pails reflected more "exotic" tastes like blood sausage or grape jelly and onion sandwiches.) Historic photos show a school barn east of the school building that was available for horses. The school had no indoor plumbing so water was carried to the school from a nearby farm.

The school day was called into session by the teacher ringing a hand-bell. The teacher's residence was often in a nearby, two-story farmhouse that still stands west of the school, or at another nearby farm. Some of the teachers were members of local families,<sup>10</sup> while others came to Hoff School from outside the community. Though a few exceptions were noted, most of the teachers are remembered by former students as generally well-qualified, organized, and fully committed to teaching country school students. Records show that most teachers served at the school for only a year, but several served two or three years, and Harry Johnson taught at the school six terms between 1930 and 1942. Amy Rostvet was the last teacher of seven children at the school in 1959-60, after which the rural school district was consolidated with the town school in nearby Adams, about 4 miles away.

Typical of most rural schools, education at Hoff consistently structured content of the curriculum at each grade level, giving emphasis to reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, but also with strong emphasis on civics, geography, science, and even appropriate exposure to art and literature.<sup>11</sup> The teacher's annual report on every student included grades for reading, grammar, spelling, writing, history, citizenship, geography, arithmetic, natural science, and psychology. Fundamental lessons useful to farm life in closely-knit communities were emphasized and achieved through the country school education delivered at Hoff School. Readers, textbooks, maps, songbooks and other teaching materials retained in the school

<sup>9</sup> Rosvold, Thelma. Undated, handwritten manuscript recorded on the occasion of the restored school's rededication, (July, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Thelma Rosvold's aunt, Ellen Mathison, was an early graduate of Hoff School and taught there in 1910 and 1912. Her father, John Rosvold, taught there in 1899.

<sup>11</sup> By contemporary standards, the country school curriculum -- what modern educators sometimes refer to as "delivery" -- might appear somewhat fragmented. The posted daily schedule for a typical country school in Wisconsin was structured into time segments of just 15-minutes. See Klinkenberg, Verlyn (2003), p.107.

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demonstrate that learning encompassed both pragmatics and a strong sense of civic duty and responsibility to community. Learning was systematically monitored and measured by the County Superintendent's annual exam, with the objective of assuring uniform assimilation of prescribed learning fundamentals.

One of the ideas that will not go away in the twenty-first century is the idea of rigorous academic standards. Ironically, the one-room school did better with academic standards than late twentieth-century public education. The key to these high standards was the eighth grade exams.

In the rural schools, the eighth-grade examinations were for relatively high stakes. For the children, these tests were a hurdle that had to be crossed in order to enter high school. The examinations were not easy nor was promotion automatic. They also provided an opportunity to recognize the academic accomplishments of the high-achieving students who would be class valedictorian or salutatorian. The exams gave an incentive and focus to the final year of elementary school.<sup>12</sup>

Under the heading "Morals and Manners", a 1900 circular from the North Dakota Department of Public Education highlighted expected principles of moral education: cleanliness and neatness, politeness, gentleness, kindness to others, kindness to animals, love, truthfulness, fidelity to duty, obedience, nobility, respect and reverence, gratitude and thankfulness, forgiveness, confession, honesty, honor, courage, humility, self-respect, self-control, prudence, good name, good manners, health, temperance, industry, economy (thrift), patriotism, civil duties, avoiding evil habits and bad language.<sup>13</sup>

Classroom fixtures in the school confirm Miss Rosvold's recollections about educational content. Portraits of respected U.S. presidents (especially the ever-present Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington) reinforced lessons of civics and libertarian democracy. The carefully-placed and maintained wash basin reinforced the lesson of hygiene and cleanliness. Geographic maps and a library of selected books kept educational content relatively current. Penmanship instilled literacy and pride in composition. A regular schedule of activities, measured by the school clock, stressed punctuality.

Nor should it be presumed that country schools were devoid of cultural arts. Hoff School benefited from Miss Rosvold's mastery of the pump organ, and doubtless other pupils and teachers mastered that instrument as well. Organ accompaniments lent themselves to another ubiquitous country school tradition: the Christmas program, which was staged from behind a drawn curtain suspended across the front of the classroom.

It was the Christmas programs more than any other event that brought people together . . . The teacher started on the Christmas event probably early in November. I don't know how much teaching went on between then and Christmas but it was a type of education. You were expected to put on a play and each kid was supposed to get up there. No matter how inept he was, each kid was supposed to perform. The community would chip in and buy Christmas presents for each of the children . . . So everybody in the community looked forward to the Christmas party or pageant. And everybody had a good time.<sup>14</sup>

Recess entailed a surprising range of recreational activities, notably skiing and sledding (down the hill of the coulee to the north of the school grounds, sometimes known locally as "Skorheim Coulee"), snowshoeing, baseball, Annie-I-over, pump-pump pullaway (sometimes played on stones in the creek under the county road bridge to the south of the school yard), hide-and-peek, and drop the handkerchief. Perhaps most surprising was the frequent playing in the

<sup>12</sup> Leight, Robert S., 1999; p.138.

<sup>13</sup> "Course of Study for the Common Schools of North Dakota, Circular No. 5", cited in Henke, Warren A. and Everett Albers, (1998); pp. 259-261.

<sup>14</sup> Fleming, Edmund; quoted in *Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier*, (1981). p.40-41.

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springtime of cricket; a game not commonly associated with early North Dakota.

Members of surrounding farm families played an ongoing and active role in the school's operation, from selecting teachers to cleaning and maintenance of the school building. Investment of time and resources in the school demonstrates neighboring families' commitment and engagement in assuring foundation education for their children as an expected aspect of American citizenship.

They [the citizen-participatory rural school boards] were invaluable laboratories of democracy in which rural Americans learned the importance of their vote, how to make laws, and how to govern themselves. Here many Americans learned parliamentary procedures – how to make motions, how to reconsider action already taken, and how to support their motions with arguments. They wrestled with such intricacies as bond issues, taxes, and contingency funds, and if they had greater confidence in democracy than other groups of Americans, it was because democracy was no abstraction to them. In their school districts they learned that their vote made a difference, they could change what they did not like, and that democracy actually worked.

Beyond all this, the little independent school districts made it possible for the government and parents to cooperate in the education of children, yet gave the parents almost complete control of that education in ways that would be virtually incomprehensible to later generations.<sup>15</sup>

While most pupils who attended the school contributed in tangible ways to formation of nearby communities, several former students are known to have made noteworthy careers beyond the Walsh County locality. Among them were a successful Nebraska businessman (Ernest Gustafson), a retired military Colonel (Barton Syverson), employees of Boeing Corp. (members of the Lofthus family), and an employee of NASA in California and Florida (Steve Erickson). The foundation education provided at Hoff School afforded an excellent beginning for achievements of every sort. Achievements and contributions of the school's graduates are important both locally and beyond.

The significance of Hoff School as a typifying, vernacular example of the rural school experience is further enriched by ephemera gathered in the course of the school's preservation initiative. Programs from student graduation ceremonies highlight individual names (and stories are told about the selection process for valedictorians), and reflect in subtle ways the community's adjustments to national and international events (World War I and II, the Great Depression, etc).

In order to understand this property's historical significance it is necessary to place the Hoff School within the context of broader patterns of historical events relating to, perhaps inevitable, closure and consolidation of independent country schools. Demise of the country's substantial investment in small-scale, local control of education is often attributed to the Country Life Movement and other academically-based educational reforms initiated in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.

Such substantial curricular revisions as Country Lifers envisioned would necessarily involve considerable reorganization. Schools would have to hire more professional supervisors and teachers trained in the new subjects. Most reformers favored the consolidated school, created by uniting several one-room school districts. Consolidated districts would have wider tax bases, facilitating the hiring of better-qualified teachers who were specialists in their subject areas. . . . And consolidated schools could be better insulated than one-room schools from local patrons intent on directing the education process.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Fuller, Wayne E. (1982); p.45.

<sup>16</sup> Danbom, David. 2006; p.171.

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The arguments and biases of professional educators, grounded in academic rationale for specialization and efficiency clearly won out everywhere in the U.S. during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, and the fate of the last rural schools was sealed soon after World War II.

In the school consolidation movement, values such as "place" and "community" were never part of the discussion. The values of the winners of school consolidation were advocates of "efficiency" and "modernization". In the end, it was a contest of the objectivity of expert opinion versus the subjectivity of intrinsic values such as place and community. The education experts could amass argument and facts to support their recommendations. Rural people in general were generally [unable to muster persuasive rebuttal] in the face of the experts, and thus were able to speak only softly and insufficiently in support of their little schools.<sup>17</sup>

Wildly-fluctuating enrollment numbers must have presented an ongoing challenge for the local school board, particularly in light of national trends in the generational aging of nearby farm families. The last group of students enrolled in Hoff School attended during the 1959-1960 academic year, at the end of which the country school was consolidated with the nearby Adams school district.

In 2000 the Hoff School building was restored as closely as possible to its historic condition prior to World War II. Donations from former students, neighbors, and friends of the Hoff School have enabled its conservation and continued use in interpreting the history of 75-years of rural school education. Clearly preservation of the school building was labor of love for many members of the extended community who contributed actively in rehabilitating the building.<sup>18</sup> Current and future usages accommodate special church services held annually in the school by Hoff Lutheran Church congregation, as was the case during its active life as a school building. Younger generations of current children have an opportunity to experience country school education firsthand through the school's continuing use for vacation bible school and as a community center.

Based on National Register Criterion "A", Hoff School is significant by virtue of its ability to communicate in tangible terms the experience of 75-years of rural school education as a departure point for contemporary educational practices of the present day. Local patterns of historical events reflect changes in educational theory and practice, and establish a benchmark for civic involvement and sustainable relationships between farm families and their community of neighbors. Given the small number of families that comprise a North Dakota township, it is not surprising to find close coincidence between members of township governance, members of the school board, and leaders of the nearby church. In a manner similar to rural churches, the independent country school was the unifying focal point for education in Hoff Township, and success of the institution was a justifiable source of local pride. Though Hoff School may no longer be viable as a primary educational facility, it remains a wonderful repository for shared community memories of the country school experience and the legacy of relationships amongst people who still feel strong connection with their "neighbors". The Hoff School retains its sense of local ownership and its importance as a unifying institution and a landmark place in the rural landscape.

<sup>17</sup> Leight, Robert L., 1999, p.15.

<sup>18</sup> *The Walsh County Record* article by Kaye Novak (June 26, 2000) identifies eighteen individuals who participated materially in work on the school, and a photo in a scrapbook kept by Miss Rosvold shows no fewer than 30 adults and school-aged children squeezed into the school desks inside the school at one of the fundraising activities.

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**10. Verbal boundary description:**

Northernmost part of a 46.69-acre parcel in the northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 5 of Norton Township (T156N R57W), Walsh County, North Dakota; extended westward 120-feet from the county road right-of-way and extending southward from the section line a distance of 160-feet. Property (owned by Hoff Lutheran Church) consists of approximately 0.44-acres bounded as follows:

NE corner UTM =	Z14 E574825 N5357595	(48°22'09.6"N 97°59'24.2"W)
SE corner UTM =	Z14 E574825 N5357495	(48°22'07.4"N 97°59'24.5"W)
SW corner UTM =	Z14 E574725 N5357495	(48°22'07.4"N 97°59'26.1"W)
NW corner UTM =	Z14 E574725 E5357595	(48°22'09.6"N 97°59'26.1"W)

**10. Verbal boundary justification:**

Legal boundaries of the school property include the extent of land originally deeded for the school (less a slight realignment of the county road right-of-way) and including all land historically used for school activities.

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Photo caption/identifier continuation sheet:

**District No. 70, Hoff Rural School  
Walsh County, North Dakota**

Photographer: Steve C. Martens

Photo date: 17 July 2007

SCM07 101\_42 BW (Digital TIFF images); State Historical Society of North Dakota  
Hoff School, context showing graveled county road to the east; facing north

**Photo number 1**

**District No. 70, Hoff Rural School  
Walsh County, North Dakota**

Photographer: Steve C. Martens

Photo date: 17 July 2007

SCM07 101\_38 BW (Digital TIFF images); State Historical Society of North Dakota  
Close-up view of Hoff School; west (side) & front elevations; facing northeast

**Photo number 2**

**District No. 70, Hoff Rural School  
Walsh County, North Dakota**

Photographer: Steve C. Martens

Photo date: 17 July 2007

SCM07 101\_41 BW (Digital TIFF images); State Historical Society of North Dakota  
Close-up view of Hoff School south (front) and east elevations; facing northwest

**Photo number 3**

**District No. 70, Hoff Rural School  
Walsh County, North Dakota**

Photographer: Steve C. Martens

Photo date: 17 July 2007

SCM07 101\_45 BW (Digital TIFF images); State Historical Society of North Dakota  
Hoff School, rear and west (side) elevations; photographer facing southeast

**Photo number 4**

**District No. 70, Hoff Rural School  
Walsh County, North Dakota**

Photographer: Steve C. Martens

Photo date: 17 July 2007

SCM07 101\_49 BW (Digital TIFF images); State Historical Society of North Dakota  
Exterior view of Hoff School facing east, with merry-go-round in foreground

**Photo number 5**



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**District No. 70, Hoff Rural School  
Walsh County, North Dakota**

Photographer: Steve C. Martens

Photo date: 17 July 2007

SCM07 101\_31 BW (Digital TIFF images); State Historical Society of North Dakota

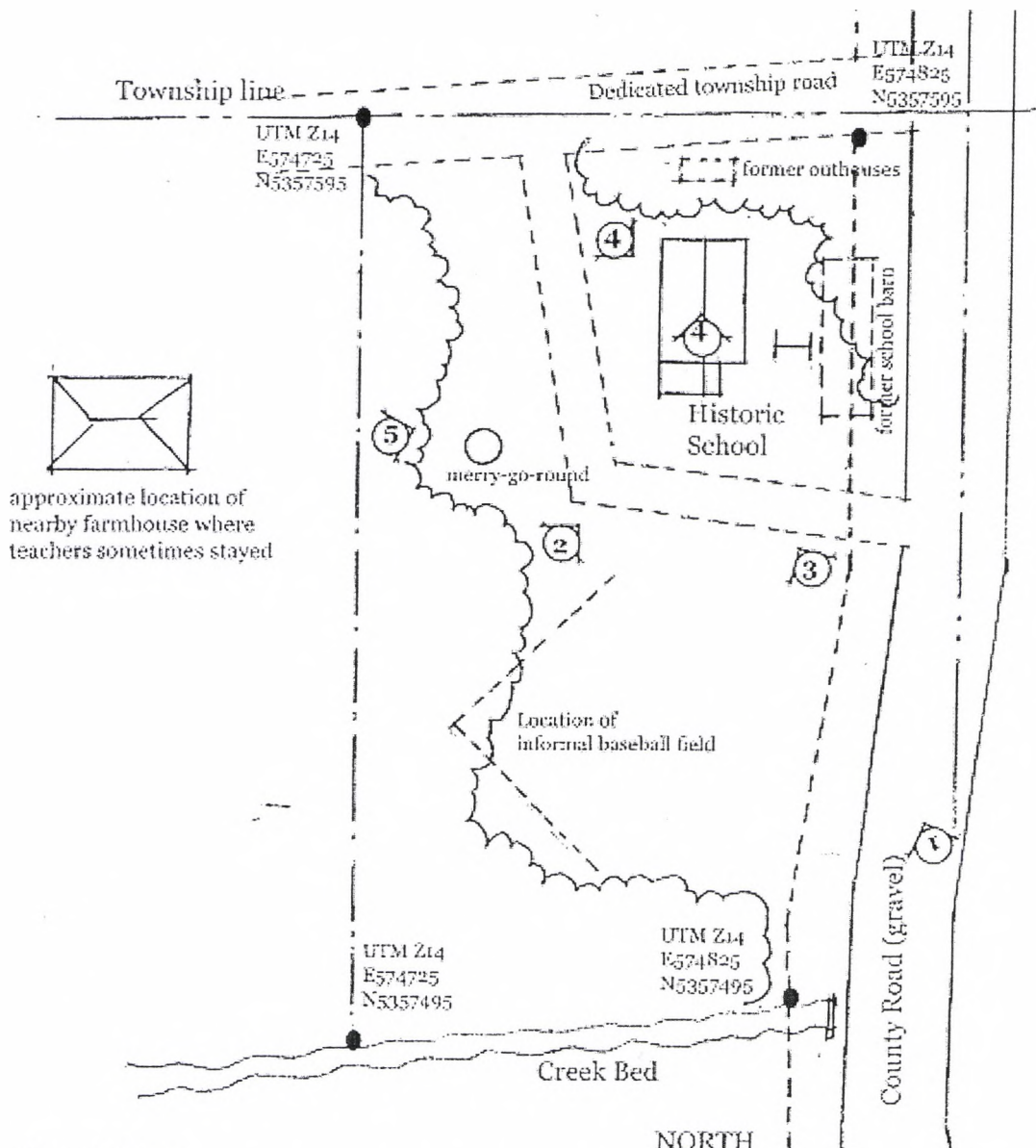
Interior view toward front of classroom, photographer facing north


**Photo number 6**

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approximate location of  
nearby farmhouse where  
teachers sometimes stayed

Sketch Map  
District No. 70; Hoff School; Walsh County, ND  
scale: 1" = 40'-0"



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*GoogleEarth*™ aerial photo image of District No. 70, Hoff School  
©Europa Technologies (downloaded 21 July, 2007)

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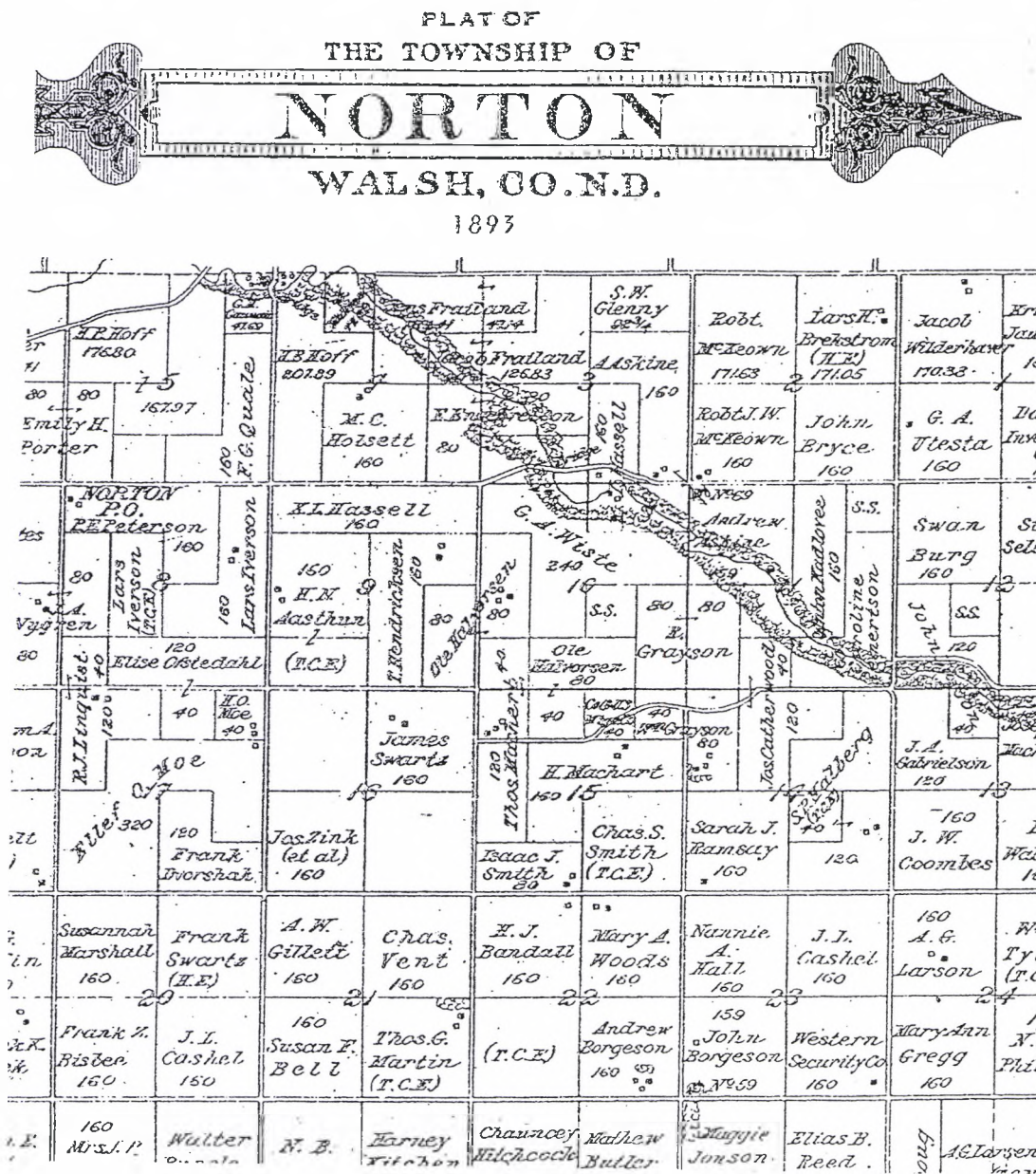
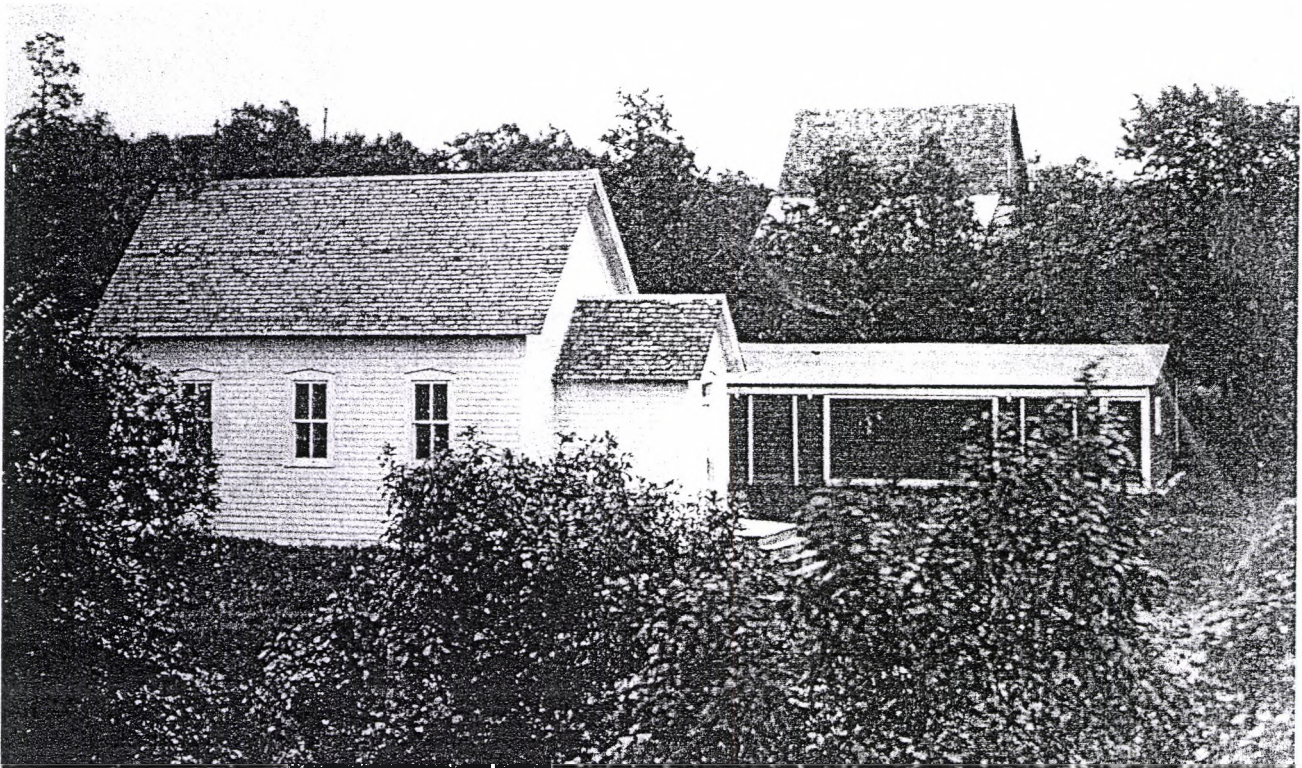


Fig. 1: excerpt from 1893 plat of Norton Township in Walsh County.  
(Hoff School is located in northeast corner of Section 5, at upper left)

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**Fig. 2:** Historic photo (undated, ca. 1915) of Hoff Rural School

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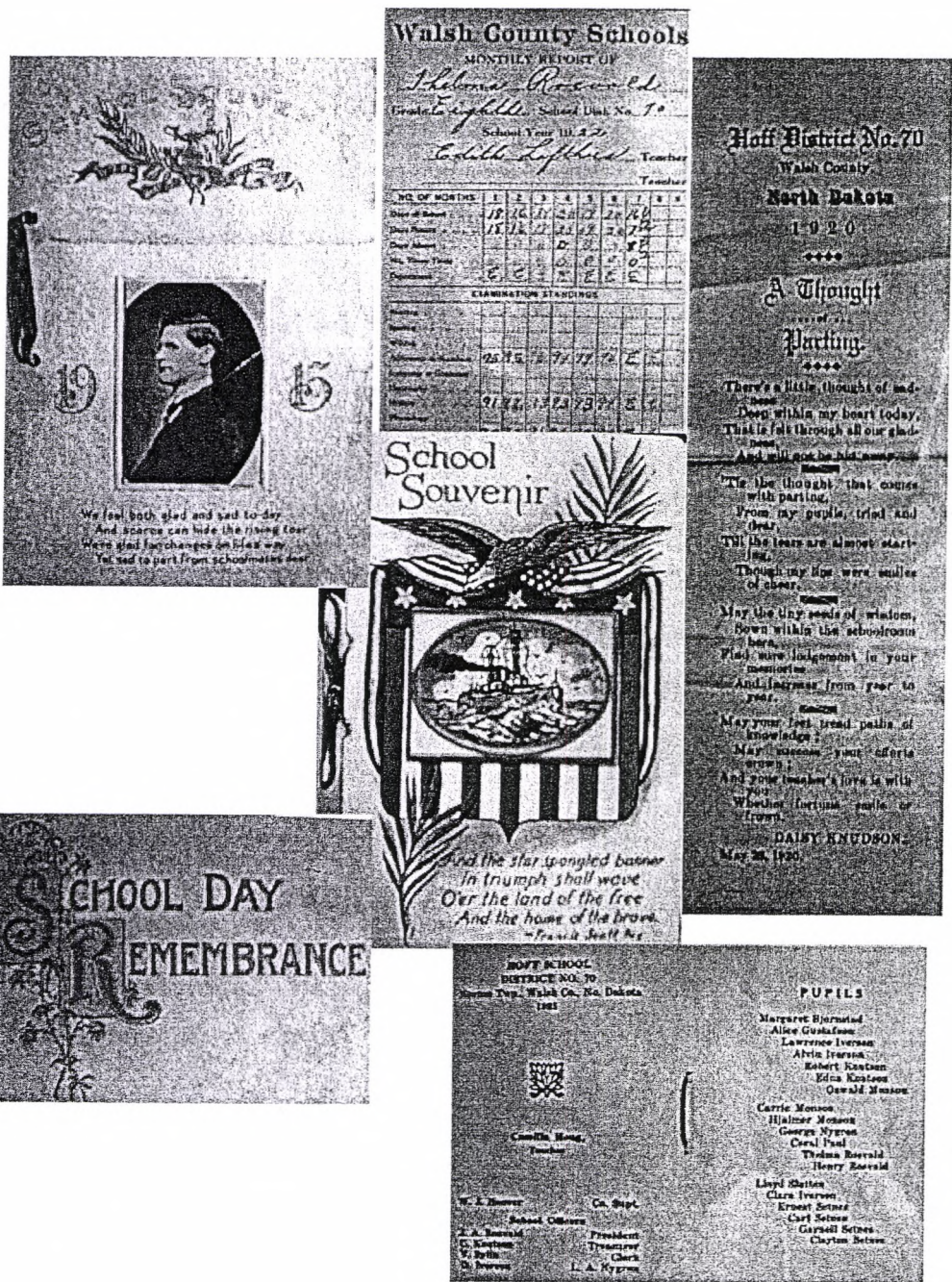


Fig. 3: Samples of ephemera commemorating events at Hoff School; selected from the personal collections of Thelma Rosvold

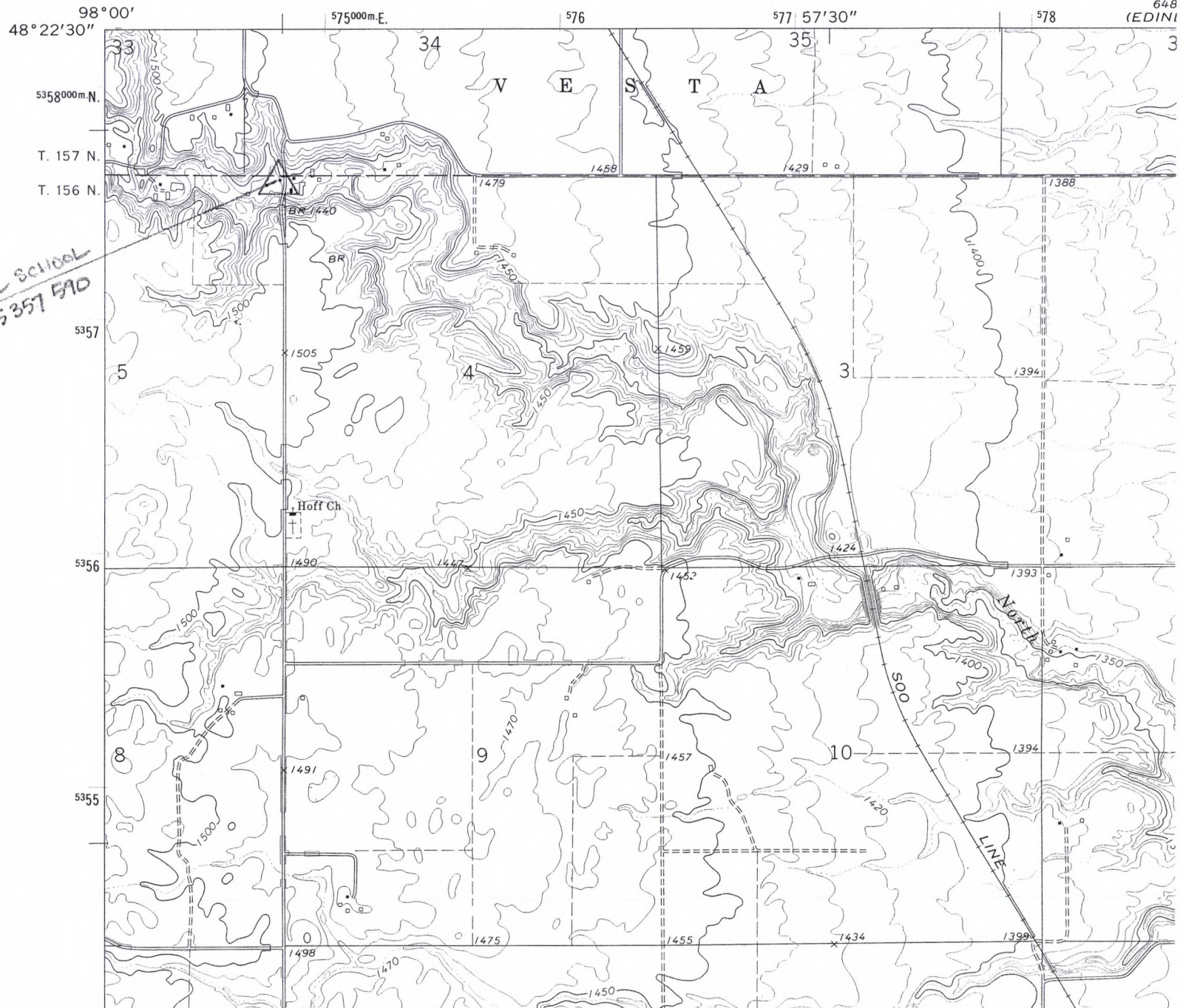






UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

6380 1 NE  
(ADAMS)



648  
(EDIN)

DIST. NO. 70, HOFF RURAL SCHOOL  
UTM = 214 E 574 820 N 5357 590



DISTRICT NO. 70, HOFF RURAL SCHOOL  
WALSH COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA  
PHOTO NO. 1 SEE CONTINUATION SHEET



DISTRICT NO. 70, HOFF RURAL SCHOOL  
WALSH COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA  
PHOTO NO. 2; SEE CONTINUATION SHEET



DISTRICT NO. 70, HOFF RURAL SCHOOL  
WALSH COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA  
PHOTO NO. 3; SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

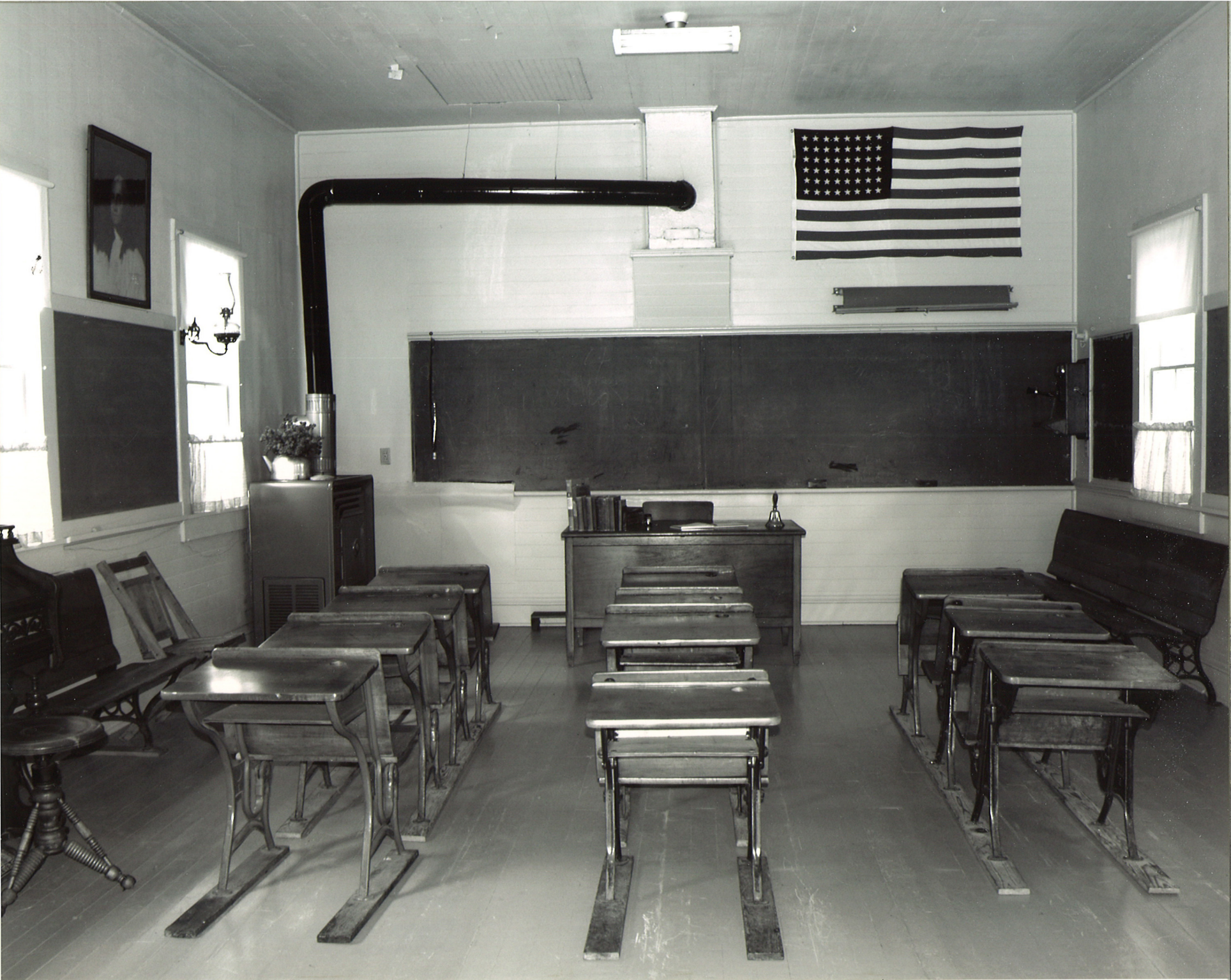




DISTRICT NO. 70, HOFF RURAL SCHOOL  
WALSH COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA  
PHOTO NO. 4; SEE CONTINUATION SHEET



DISTRICT NO. 70, HOFF RURAL SCHOOL  
WALSH COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA  
PHOTO NO. 5; SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS



DISTRICT NO. 70, HOFF RURAL SCHOOL  
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PHOTO NO. 6: SEE CONTINUATION SHEET