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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Alkabo School

other names/site number Alkabo District #36 School

2. Location

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication N/A

city or town Alkabo vicinity X

state North Dakota code ND county Divide code 023 zip code 58845

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_\_\_ statewide X locally. (\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Merlan E. Paaverud, Jr.  
Signature of certifying official  
Merlan E. Paaverud, Jr. SHPO

10/18/2010  
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): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson H. Beall 12.7.10

for  
Signature of Keeper

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

(Property Name)  
Alkabo School

(County and State)  
Divide County, North Dakota

**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(s)

**Number of Resources within Property**

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing: "Federal Relief Construction in North Dakota" (pending MPDF)

**6. Function or Use**

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

Cat: Education Sub: School  
Social Civic, meeting hall  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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

Cat: Vacant/Not in Use Sub: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

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

Late 19<sup>th</sup> & Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals/Italian Renaissance  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> & Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals/American Colonial Revival  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

**foundation** Concrete  
**roof** Wood/Cedar Shingles  
**walls** Wood/lap siding  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**other** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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**Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota**

Alkabo School, Alkabo, North Dakota

**7. Narrative description:**

The Alkabo School building is the most prominent architectural feature in its community, officially designated a "populated place" with fewer than 50 residents, located 7 miles from the Montana border and 10 miles from the Canadian province of Saskatchewan in far northwestern Divide County, North Dakota. Founded in 1913 by the Soo Line Railroad (Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Sault Ste. Marie), the town of Alkabo grew north of the railroad tracks, which run east-west across the lower terrain of this hilly region. The name "Alkabo" (pronounced al-KAY-Bo) is derived from the railroad company's combined the words "alkalai" and "gumbo" are descriptors of the two kinds of soil they found there. (The pronunciation is contradictory to the formation of the town's name.) It is a delightful and proud community made up of primarily Norwegian-American descendants.

***The school exterior:***

The Alkabo School building sits at the top of a prominent hill on about 3 acres of land, facing south towards the town. Placed at the end of a 3 block long main street that ascends the hill, the school is prominently visible to everyone entering the town, and it has been the center of community activities for more than 70-years. The acreage is fenced, with a large gate to the south. The site is defined by a hedge of hardy caragana (*caragana arborescens sibirica*) shrubs on the north, east, and west sides of the schoolyard. The shrubbery was planted in May 1925 by the school's janitor, Hank DeJardine.

The schoolyard also displays functional playground apparatus including a very traditional and historic merry-go-round and a child-sized pair of swings on a pivoting support post. Some of the playground equipment actually pre-dates the existing school, while a playground slide was installed in the 1950s. The "teacherage", which was a renovated lumberyard building, was moved onto the east edge of the schoolyard in about 1950 to provide a residence for teachers. That feature is no longer extant. An outhouse privy is located near the hedgerow west of the school building, placed there in 1964 after the school closed.

An earlier school building existed on the site, built in 1916. The architectural subject of this National Register nomination is the current story-and-a-half school building designed in 1933 and dedicated in 1934. The school is in an astonishingly excellent condition of maintenance and pure preservation, with many of the original educational materials and fixtures still in place on the interior. The local community is particularly welcoming to occasional visitors by allowing easy and unrestricted access to the interior, which enables a very personal experience of mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century education in rural parts of the Great Plains.

Based on a 1933 school design by architect Edwin William Molander of Minot, the Alkabo School is a wood framed, wood siding clad building on a site cast concrete foundation. The hipped roof is covered with weathered cedar shingles. A hip roofed entry vestibule projects outward from the center of the south elevation, surmounted by a gabled, split pediment bay supported by wide pilasters. The gable is ornamented with a decorative medallion or *rondelle* detailed in wood trim, centered between the eave brackets of the split pediment. Original architectural blueprints for the building show the possibility of a clock being placed within this round trimwork feature, but given the Depression conditions at the time the school was built, this extra-cost feature was likely eliminated in the interest of pragmatic economy.

Concrete exterior steps lead to a pair of 8-lite (2:4) French doors, surmounted by a 5-lite transom window and a blank panel on which the school's name could be painted or applied. The south side, center bay projects out from the main massing of the building a distance of about 7-feet. Above the paired entry doors was placed a signboard with the message "Alkabo School District #36", until school redistricting occurred in 1962.

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**Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota**

The other most visible features of overall massing are the metal gravity ventilator extending above the peak of the hipped roof, a tall brick chimney set well back from the front façade of the entry vestibule, and a particularly prominent crest, cupola, or ornamental "lantern" that helps to conceal the functional chimney. The under-scaled lantern, containing a bronze school bell, is perhaps the dominant feature on Alkabo School connecting the building architecturally with the architect, Molander. It is a recurrent motif on several of his buildings, bordering on a "trademark". The bronze bell was donated in 1950 by the Alkabo Homemakers Club, and installed by Harvey DeLong in time to ring on the first day of school that September.

The cupola is placed atop the gabled roof ridge of the projecting vestibule. It is eight sided and the bottom portion is covered with lap siding, matching the building exterior. Five lap boards at the base extend up to support slender, columnar posts defining eight, vertically proportioned openings. The cupola lantern is topped with a slender fluted roof resembling a Chinese pagoda, shingled with cedar shingles and capped by a metal flashing ball.

The cast concrete foundation extends above the grade 6 1/2-feet on the south side of the building, and a little less on the other sides owing to the sloped site. The height of the foundation gives the impression of a 2-story building, but it is actually a one-story frame structure atop a tall, ground level (basement) gymnasium set 5-feet into the grade. The basement has two windows on the east and west sides, five on the north, and one on the west end of the south side, providing high daylight into the gymnasium floor. A shed roofed, functional storage area addition was added to infill the lower part of the east half of the south exterior elevation, somewhat disturbing the overall symmetry of the principal façade.

From the exterior, windows and fenestration are organized with symmetrically placed 3 over 6 single hung windows on the south elevation. (The window toward the west end of the south elevation has been covered over with a removable blank panel.) An extra set of matching windows is placed on the side elevations of the projecting vestibule. The east and west elevations are the main sources of daylight into the classrooms. Large bands of windows occur toward the rear (north end) of these two exterior elevations (grouped in sets of five). The sash in these five panel window sets is in an unusual 6 over 9 configuration, tucked closely up under the eaves of the roof. The upper sash portion of these windows was frosted glass (described more fully under "interior features"). On the south elevation, four of the five window panels have been covered with removable, blank panels. A similar, third set of these large, five-panel windows are located at the centerpoint of the north (rear) elevation.

***The school interior:***

The basement level, enclosed by a concrete foundation wall, contains a moderately large and very serviceable gymnasium/auditorium that was the envy of many surrounding school districts at the time the Alkabo School was built. A raised stage is placed toward the east end of the auditorium/gym floor. The south part of the basement juts out below the entry vestibule to form space for a furnace room, with open concrete stairways on each side connecting the gym floor to the main level. The furnace room contained two coal fired furnaces, coal bins, holding tanks for the chemical toilets, and a gas operated light plant that provided an ample supply of electricity for night time activities. In terms of architectural functionality and mechanical services, this 3-classroom school was at the "leading edge" of design sophistication for a modern school facility in a remote rural location during the 1930s. The building's functionality was enhanced in the 1950s with installation of electrical service by the Rural Electric Cooperative power company.

At the raised, main floor level, entry to the school is from the vestibule area served by a pair of south facing, *lited* (windowed) doors. Upon entering the vestibule, one can go left or right down to the gymnasium/auditorium



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level, or continue straight up a wide set of open stairs leading to the classrooms (and main level restrooms). The classroom on the east was called "the little room" and accommodated grades 1 through 4. Five high windows lined the east wall of this classroom. A book closet was placed on the east end of the south wall, alongside a doorway to the cloakroom, more wall with a blackboard, and a second doorway from the cloakroom directly out of the classroom. Additional blackboards were placed on the north and west walls, and there was a supply closet in each classroom/cloakroom area.

On the west end of the main floor, an identical, mirror image classroom served grades 5 through 8 and was known as "the big room". Between the two elementary classrooms, along the north side of the plan, was the classroom that accommodated high school students. Its windows faced north with book closets on the west, south, and east interior walls. Two doorways led to the cloakroom, with one of them also allowing egress directly from the high school classroom. Blackboards were on the east and south walls, between the doorway openings.

A hallway connects the doorways of all three classrooms, and also serves the two, 2-stall restrooms at the east and west ends. The girls' restroom was adjacent to the "little room" classroom on the east and the boys' restroom adjacent to the "big room" classroom on the west. A drinking fountain in the hallway was supplied with fresh water brought in daily.

All interior floors were hardwood, except for the sealed concrete main entry. Interior wall surface and partitions were durable plaster on lath. Two large coal-fired furnaces heated the building, delivering heat from large, grated supply vents in each classroom and placed high on the wall in the gymnasium/auditorium. Cold air returns were placed near the floor line below the heat supply registers, and secondary grates were set in the floor.

Functioning windows for daylight and ventilation in the classrooms merit some additional description. Each of five window units in the three classrooms was 7' 8" tall by 3' 3" in width (total width of the window sets is more than 16-feet). The upper portion of each window was a six-pane ventilating sash with frosted glazing, openable with a long pole and hook hanging alongside. (Each window had a special hole that exactly fit the hook.) Each window unit also had a heavy canvas, darkening shade (usually left in the raised position) that could be drawn down by means of a thin rope cord to darken the room for movies when necessary. The bottom 16-inches of each window was covered with a sheer curtain that could be easily pulled aside.

Several functional alterations were made to the interior late in the 1950s. They included excavation for new locker rooms and showers, drilling a new water well, constructing bleachers and a balcony toward the west end of the south part of the gym, and conversion of the lower grades cloakroom to a hot lunch program kitchen. Cupboards, an electric stove, refrigerator, serving counter and storage shelves were all installed. A small pump house was built in the southeast corner of the schoolyard to accommodate the new well.

***Descriptive summary:***

Overall the school exterior is crisply painted a warm "cream yellow" or ivory color that catches the long rays of sun on the northern Plains, in contrast with the painted gray concrete foundation "base" on which the school sits. The exterior was freshly painted in the summer of 2004, financed by local fundraising, with matching funds from Thrivent Financial Services and some township assistance. The interior was most recently painted in 1960. The building is in a remarkably fine state of pure preservation. A recurrent written comment often left behind in the visitors' book affirms that, "it looks like it could be back in use as a school with very little work." Up to the present time vandalism has not been a significant problem, and it is quite remarkable for a casual visitor to be able to see the school, its interior with all fixtures and learning materials in such an undisturbed condition, reflecting the historical period.

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The Alkabo School has been identified by Mary Kate Ryan, an architectural historian on staff at the State Historic Preservation Office, as a modest vernacular example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even though the Alkabo School was designed by an academically trained architect (Molander), vernacular designs like this school are notorious for their eclectic mixing of styles. A second opinion by architectural historian Steve Martens of North Dakota State University asserts that much of the stylistic expression of Alkabo School is influenced by the American Colonial Revival, as are many of Molander's other projects.<sup>1</sup> This period revival association is important in interpreting the school because the Colonial Revival was one of the popular, democratically patriotic architectural motifs associated with the era of the Great Depression.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, refer to Molander's designs for Stanley City Hall, Sunnyside Elementary School in Minot, and other small school buildings pictured in the file of Molander's work at the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office in Bismarck.

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

See continuation sheets.

**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.

**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.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Education

Civic

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1933-1963

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates 1933-34 Design and construction of the school

October, 1934 Dedication of the school building

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation Norwegian American

\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder Molander, Edwin W.; Architect (Minot)

William Nordman Co.; builder (Noonan, ND)

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

See continuation sheets.

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Alkabo School, Divide County, North Dakota feature

**8. Statement of Significance:**

As an individual property, Alkabo School has local significance in terms of education and the culture of local settlement patterns. 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. Alkabo School retains sufficient integrity and visibility to justify a sustained local effort for its careful preservation by local residents. Alkabo 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 "close-contact" and direct local control over public education that scarcely exists today. The ability of this rural school system, and others like it in North Dakota, to muster resources necessary to meet statewide educational standards well into the 1960s, reflects the national shift in educational priorities that occurred from 1930 to 1960. In particular, the school building embodies public investment in education during the 1930s.

The 1934 Alkabo School building is an important architectural feature on the rural landscape that reflects the historical importance of public school education to a rural community. An earlier, one-room country school building had existed on the site. Julius Johnson, a Norwegian-American immigrant relocated from Minneapolis to take up farming on a new homestead in Divide County, North Dakota. One of the first commitments he made to his new community and his farm neighbors was building a new school to serve the fledgling railroad town of Alkabo, on the furthest western reaches of the Soo Line railway (Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Sault Ste. Marie). Thus, the site of the first school, built in 1915, was on a tract at the south end of Johnson's 160-acre homestead on Section 11 toward the northeast part of the township, just beyond the platted limits of Alkabo.

Founded by the Soo Line in 1913, Alkabo was a typical prairie town. Homesteaders had started coming as early as 1906, but the greatest influx was from 1910 to 1918 and the community continued growing through the 1920s. Most of the immigrant farming families were from the Scandinavian countries. Farming was the principal means of earning a living, and the Norwegians American, in particular, placed a high value on education and social culture.<sup>1</sup> The immigrant farm families were generally "cash poor", so the school district rarely had any surplus funds. Farm families contributed time and labor to sustaining the school, and arranged social activities to pay for teacher salaries and needed improvements. Local control of foundation education was clearly a civic and cultural priority, particularly among Norwegian-Americans who populated the majority of farmsteads in western Divide County.<sup>2</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>3</sup>

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. Local 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. Teachers were respected members of the community, and children were expected to work hard to do their best. The school system cooperated with farm families by allowing students to be absent during critical times when they were needed on the farm. Teachers assisted students in making up any work they missed. Parents provided transportation to surrounding communities for students and

<sup>1</sup> William Sherman. *Prairie Mosaic*.

<sup>2</sup> see William Sherman, and Playford Thorson. *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History*:190-213.

<sup>3</sup> Theobald, Paul and Paul Natchigal. "Culture, Community, and the Promise of Rural Education", in *Phi Delta Kappan*, (October, 1995):132.



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teachers to attend extracurricular events like basketball games and contests. Farm mothers were regularly counted on to provide food for school activities and organizational skills for social fundraisers.

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>4</sup>

A fire destroyed the first school building on October 31, 1931, leaving Alkabo without a school. Education was such an essential part of community life that despite persistent, widespread drought and dire economic conditions of the Great Depression, local residents set out at once to arrange for a new school building. The unemployment rate of 72% in Divide County in 1933 was the highest of any county in North Dakota. In seeking financial assistance to build the new school local residents turned to the Civil Works Administration, a federally sponsored relief program administered by the state government in Bismarck. The Civil Works Administration (CWA) was established in the summer of 1933 because the earliest New Deal initiatives, had failed to sustain the hoped for economic upswing. In particular, a new approach was needed that could be implemented during the winter months. The CWA was structured in such a way that local applicants like the Alkabo School Board, could apply for loan money for immediate architectural design assistance and specialized construction services, together with grants for work relief to hire local laborers providing an important form of income for rural families.

Harry L. Hopkins, the Federal Emergency Relief Administrator, was placed in charge of the new work relief program. In turn, he assigned respected state Supreme Court Judge A. M. Christenson to head up a state relief committee to prioritize projects. Hopkins' message to the North Dakota Emergency Relief Administration was typical:

The State Emergency Relief Administration is hereby constituted the Civil Works Administration for the State of North Dakota with yourself as chairman. It will be the Federal Civil Works Administration. The present emergency relief committees in each county of your state are hereby constituted the Civil Works Administration for that county.<sup>5</sup>

At the peak of the CWA program in November 1933, it employed about thirty-seven thousand persons in North Dakota. Operations of the CWA in the winter months of 1933-34 gave further impetus to a work program that was suited to building skills and earning capabilities among workers. When the CWA was discontinued on March 15, 1934, its work projects were again taken over by the encompassing agency FERA, which employed about 21,000 workers at a minimum wage of thirty cents an hour and had a weekly payroll of some \$250,000. From February 1933, to the end of December 1935, relief in North Dakota cost over \$36,000,000. The federal government furnished more than \$32,000,000, the counties \$3,500,000, and the state only \$139,000 (all of it in December 1935). The Civil Works Administration remained in existence a mere four and one half months and represented the first attempt by the federal government to give work to the unemployed instead of simply aiding the states in the problem of direct farm relief payments. Essentially all farm families in drought stricken North Dakota were destitute from 1932 to 1936. Work relief activities directly

<sup>4</sup> Wayne E. Fuller, (1982):45

<sup>5</sup> Harry L. Hopkins. 1933 correspondence to North Dakota State Board of Administration Chair Adolph Christenson.

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benefited the morale and the economy of a stricken people, and in an important way affirmed the viability of education in many small communities like Alkabo.<sup>6</sup>

With financial backing from the state emergency relief committee, the Alkabo school board proceeded with planning a modern, new school facility. They worked with a young Minot architect, Edwin W. Molander who earned his architectural degree from the University of Minnesota in 1925 and promptly began building his career in Montana and northwestern North Dakota. Molander became knowledgeable about the workings of the various federal work relief construction programs and exercised sound architectural judgment about the practical needs of communities like Alkabo. When he ultimately relocated to Washington state in 1940, he listed more than 30 North Dakota projects (with a value of more than \$1.6-million in 1940 dollars) completed from 1933 to 1935, including 14 schools of various sizes. The school he designed for Alkabo appears to be one of his earliest architectural commissions, and a good argument can be made for the extent to which it reflects "leading edge" thinking about the design of educational infrastructure for small communities in 1933.<sup>7</sup>

The school board, teachers, and community members held a series of meetings to consider the design of the new school building. Advertisements for Bids in the local newspapers indicate that bids were opened in July of 1933. General construction was awarded to William Nordman Co. of Noonan, ND, with the contract for a modern coal fired heating system awarded to Minot Roofing & Cornice Co. Total construction was estimated at \$8500. Work began immediately, with many men from the community volunteering or taking on work for modest work-relief payments. Work on the school proceeded efficiently over the next 14-months, and in October 1934 the new Alkabo School was dedicated, with state Superintendent of Public Instruction Arthur E. Thompson (1891-1969) giving the dedication address.

Typical of most rural schools, education at Alkabo consistently structured the 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. 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 balanced, quality school education delivered at Alkabo School. Textbooks, maps, songbooks and other teaching materials retained in the school demonstrate that learning encompassed both pragmatics and a strong sense of civic duty and responsibility to community.

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>

For more than 30 years the Alkabo School was the center of education, recreation, and community activities. Dedicated teachers provided leadership for plays, declamation contests, spelling bees, volleyball, and boys' and girls' basketball. Community life was sustained by carnivals and lutefisk suppers, band concerts, chorus groups,

<sup>6</sup> Steve C. Martens, (2010):17-42.

<sup>7</sup> R.R. Bowker Co. (1956) and biographical file materials regarding Edwin W. Molander, from the collections of the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Gulliford, (1984):35

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talented soloists, Young Citizens League, Parent Teacher Association meetings, 4-H and Girls Scouts. Trophies and award certificates in the school reflect that Alkabo students placed in statewide athletic events, and won regional competitions and county "play days" (a North Dakota springtime phenomenon that consisted of track events, as well as spelling contests and declamations).

Because of the quality of space it afforded, its gymnasium floor, auditorium and stage, the Alkabo School building lent itself well to non-school activities. In small rural school systems it is often impossible to draw distinction between educational purposes and those programs that are civic, social, and cultural in nature. The building was regularly used for Homemaker activities, Sunday School and Bible Study groups, Christmas programs, health fairs and clinics, first aid training, reunions, anniversaries, Farmers Union and Farmers' Elevator meetings. As a center of local government, it accommodated township meetings, political assemblies and served as a polling place for elections. The school accommodated adult basketball for both men and women, and an interesting newspaper account from the 1930s calls attention to an independent men's basketball team organized by schoolteacher Webb Bublitz called the "Alkalai Clouds". In the mid-1930s, with grant support from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), men of Norwegian ancestry from the Alkabo area constructed a notable ski jump half a mile north of the school, and conducted competitive tournaments for ski jumpers.<sup>9</sup>

The Alkabo School physically demonstrates the manner of operation and educational content of small rural schools that operated throughout rural America from 1933 to 1963. The school also tells the unique story of the community of Alkabo. The school building was used for community dinners and for many years as a fundraising center for civic programs like March of Dimes. The World War II saving stamp program was conducted from the school, as was the sale of war bonds. Best of all, a big, community-wide "Welcome Home Program and Dinner" was held there in September 1946 for young men and women who had served in the military.

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. Many students who attended the Alkabo School went on to accomplish important work and contribute in many meaningful ways to sustaining the rural community in their home county. Students graduated from Alkabo School well prepared to lead productive lives. 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 Divide County. Several graduates went on to universities and colleges to become medical technicians, nurses, doctors, ministers, engineers, and successful business leaders. A 1955 graduate of Alkabo School, U.S. Congressman Martin Sabo went on to make important contributions in Minnesota and national politics.

For four years during World War II, from 1942 until 1946, the high school was reduced to a two-year program. The four-year program was reinstated from 1946 to 1962, and the school system was remarkably successful in continuing to meet ever more rigorous statewide educational standards. Spring of 1963 marked the end of elementary school classes. Since its closure in 1963 as a result of school district consolidation, the school has been admirably maintained thanks to the caring, investment, and effort of a community made up mostly of Alkabo School graduates. The building and its contents are now regarded as "historic", in that they give visitors firsthand insight into the best aspects of small town education and values. An all school reunion was held at Alkabo School in 1982, and another reunion in 1988. On July 4, 2005 a combination school reunion and community reunion was held.

<sup>9</sup> Elaine Leininger. (2002):292-297.



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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section**   8   **Page**   5    
**Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota**

The school was the unifying focal point for education and community in Alkabo and the surrounding townships. Success of the institution was a justifiable source of local pride. Though Alkabo 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 Alkabo School retains its sense of local ownership and its importance as a unifying institution and a landmark place in the rural landscape of the northern Great Plains. In an unsentimental way, the school stands proudly today on its prominent hilltop site in evidence of 30 years of successful operation of an admirable education program and a center of small town community values.

Based on National Register Criterion "A", Alkabo School is significant by virtue of its ability to communicate the tangible legacy of 30-years of rural school education that formed 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. The school building also affords evidence of Depression Era responses to dire economic circumstances and the extra effort made by autonomous, small communities throughout the Great Plains to renewal and revival.

Alkabo School's secondary significance under Criterion "C" is reinforced by the architectural design and implementation of forward-looking architectural design principles under the auspices of a Depression Era Civil Works Administration (CWA) work relief project. The distinctive architectural style and innovations in technology upgraded the standard of school infrastructure from the ubiquitous "one room school". Federal work relief programs encouraged a more modern, scientific approach to educational infrastructure, and the investment made by the community of Alkabo continues to reward visitors by showing the school's sophisticated design and construction, together with its furnishings, displayed in an authentic, welcoming, and unaltered way.



(Property Name)  
Alkabo School(County and State)  
Divide County, North Dakota

(Page 4)

**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: Divide County Historical Society collections, Crosby and School District Records at Alkabo, ND**10. Geographical Data****Acreage of Property** 2.23 acres**UTM References; NAD 27** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

13	581 650	5 412 960
Zone	Easting	Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See continuation sheets.

**Boundary Justification**

See continuation sheets.

**11. Form Prepared By**

**name/title:** Elaine Danielson Rust Leininger  
 (with input from Steve C. Martens; Architect)  
**organization:** for the State Historical Society of North Dakota  
**street & number:** 105 Stromstad Street  
**city or town:** Alkabo

[alkabo@nemont.net](mailto:alkabo@nemont.net)  
[steve.martens@ndsu.edu](mailto:steve.martens@ndsu.edu)  
**date:** July 2010  
**telephone:** 701.834.2423  
**state:** ND **zip code:** 58845-9234

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

See Continuation Sheets

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

**name:** Mr. Wayne Herman; Chair,  
Westby Township Board of Commissioners  
**telephone:** 701.985.2653  
**street & number:** 14750 ND Highway 5  
701/985-2653  
**city or town:** Alkabo, ND 58845

Mr. James Reistad; Vice-Chair  
Westby Township Board of Commissioners  
14616 Co. Hwy. 5  
Grenora, ND 58845-9230

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section   9   Page   1    
**Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota**

Alkabo School, Alkabo, North Dakota

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

*Alkabo Gazette* newspaper. Various dates, 1915 to 1919. Alkabo, ND. In the collections of the Divide County Library, Crosby, ND.

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National Park Service**

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section**   9   **Page**   2    
**Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota**

Leininger, Elaine Danielson Rust. *Portraits of Prairie Pioneers and the Early Years of Alkabo*. Alkabo, ND: s.n., 2002.

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10 Page 1  
Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota

Alkabo School, Divide County North Dakota

**10. Verbal boundary description:**

The Alkabo School is located at the north end of Main Street in the village of Alkabo, adjoining the original platted town site but not within the incorporated town site boundaries. Fourth Avenue forms the south boundary of the site. The site consists of an unplatted 2.23 acre parcel within the SW 1/4 of the SE 1/4 Section 11 of Westby Township. The dedicated school site is marked by a fenced boundary, and is part of the quarter section that was originally homesteaded by Julius Johnson, who was a member of the Alkabo School Board at the time the original school was built on this site. The property defined by the schoolyard is a rectangle measuring 198 feet east to west by 219 feet north to south.

The property owner of legal record is the Westby Township Board of Commissioners,  
c/o Wayne Herman (Chair); 14750 ND Highway 5; Alkabo, ND 58845 and/or  
James Reistad (Vice-chair); 14626 Co. Hwy 5; Grenora, ND 58845-9230

**10. Boundary justification:**

The parcel boundary contains all areas and extant features historically associated with the Alkabo School.



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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Additional documentation Page 1  
Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota

Photo caption/identifier continuation sheet:

1. **Alkabo School**
2. Divide County, North Dakota
3. Photographer: Steve C. Martens
4. Photo date: October 18, 2009
5. State Historical Society of North Dakota  
ND\_DV\_Alkabo\_AlkaboSchool\_111.tif (Digital TIFF image)
6. Subject description: Alkabo, ND School exterior  
Photographer facing north  
**Photo number 1**

1. **Alkabo School**
2. Divide County, North Dakota
3. Photographer: Steve C. Martens
4. Photo date: October 18, 2009
5. State Historical Society of North Dakota  
ND\_DV\_Alkabo\_AlkaboSchool\_112.tif (digital TIFF image)
6. Subject description: Alkabo, ND School exterior  
Photographer facing northwest  
**Photo number 2**

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National Park Service

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Additional Documentation Page 2  
Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota



Fig. 1: Aerial photo locational map for Alkabo School, Divide County, ND; adapted from *Google Earth*

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Additional Documentation Page 3

Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota

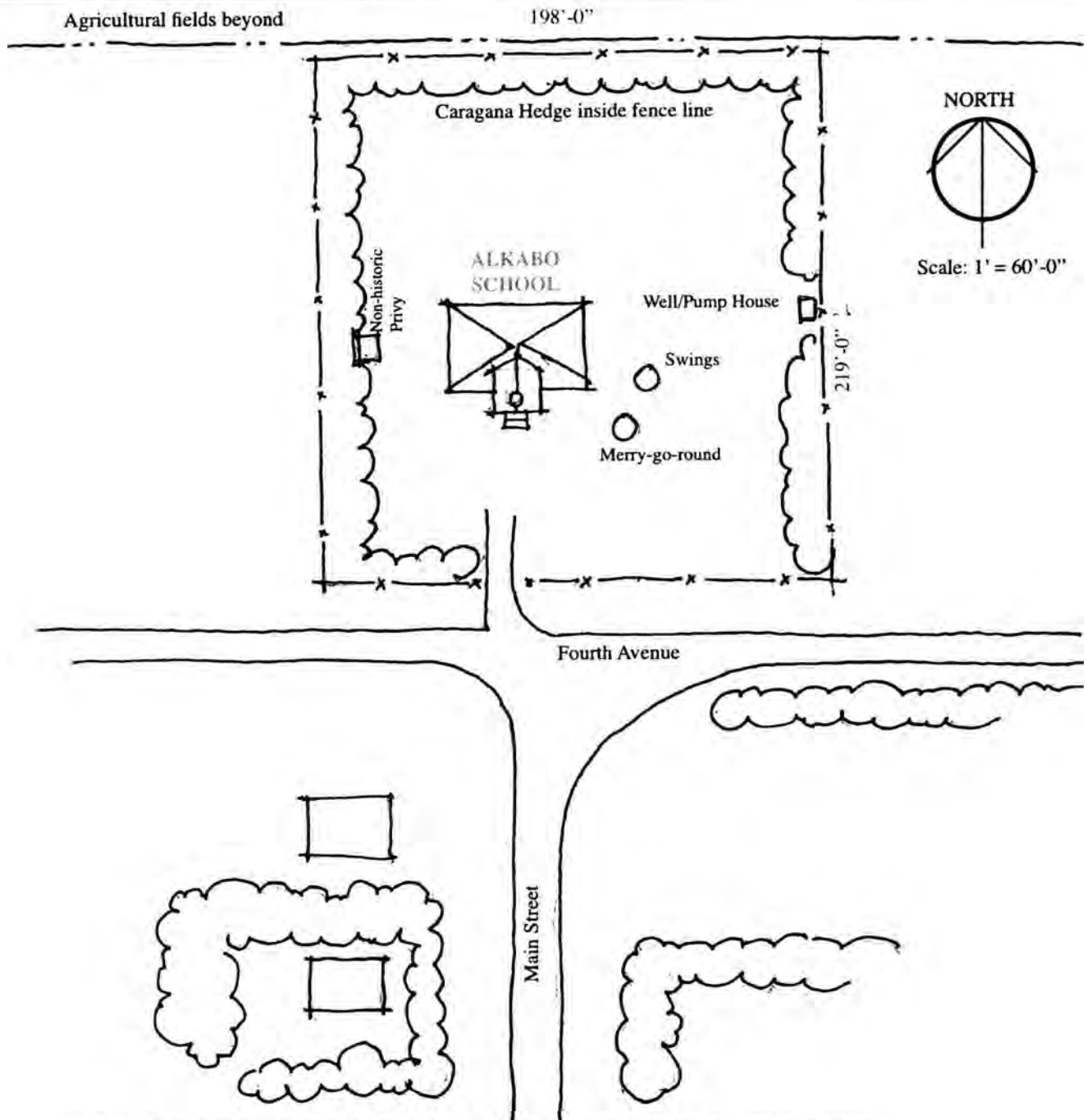


Fig. 2: Site sketch map of Alkabo School site; modified from Google Earth aerial photograph

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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Additional Documentation Page 4

Crystal Springs Fountain WPA Structure; Kidder County, North Dakota

120	30	30		
Erving 160 (H.E.)	Res De Long 160 (H.E.)	C.O. Christianson 80	160	160
160	Nora Johnson 160 (H.E.)	160	160	160
160	Luther 160	Johnson 160 (H.E.)	160	160
160	Carlson 160	Carlson 160	160	160
160	Selma 160-34	Amanda 160	160	160
160	Lars 160 (H.E.)	John 160 (H.E.)	160	160
160	Rostad 160 (H.E.)	Terleif 160 (H.E.)	160	160
160	160	Taletta Tonnerson 160 (H.E.)	160	160
160	160	160	160	160
160	160	160	160	160

Fig. 3: Historic plat map (1912) excerpt showing Alkabo, North Dakota school site



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National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Additional Documentation Page 5  
Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota

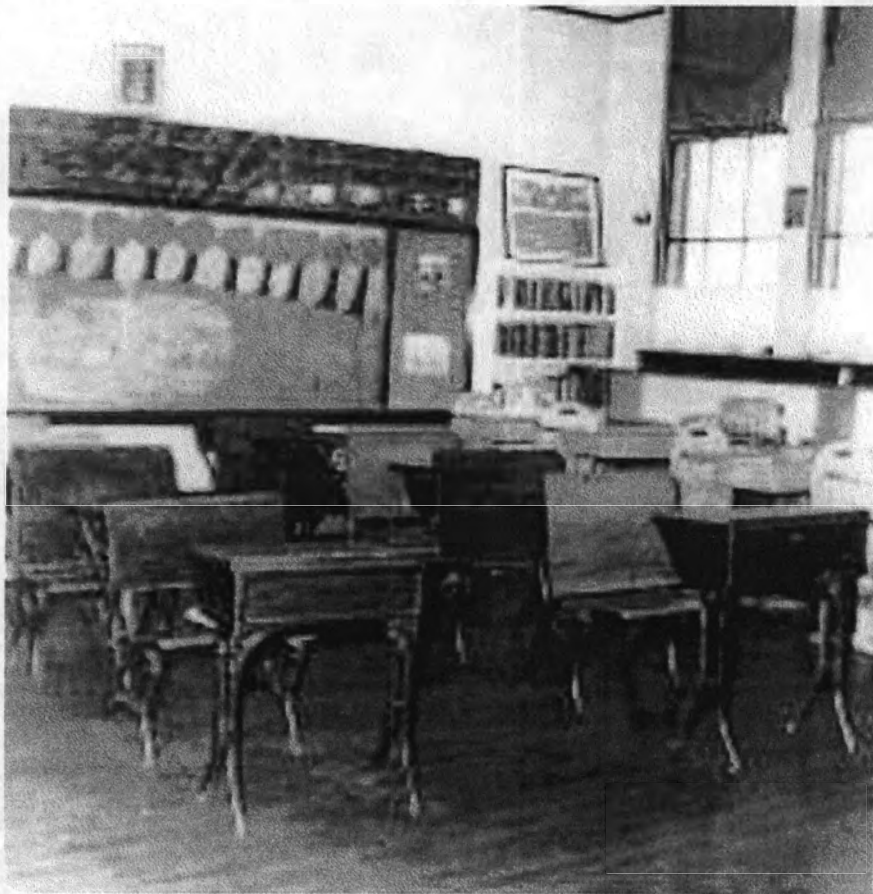


Fig. 4: Historic photograph of Alkabo School interior, from Jim Fischer internet site

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Additional Documentation Page 6  
Alkabo School; Divide County, North Dakota

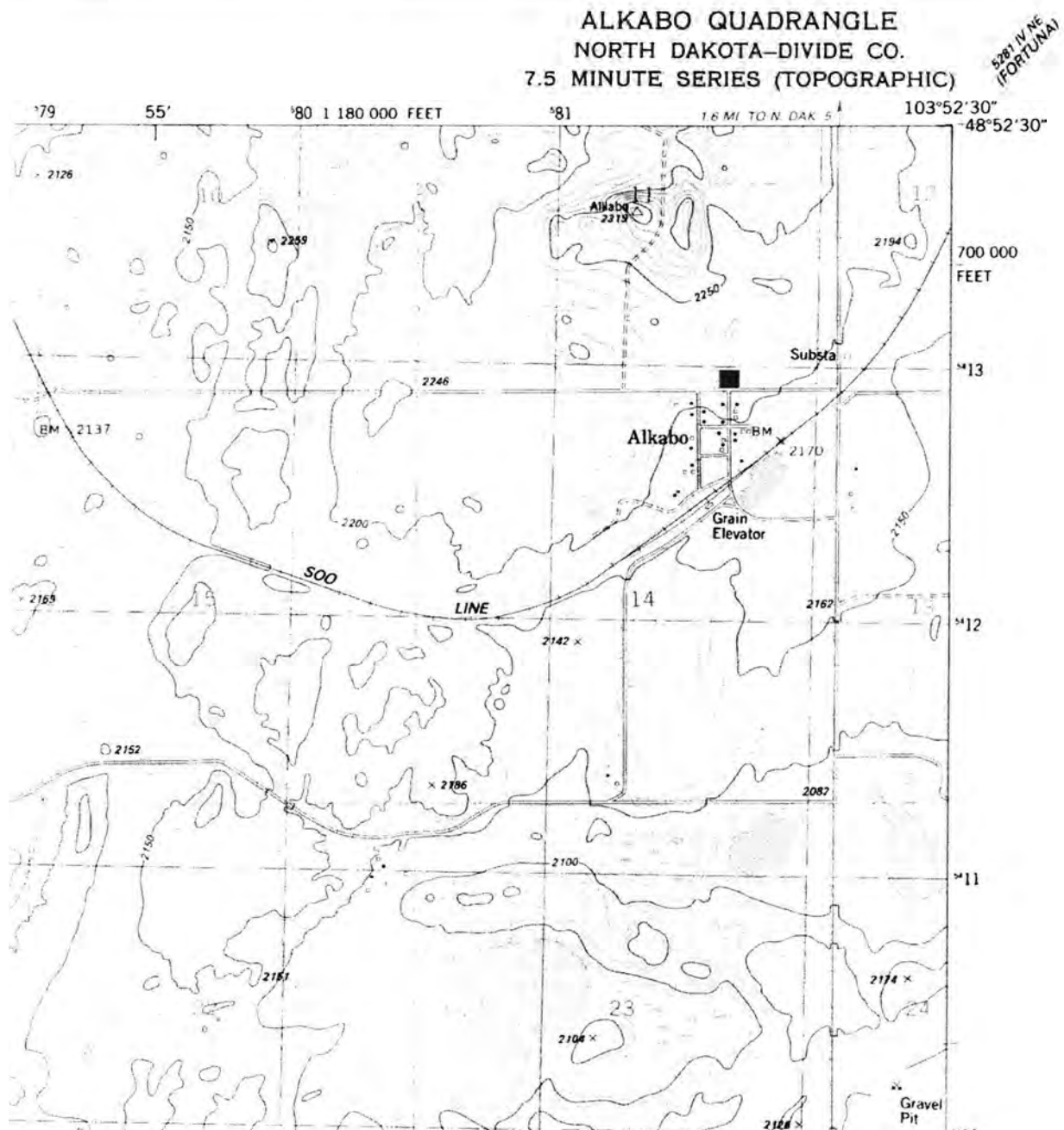


Fig. 5: USGS topographic reference map  
Alkabo, North Dakota quadrangle

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Alkabo School  
NAME:

MULTIPLE Federal Relief Construction in North Dakota, 1931-1943, MPS  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NORTH DAKOTA, Divide

DATE RECEIVED: 10/22/10 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/22/10  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/07/10 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/07/10  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000997

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: Y

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 12-7-10 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_


TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.





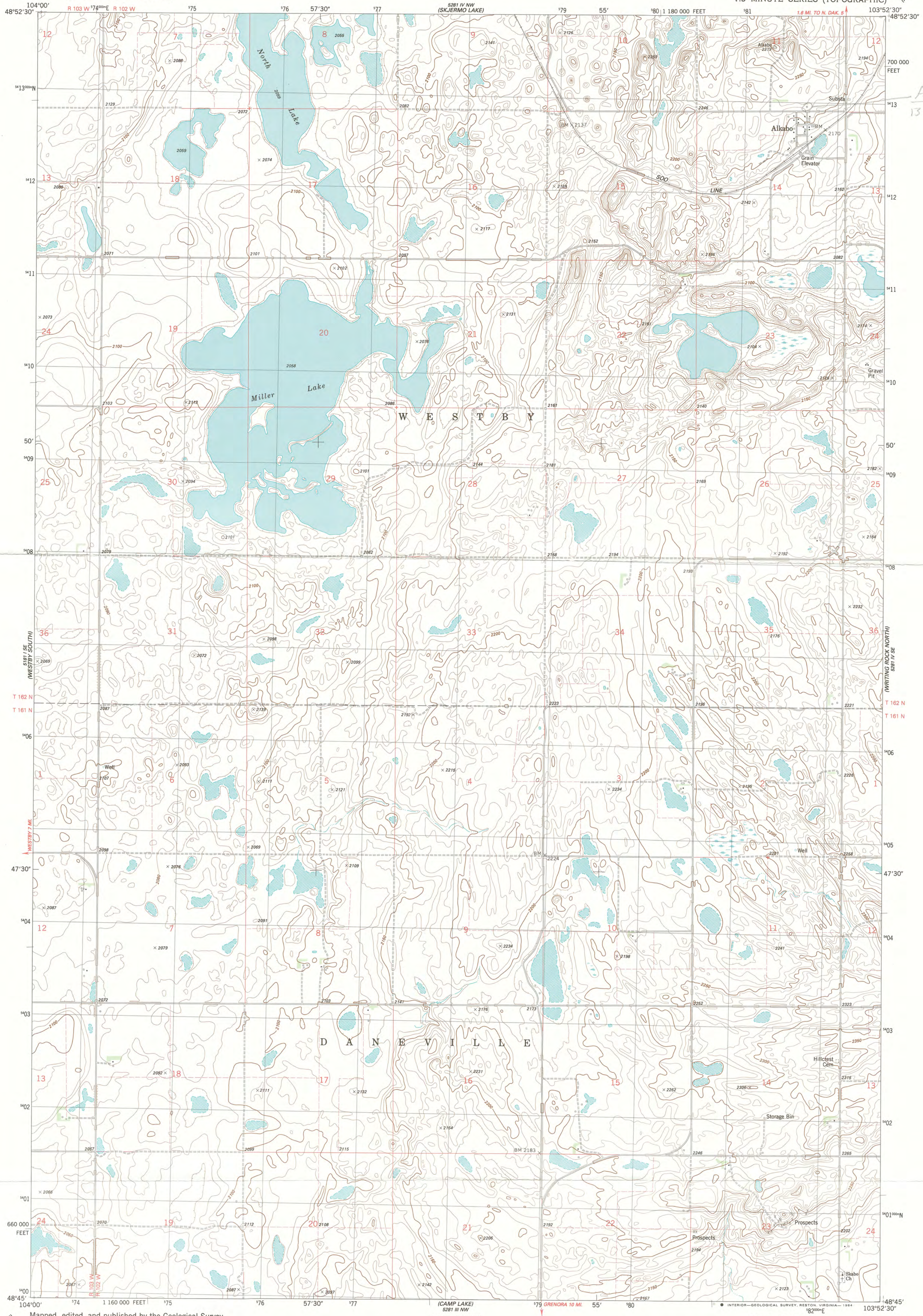


Alkabo School  
Divide County ND  
Photo #1

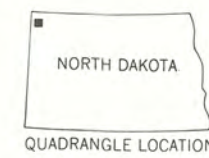
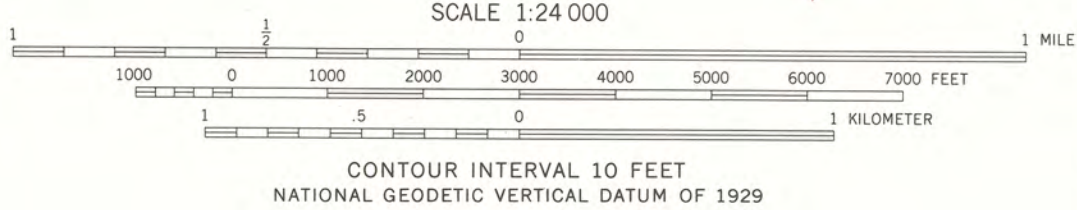
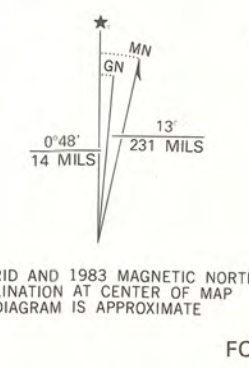


Alkabo School  
Divide County ND  
Photo #2





Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1974. Field checked 1977. Map edited 1983  
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: North Dakota coordinate system, north zone (Lambert conformal conic) 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 13 1927 North American Datum  
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines 2 meters north and 38 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

ALKABO, N. DAK.  
N4845-W10352.5/7.5

1983  
DMA 5281 IV SW-SERIES V871

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
AND BY THE STATE WATER COMMISSION, BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA 58501  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST