

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/meeting hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Sandstone

walls Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Danforth School is located about 10 miles east of Sandstone in the southeast corner of Section 5 of Danforth Township in Pine County. The building is a 20 by 40 foot single story rural schoolhouse with three rooms. The earliest part of this structure was built in 1899 with logs salvaged from the Hinckley fire of 1894. A 10 by 20 foot wood frame addition including a belfry was put on the east side of the building in 1909.

Historic photos indicate that at the time of its construction in 1899 the Danforth School was a 20 by 30 foot rectangular one room building with an entrance porch. There were three 20 by 60 inch double hung windows in the north and south sides and a chimney at the west end. In about 1909 the building was extended ten feet to the east, providing space for two additional small rooms: a cloakroom on the south side and a library on the north. Additional changes at this time include the addition of a belfry over the entrance, set at an angle of 45 degrees to the roof line.

The westernmost 30 feet of the walls are built of pine logs, hewn flat to about 8 inches of thickness, chinked with mortar, and connected with dovetail joints at the corners. The ten foot extension is wood frame and the entire building is covered with 6 inch wood lap siding. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles and the building rests on a sandstone foundation less than one foot above ground level, which provides no crawl space and has encouraged deterioration of the sills.

One enters the school directly into the cloakroom, which contains a trapdoor into the attic. The building has its original 4 inch wood flooring and the floor surface is uneven, probably because floor support pillars were not set below the frostline. The west wall is given over to blackboards and the others are covered with the original wainscotting. The eight foot ceiling is gypsum wall-board over the original wainscotting. The westernmost window on the south side was replaced with a door in about 1930. Most remarkable perhaps is that 26 of the original desks remain bolted in place, except for one row along the north wall. The desks are

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
EDUCATION

Period of Significance
1899-1941

Significant Dates
1899, 1909

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Danforth School is significant under National Register Criterion A because it represents rural education in Pine County, Minnesota between 1899 and 1941. The earliest school district in the county was established in 1879 and the Danforth School was built in 1899. By 1930, rural population in the county had reached its peak, the trend toward consolidation had begun, and no new rural schools were being built. Education during this period was carried out in single classrooms with up to 30 students in Grades 1 to 8. Of the estimated 250 rural schoolhouses constructed in Pine County, only the Danforth School remains on its original site, contains original desks, blackboards, library, books, and other equipment typical for schools of its vintage.

The township system of land division which had been established for the United States in 1785 stipulated that proceeds from the sale of Section 16 in each township be set aside for school purposes in that township. Minnesota territorial and state legislation made further provision for rural schools, including the possibility of dividing townships into two or more districts as population increased. Each district had a four member school board and a county superintendent. The first school district in Pine County was established in Chengwatana Township in 1874.¹ Danforth Township was organized in 1904 and the Danforth School District (#74) was established two years later.² The Danforth School, built in 1899 and enlarged to its present state in 1909, was initially part of Sandstone District #5, organized in 1876 and one of the earliest in Pine County.³ There were two other schools in Danforth Township, the Berger School in Section 21 (1900-1905) and the Greenly School in Section 19, no longer extant.⁴

It is apparent that established local public schools was of primary importance to the first settlers in rural areas of the Midwest. The very early dates of school district organization in

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divided into groups of two sizes to accommodate the several grades that were taught. It appears that the windows, desks, blackboards, flooring, and wall fabric are all original.

The Danforth School is located on a one and one quarter acre lot 417 feet west of the southeast corner of Section 5 of Danforth Township, which is about 10 miles east of Sandstone and 14 miles north of the St. Croix River. Until about 1984, access to the school was from a short road running west from County Road #22. In 1984 the Danforth Community Chapel was built on a lot directly east of the school, and access is now through the chapel drive and parking lot, which also serves the school. The original playground space surrounds the building, and a grove of white oak stands on the eastern edge of the site. There is a contributing hand waterpump across from the stairs on the east of the school.

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Pine County indicate that this was no less true there.⁵ A fuller picture of the local significance of the Danforth School can be drawn from a discussion of two historic contexts: Northern Minnesota Lumbering (1870-1930's) and Swedish Immigration to Pine County (1880-1914).

Swedish immigration to Minnesota began as early as 1850 and a large concentration of Swedish settlers quickly developed in Chisago and Isanti Counties along the St. Croix river valley.⁶ Swedes began moving north into Pine and Kanabec Counties by 1880, and by 1890 Swedish born settlers represented about one fourth of the total population of Pine County. The earliest settlement was in association with lumbering activities and railroad development, but by the time of the Hinckley fire in 1894, most of the land had been cut over. Advertising posters in the Hinckley Fire Museum indicate that after the fire, land owners began selling their holdings to immigrants and other settlers for farming via land companies such as the Farmers Land and Cattle Co. This firm owned considerable land in Danforth County and in 1909 deeded a lot to District #74, upon which the Danforth School still stands.⁷ An earlier instrument is on record indicating that the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad had donated the same parcel for school purposes. This is quite typical for what occurred throughout Pine County during early settlement.⁸

Swedes responded in large numbers to these advertisements for inexpensive land "ready for farming." By 1910, Federal census figures show that of a total of 89 residents in Danforth Township, most are Swedish born or born in Minnesota of Swedish parentage.⁹ All but three of 15 farms in Danforth Township were Swedish owned and virtually all the occupations listed are either farmer or farm laborer. Neighboring townships do not show any similar concentration of Swedes in rural areas at this time, but there were concentrations of Swedes elsewhere in Pine County and elsewhere in Northern Minnesota who had also settled on cutover lands.¹⁰

The Danforth School was the earliest community building of any kind in the area. Thus, that the building served community functions besides education would seem likely and has been so indicated by local residents.¹¹ Church services and Sunday school were held there until 1984 when the Danforth Community Chapel was built next door. Since a majority of the local residents were Swedish, a pastor from Sandstone came by once a month to give a service in Swedish.¹² A

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community cemetery was platted in 1916 one half mile east of the school and the original document still hangs in the school building. The Danforth School became the Township Hall in 1904 when the township was organized. It became township property in 1966 when school was no longer held there.

In Pine County as elsewhere in the Midwest, designs and specifications for buildings and school curricula originated with state Boards of Education and were disseminated by county superintendents.¹³ The single story, gable roof, rectangular wood frame building is the most characteristic type for the period up to 1914 in Pine County.¹⁴ The Danforth School embodies this form in its exterior appearance even though most of the walls are built of logs. Logs were used in perhaps four or five other school buildings of Danforth's vintage in Pine County. At most, however, only one of these survives, in Birch Creek Township near Denham.¹⁵ A Multiple Resource Area Nomination of Pine County in 1980 indicated few surviving examples of wood frame rural schools of the Danforth type.¹⁶ It is estimated that as many as 250 schoolhouses may have been put up in a total of 129 school districts in Pine County.¹⁷ A number of these structures survive, but only in modified form, to serve as farm outbuildings or residences, and in most cases the buildings have been moved from their original site.¹⁸

In 1909 the school was extended 10 feet to the east with a 10 by 20 foot wood frame addition which included a belfry. The extension provided a cloakroom and library in separate rooms. This arrangement became common by 1914 in Pine County.¹⁹ The floorplan of Danforth is typical for schoolhouses of its vintage and illustrates several aspects of educational practice of this period. The very earliest schools were often only a single room which was entered directly from the outside as at Danforth between 1899 and 1909. Later these schools had a single classroom into which pupils entered either from a single entrance through a cloak- and storage room, or through two entrance-cloakrooms.²⁰ Either or both of these smaller rooms may have also served as a library or for heating fuel storage. However these subsidiary spaces were arranged, the essential functions they served were about the same. Since it was not practical to segregate pupils according to grade, segregation by gender was common in order to minimize distraction and facilitate order in the classroom.²¹ The Danforth School had five rows of desks running lengthwise equally spaced over the floor. One row along the north wall was removed permitting freer

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movement within the classroom. There are two desk sizes in order to accommodate the various ages of the children attending. Providing windows on the two long walls of the classroom space was the accepted practice until c. 1890 when the idea was disseminated in educational circles that two sources of light was harmful because of the contrast in intensity between one source and the other. Later rural schools, from c. 1914 to 1930, featured only a single source of daylight, provided by several closely spaced windows on one wall.²²

When considering the several social functions that most of these schools served---community center, township hall, and often church, education had to occur in a broader social context than it did after consolidation. Teaching the basic subjects took place along with voting, celebrating national holidays, worship, sports, and more. Grading students by performance inevitably suggests a certain level of competition in learning, but with one teacher and several grades in one room, co-operative learning was also inevitable, if not encouraged. Many former students of the one room school have indicated that older students would help the younger with their lessons. An educational philosophy is embodied here, even if many of its tenets were never spelled out by educational philosophers and administrators.

A law passed in 1929 by the Minnesota State Legislature permitted the formation of a single school district and board for each county. Some consolidation had already begun by this time. As the means of transportation made it possible, consolidation increased, reflecting a philosophy which suggested that more subjects and grades and their rigorous segregation was more efficient than what was typical in the single classrooms of the rural schools. Consolidation proceeded more slowly in Pine County than in some other areas of the state, however. District #129 in Ogema Township was the last to be organized in Pine County (1941), but no new rural schoolhouses were built in the county after 1930.²³ School was held at Danforth until 1966, but by then it was no longer typical of rural education in Pine County.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Cordes, Jim. Pine County and Its Memories. North Branch, MN, 1989, p. 5.
- 2 Cordes, pp. 209, 211.
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 *ibid.*, Thora Swanson, (Interview, June 17, 1991).
- 5 Cordes, *passim*.
- 6 Information on Swedish immigration is drawn from Nelson, pp. 199-200., Nordstrom, p. 17, and Rice, pp. 248-264. See Section 9.
- 7 Files, Pine County Recorder's Office.
- 8 Cordes, *passim*.
- 9 13th Census of the United States (1910)---Population Schedules. Figures cited by Rice (p. 251) indicate that the foreign born Swedish population in Pine County had gone from 67 in 1880 to 1951 in 1895.
- 10 Plat Book of the State of Minnesota (1916). See also Nelson, Nordstrom, and Rice.
- 11 Nona Wheeler, (Interview, June 17, 1991); Thora Swanson: See also Cordes, *passim*.
- 12 Swanson.
- 13 Gulliford, pp. 193-195.
- 14 Haidet, Cordes.
- 15 Cordes, p. 171.
- 16 Haidet, Mark E. Historic Resources of Pine County. Multiple Resource Area
- 17 Nomination, 1980. MN SHPO Files.
Cordes, pp. 4-5.
- 18 Cordes, *passim*.

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FOOTNOTES (cont.)

19

ibid.

20

ibid., Gulliford, p. 172.

21

Cordes, p. 5. Gulliford, p. 190.

22

Gulliford, pp. 193-195. From the evidence gathered by Cordes, this pattern was followed in Pine County.

23

Cordes.

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Gulliford, Andrew. America's Country Schools. Washington, D.C.:
The Preservation Press, 1984.

Nordstrom, Byron (ed.). The Swedes in Minnesota. Minneapolis:
Denison, N.D.

Rice, John G. "The Swedes" (in) Holmquist, June Drenning (ed.),
They Chose Minnesota. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical
Society Press, 1981.

State Historic Preservation Office. Minnesota History/Architecture
Inventory Files.

Files, Pine County Recorder's Office, Pine City.

Pine County Museum Collection. Askov.

Hinckley Fire Museum Collection. Hinckley.

District #74 School Records. Danforth School.

INTERVIEWS (June 17, 1991):

Thora Swanson
Nona Wheeler
Joann Bernard

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A LINE PARALLEL WITH THE SOUTH LINE OF SAID SECTION 260 FEET,
THENCE SOUTH 208 FEET AND 7 INCHES TO THE PLACE OF BEGINNING.