

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

historic name Debs School

other names/site number Upper Piedra School; Debs Community Building / 5HN642

2. Location

street & number 2783 McManus Road [N/A] not for publication

city or town Pagosa Springs [in Archuleta County] [X] vicinity

state Colorado code CO county Hinsdale code 053 zip code N/A

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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title: Georgiana Castiglioni, State Historic Preservation Officer; Date: 3/8/05

Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- [X] entered in the National Register [ ] See continuation sheet.
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register [ ] See continuation sheet.
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other, explain [ ] See continuation sheet.

Signature of the Keeper: Edson H. Beall; Date of Action: 4/28/05

Debs School  
Name of Property

Hinsdale County, Colorado  
County/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**

(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing.**

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

Rural School Buildings in Colorado  
Ornamental Concrete Block Buildings in Colorado

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Function**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education/school

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Rural Schoolhouse

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Concrete  
roof Metal  
other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more 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.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or 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.

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

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

- Architecture
- Education
- Social History

**Periods of Significance**

1926 - 1951

**Significant Dates**

1926

**Significant Person(s)**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Coors, Walter [builder]

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(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:  
Colorado Historical Society  
Hinsdale County Museum, Lake City

Debs School  
Name of Property

Hinsdale County, Colorado  
County/State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than one

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1.     13     308756     4145419  
      Zone    Easting     Northing

2.     Zone    Easting     Northing

3.     Zone    Easting     Northing

4.     Zone    Easting     Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cathleen Norman (edited and additional material by OAHF staff)  
organization Preservation Publishing date 27 August 2004  
street & number 459 South Routt Way telephone 303-985-2599  
city or town Lakewood state Colorado zip code 80226

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### 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.

### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

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

name Hinsdale County (Ray Blaum, Hinsdale County Administrator)  
street & number P. O. Box 277 telephone 970-944-2225  
city or town Lake City state Colorado zip code 81235

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127, and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Debs School  
Hinsdale County, Co  
(Rural School Buildings of Colorado MPS)  
(Ornamental Concrete Block Buildings in Colorado MPS)

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## DESCRIPTION

Debs School is located in the extreme southern end of Hinsdale County. It is one mile north of the Hinsdale-Archuleta County line and approximately 19 miles northwest of Pagosa Springs, the county seat of Archuleta County. The building sits on the south half of a two-acre parcel transected by McManus Road and surrounded by farm and ranch land. A post and four-strand barbed wire fence encloses the schoolyard and delineates the nominated parcel. The undulating grassy plot contains the remains of two pieces of playground equipment. A roughly hewn timber framework and a metal pole framework sit idle, as their swings are no longer present. Behind the schoolhouse, a cast iron hand pump manufactured by "W. C. Davey Pump Corp." of Rockford, Illinois sits on a deteriorating concrete pad.

The one-story, front-gabled building has a rectangular plan, measuring 32-1/2 feet by 24-1/2 feet. It is oriented east-west with the entrance facing west toward McManus Road. The building has a poured in place concrete foundation. Its walls are constructed of rock face ornamental concrete blocks (measuring approximately 18" x 12" x 8") that were manufactured on site utilizing sand and gravel from nearby Big Pagosa Creek. Plain face (smooth) ornamental concrete blocks serve as window lintels. The framed gable ends are clad in rolled asphalt and corrugated metal covers the roof with its slightly overhanging eaves. A small, square concrete block chimney protrudes from the north roof slope. Four, slender, square wood posts on a concrete slab floor support the half-hipped roof of the partial width porch (15' X 6'4"). The porch roof, also sheathed in corrugated metal, shelters the entrance and two flanking windows that are centered on the west facade. The windows are tall, narrow, wood frame, double hung sash with 1-over-1 lights. Three similar windows are evenly positioned on the south wall. The north wall contains one of these tall narrow windows along with two smaller, square, wood frame, fixed sash, single light windows. There is evidence of two small windows high on the east (rear) wall, but these openings are in-filled with rock face ornamental concrete block.

A five panel wooden door with transom leads to the single, undivided interior space with its tongue-and-groove oak flooring and plastered walls. Wide wooden boards serve as baseboards, a picture rail, window and door surrounds. There is a warming stove near the door and a large black board hangs on the opposite (east) wall. Built-in bookshelves, storage cabinets and a desk occupy some of the wall space, while old-fashioned school desks and an assortment of chairs line the remainder of the walls. Attached to the ceiling, porcelain lampholders with bare bulbs provide illumination.

The well-preserved building appears to have undergone only one alteration and it was an historic change. The two windows on the east wall were filled in with ornamental concrete blocks around 1937. A ca. 1950 photograph shows a screen door that no longer covers the entry.

The outbuildings associated with the typical rural schoolhouse are no longer extant on the Debs School property. A teacherage, converted from the original 1911 frame school building was converted into a coal and horse shed, and then removed. A second teacherage was constructed around 1941. It is present in a ca. 1950 photograph and appears on the 1964 USGS topographical map, but has since been removed. The privy that served the teacher and schoolchildren is also gone. Despite the loss of its outbuildings, Debs School retains its integrity of setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

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Hinsdale County, CO

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(Rural School Buildings of Colorado MPS)  
(Ornamental Concrete Block Buildings in Colorado MPS)

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## SIGNIFICANCE

Debs School is eligible to the National Register under criterion C for architectural significance as it represents both a distinctive type and method of construction. In its size, plan, roof shape, interior configuration, and placement of windows and doors, Debs School meets the registration requirements of the "Schoolhouse" property type described in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) entitled *Rural School Buildings in Colorado*. The building is Hinsdale County's sole surviving one-room schoolhouse. Debs School has exterior walls of rock face ornamental concrete block and therefore meets the registration requirements of the "Ornamental Block Public Buildings" property type delineated in the *Ornamental Concrete Block Buildings in Colorado, 1900 to 1940* MPDF. While residences form the largest single group of identified ornamental concrete block buildings, three school buildings constructed of this material have also been found in Colorado. The large, two-story, multi-room Platteville Elementary School in Sedgwick County is one such example, but it has a substantial brick addition across its façade. Debs School is one of only two ornamental concrete block rural schoolhouses identified in the state—the other being the Maxwell Creek Schoolhouse (5CF733) south of Buena Vista.

As noted in the rural school buildings MPDF, schoolhouses are also eligible under criterion A for their association with the educational and social history of the area. Debs School served the educational needs of this remote region of southern Hinsdale County as its only school from 1926 to 1951, when consolidation forced the discontinuation of classes in the building. A replacement for a smaller 1910 wood frame schoolhouse, the building with its durable construction material reflected the importance of education and the permanence of the community itself. As the only public building in the Upper Piedra region, the school was a community focal point, hosting diverse gatherings and functions. It served as a meeting hall and social gathering place for residents of the isolated farm community.

### History of the Upper Piedra/Debs Region

The Upper Piedra River area is located in the extreme south end of Hinsdale County at the southern base of the vast, remote Weminuche Range. Due to its isolation from the remainder of Hinsdale County, Debs has historically had close ties with Pagosa Springs, 19 miles south. Extreme snowfall and spring mud impede travel conditions and isolate the area.

The Upper Piedra was prime summer hunting ground for Native American tribes. The area would also be known for its fine agricultural lands. Agriculture was the principal occupation on the Upper Piedra during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. During the 1880s, hay from the high-country meadows was harvested for Fort Lewis, at that time located near present-day Pagosa Springs. Mexican families grazed sheep on Williams Creek. By 1888, irrigation ditches had been built to water hay fields. In 1894, ranchers from New Mexico began to drive cattle to the Upper Piedra for summer pasture. By the mid-1890s, homestead claims were being filed and early settlers included the Clayton, Davis, Gordon, Johnson, Keane, Reno, Reed, O'Neal, and Toner families.

The name Debs originated in 1903 with organization of the first local voting precinct. The majority of the voters leaned toward Socialism and Eugene V. Debs was the Socialist presidential candidate at that time. Bradford O. Thayer established the Debs Post Office in September 1915 and, with his wife, Cora A. Thaye, continued to serve as a postmaster until the post office was discontinued in 1925. The name "Debs" stuck, although the area is also called the "Upper Piedra" because of its location on the

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Debs School  
Hinsdale County, CO

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(Rural School Buildings of Colorado MPS)  
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upper reaches of the Piedra River. (Although also referred to as the south end of the county, Upper Piedra is more descriptive and the use of Debs has become less common.)

Grazing and livestock production remained the major economic activity until the mid-1960s. In recent decades, the Upper Piedra, together with neighboring portions of Archuleta County, has become a summer recreation center, which has introduced new commerce in the form of country stores, RV parks, cabins, guest ranches, and outfitting operations. Proximity to the San Juan National Forest, created in 1905, encourages outdoor recreation, hunting, and sporting activities.

### History of the Debs School

The Hinsdale County School District was established in 1876 to serve the large, mountainous county in which silver and gold mining at the north end became a major economic force. Seven separate school districts eventually developed, with District Number 7 at Debs (created in 1909) in the county's far southern end being furthest from the county seat at Lake City.

As homesteading and cattle ranching expanded in the Upper Piedra at the turn of the century, the increasing number of ranch families created the need for a formal means to educate their children. A school district was formed in 1909 and the first classes consisted of eleven pupils taught in the residence of the Walter Clayton family that same year. The teacher was Mrs. C. S. Barnes, who lived in the Weminuche Valley and rode by horseback back and forth each day. As typical in high altitude communities, school classes were held in the milder months, beginning as a "three-month school" in session only in summer. By fall 1910, ranchers realized a more permanent arrangement was needed. John Webb, Jack Keane Sr. and John Toner erected upon donated land a small wood building, "a car roofed deal where the boards were beaded," made of materials from the Houser Sawmill. An adjacent teacherage was also constructed.

In spring 1911, classes began in the new building, taught by Maude Boyles, a high school graduate from Pagosa Springs. The following school year, the frame school building was moved to the present two-acre parcel, donated by the Jack Keane family, and was improved with a gabled roof. The facility was equipped by local fund-raising efforts. For example, box socials, pie socials, and dances yielded money to purchase two-seated iron frame desks for all of the students in the 1912 school year. The teacher's salary ranged over the years from \$30 per month to \$150 per month. All but one of the teachers was female.

By 1926, a larger building was needed and School District Number 7 contracted with Walt Coors, a builder from Pagosa Springs, to erect the present school. Sand and gravel were taken from nearby Big Pagosa Creek and the concrete blocks were cast on site. (Meanwhile, the 1911 frame schoolhouse was converted into a teacherage. The building was later converted to a coal and horse shed before being removed from the property.) Classes began in 1926 and continued in the ornamental concrete block school for the next 25 years. School operated in the spring and summer months because rigorous winter weather prevented safe travel. It was also difficult to heat the schoolhouse in the winter. The Debs School also served as a community hall for families in the surrounding five-mile radius, which included parts of adjacent Mineral and Archuleta counties. The building was used for meetings, pot-luck dinners, dances, and as a polling place. Local musicians included Bud Keane, Jack Keane, Ted Webb, Mr. Willis, and Rosa Willis. The last dance was in the 1940s, a fundraiser to buy science equipment. It is interesting to note that the parcel of land donated by the Keane family was not officially

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transferred to the school district until 1941.

In 1951, the school closed due to consolidation. This reflected the growing movement toward the consolidation of rural schools and the construction of new, modern education facilities that occurred across the United States in the decades following World War II. Southern Hinsdale County and Archuleta County were combined into the "Joint 50" district, and school children from Upper Piedra were then bused into Pagosa Springs.

The Upper Piedra Improvement Association (an unincorporated association) was formed as a non-profit organization to take over ownership and maintenance of the concrete block school. Similar social activities continued. School District No. 7 deeded the two-acre parcel to the Improvement Association in August 1964. The 1964 USGS quadrangle map identifies the property as the Debs Community Hall. In 1977, the property was transferred from the Upper Piedra Improvement Association to the Upper Piedra TV Association. This association was formed to provide television service to the area through the installation of translators and repeaters that brought in TV signals and rebroadcast them. Fund-raising activities, such as pie socials, were held to finance the operation and maintenance of the equipment.

Until the late 1990s, the building was known as the Upper Piedra Community Building. More recent activities in the building included weddings and county commissioner meetings in addition to its continued use as a community hall and polling place. The building has stood vacant since 1997. In June 2001, the Upper Piedra Improvement Association quit claimed the parcel to the Board of County Commissioners of Hinsdale County.



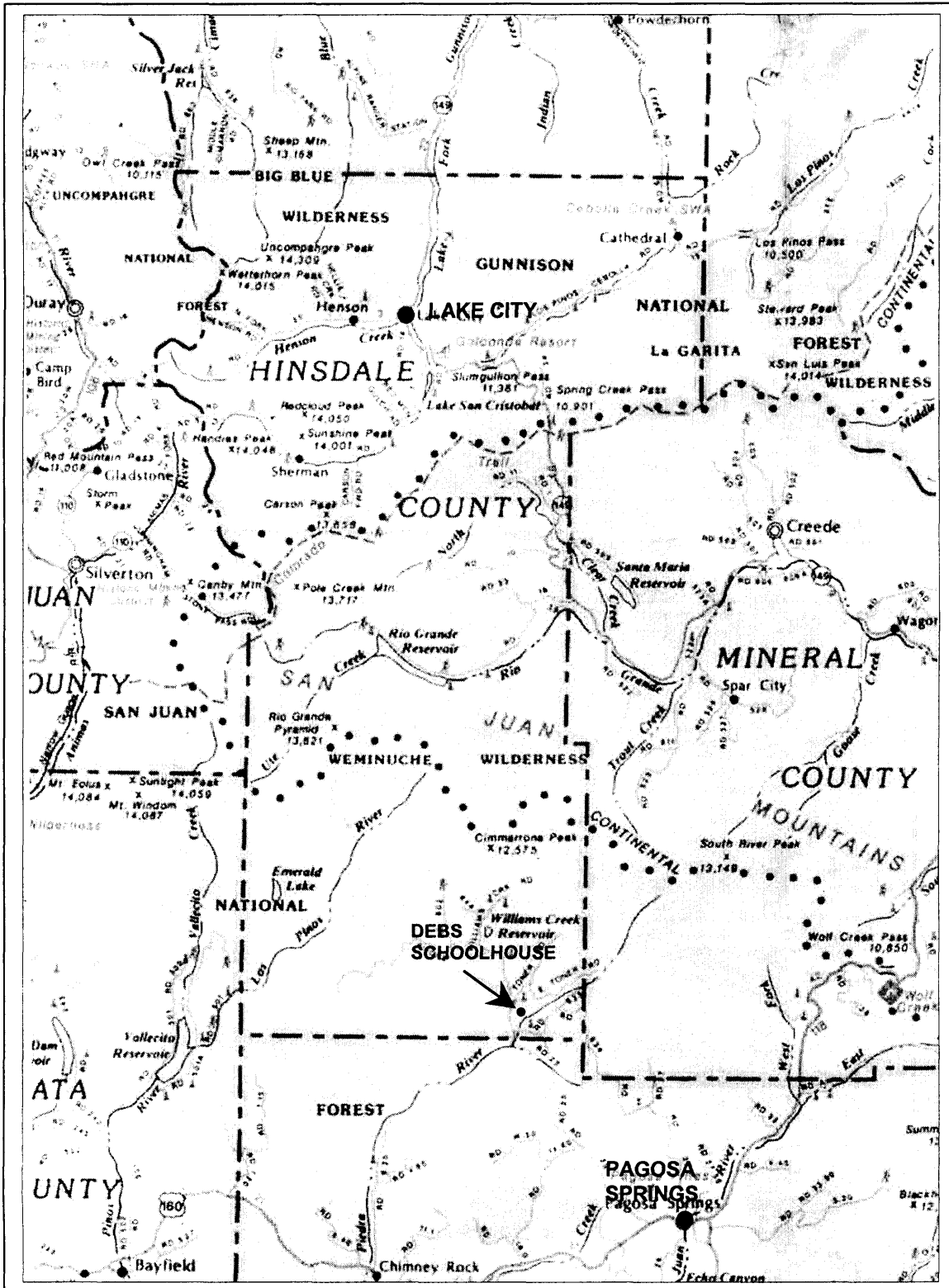
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Extract from *Large Scale Colorado Road Map* (Denver: Pierson Graphics, Co., 1990)



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- Grice, Bob. "Hinsdale Upper Piedra Area – Comprehensive Plan." Telluride, CO: Four Corners Planning, Inc., 2000.
- Heckendorn, Dale. *Ornamental Concrete Block Buildings in Colorado, 1900 to 1904 Multiple Property Documentation Form*, 1996. Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.
- Kleckner, Bob. Telephone interview by Grant E. Houston. 2001.
- Lake City, Colorado. Hinsdale County Museum. Hinsdale County School District Records.
- Lake City, Colorado. Hinsdale County Courthouse. Clerk and Recorder Records. Warranty Deed dated 13 May 1941 (Book 38, Page 273); Deed dated 30 September 1964 (Book 49, Page 104); Deed dated 3 October 1977 (Book 109, Page 112).
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- Toner, Archie. "History of the Debs, Upper Piedra (including cemeteries)." (ca. 1963. Typewritten. On file at Hinsdale County Museum, Lake City, Colorado.)
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## GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated parcel is located within the south half of two acres of land extending 417.4 feet south and 208.7 feet east from the Northwest corner of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 14, Township 37 North, Range 3 West, New Mexico Principal Meridian. A fence that lies east and south of McManus Road as the road transects the two-acre lot encloses the nominated parcel. The fence line starts at the east edge of McManus Road and proceeds in a northeasterly direction for approximately 175 feet, then turns south for approximately 162 feet, then turns west for approximately 125 feet, and then proceeds in a north-northwesterly direction for approximately 112 feet, back to the point of beginning. See the accompanying sketch map.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes the parcel of land historically associated with the schoolhouse, specifically the fenced area that includes the schoolhouse and the schoolyard.

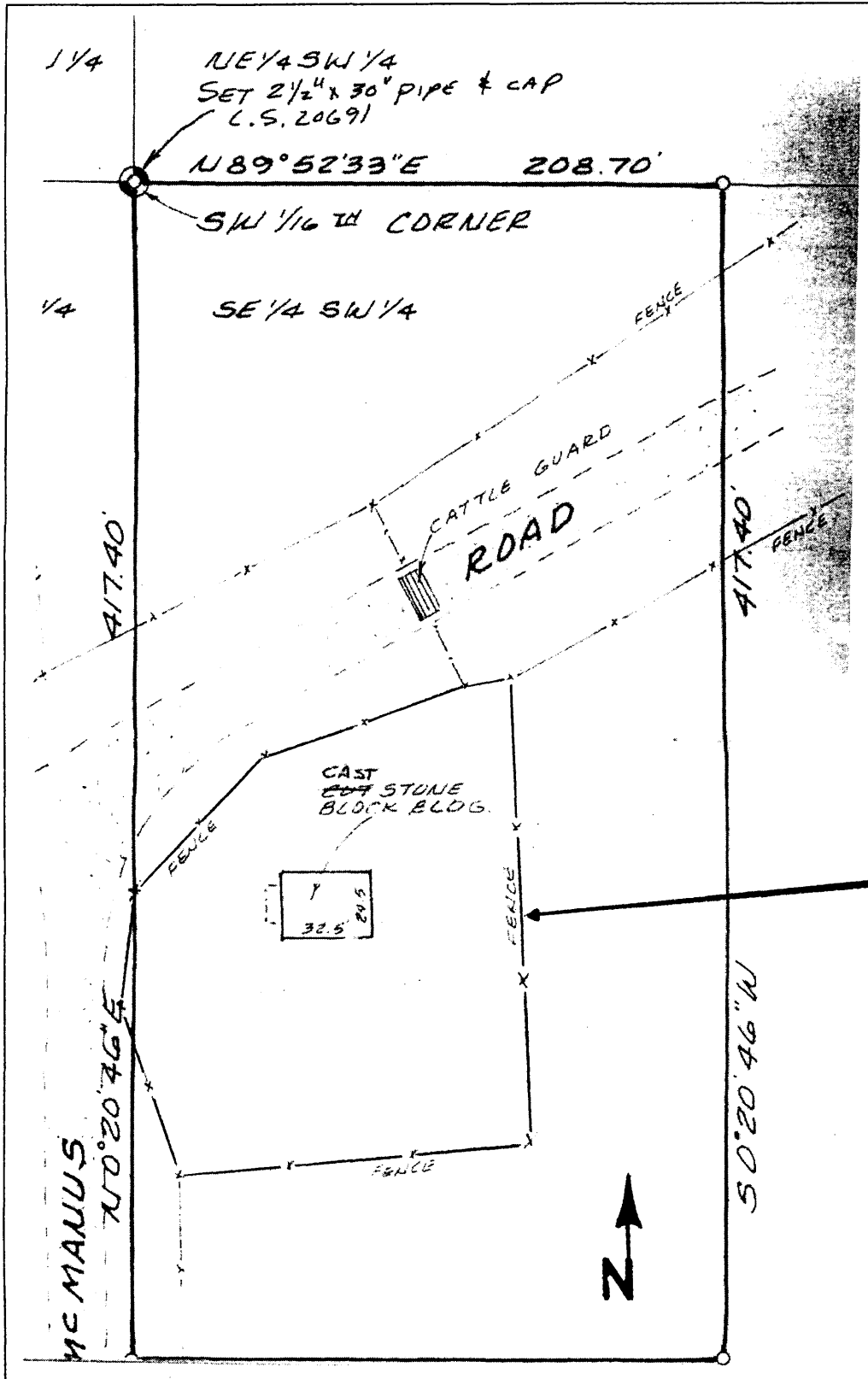
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Sketch Map



Nomination  
Boundary

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**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

The following information pertains to all photographs, except as noted:

Name of Property: Debs School  
Location: Hinsdale County, Colorado  
Photographer: Grant Houston  
Date of Photographs: July 2004  
Negatives: Hinsdale County Historical Society

<u>Photo No.</u>	<u>Photographic Information</u>
1	South elevation and view of landscape and rural setting, view north
2	South elevation and view of playground and rural setting, view north
3	West and south elevations, view northeast
4	North elevation, view south (June 2000)
5	East and south elevations, view northwest
6	East elevation, showing enclosed windows, view west
7	Interior (June 2000)
8	Interior (June 2000)

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**USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP**  
Oakbrush Ridge Quadrangle

