

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received AUG 16 1984  
date entered FEB 7 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Lower Shell School House (Odessa District)

and/or common Shell Valley Old Stone School House

2. Location

street & number U.S. Highway 14 not for publication

city, town Greybull vicinity of 6 miles east of Greybull

state Wyoming code 056 county Big Horn code 003

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> na in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> na being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other/temp. abandoned

4. Owner of Property

name John J. McGough Jr.

street & number Trapper Vally Ranch P. O. Box 13

city, town Shell vicinity of state Wyoming 82441

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Big Horn County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Basin state Wyoming 82410

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wyoming Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1983  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Wyoming Recreation Commission

city, town Cheyenne state Wyoming

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date N/A

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Lower Shell Schoolhouse is located in a rather desolate portion of the arid Big Horn Basin in northern Wyoming. The schoolhouse and the two acres of land included within the nomination's boundaries sit on a dry greasewood bluff near Shell Creek in Big Horn County. The school, constructed in 1903, retains its architectural integrity but none of the original outbuildings such as the coal shed or outhouses remain standing today.

The building's isolated location and limited ornamentation give the Lower Shell School a rather stark appearance. The school is a one-story rectangular building that measures approximately 24' x 46'. The structure sits on a north-south axis with three, one-light-over-one-light, double-hung windows on the east and west walls. This construction distinguishes from the school construction style of a later period that utilized an east-west axis and had north-facing windows. The ashlar sandstone of the primary facade is finished and laid in regular courses while the remaining walls are constructed of rock-faced sandstone laid in random courses. Each masonry wall is approximately 18" thick. Rock-faced stone lintels and sills are part of the window and door treatments. The original cement stoop still remains in front of the entry. The building's main entry, a double door with five panels each, is centrally located on the primary facade and has a single stationary transom over the original frame doors. The 1903 datestone was placed over the transom. A prominent frame bell tower intersects the hipped roof above the front door. The hipped roof on the main structure is mirrored by the hipped roof on the bell tower. Unfortunately, the school bell was at some point removed from the tower.

The building consists of only one room with many of the original appointments such as the wainscoat and soft wood flooring. The ceiling is 11'8" high.

At various times in its history, repairs were made to the school. The mortar was repointed several times and the roof was reshingled in the 1930's. In 1980, to check the deterioration brought about by abandonment and vandalism, very basic restoration was begun. The old wooden shingles have been replaced with cedar shingles while the bell tower was strengthened and the chimney rebuilt. An opening has recently been made in the rear wall for an additional door. The broken windows have been replaced with double-hung wooden windows. A footing has been poured around the entire building and some major repointing done to the walls. All basic restoration work has been done with minimum of disturbance to the original character of the building.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1903 **Builder/Architect** unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Lower Shell Valley Stone School House is an outstanding representative example of the vanishing one-room school house and embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction employed by pioneer masons utilizing indigenous building materials. In addition, the use of the school house as a community meeting place for 70 years and as a center for education for nearly fifty years associate the building with events which have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Wyoming educational and social/humanitarian history and development. Not only does the building retain its integrity, the landscape has unimpaired visual integrity so the historic ecological relationships remain unaltered. The Lower Shell Valley Stone School House is a visual symbol of the process by which human beings organized their frontier communities and lived together in a group while promoting the education and social development necessary to a civilized society. As one of the few remaining, intact one-room school houses in Wyoming, the Lower Shell Valley Stone School House is worthy of recognition by enrollment on the National Register of Historic Places.

SEE ADDENDUM

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE ADDENDUM

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2 acres

Quadrangle name Devil's Kitchen, WY

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u>	<u>2</u> <u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u> <u>8</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>9</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u>	<u>2</u> <u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u> <u>8</u> <u>1</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u>	<u>4</u> <u>9</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u> <u>6</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u>	<u>2</u> <u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>9</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u> <u>6</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>
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D	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u>	<u>2</u> <u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>9</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>
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E	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
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G	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
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H	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
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Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE ADDENDUM

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>na</u>	code	<u>na</u>	county	<u>na</u>	code	<u>na</u>
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state	<u>na</u>	code	<u>na</u>	county	<u>na</u>	code	<u>na</u>
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# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John J. McGough

organization

date April, 1984

street & number P. O. Box 13

telephone 765-2175

city or town Shell

state Wyoming

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Alvin J. Bastron

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 8/11/84

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Kevin M. Brown  
Keeper of the National Register

date 2/2/85

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

Page 1

The aridity and isolation of the Big Horn Basin contributed to its late settlement by white homesteaders. The Shell Creek area, probably named after the fossil shells which were found along the stream bank, was first utilized by sheepherders in the 1870s. Later, cattle raisers joined the sheepherders in competition for grazing locations.

In 1890, Jordan Smith selected a spot along the creek, took out a water right and built the area's first irrigation ditch. He was soon joined by other farming families and the Town of Shell was established. Although the pastoral tranquillity was disrupted briefly during range wars in the 1890s, the Town of Shell continued to attract new settlers. The population in the Shell Creek area consisted of agrarian family units seeking to provide a solid way of life based on the fruits of their own labors.

By the end of the 19th Century, the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints decided to colonize additional areas in Wyoming. They sought locations where people could establish homes in towns near their agricultural endeavors. Thus, church members would be able to engage in church and social activities easily without being forced to travel long distances. After investigation the Big Horn Basin was judged to be an appropriate location for expanded colonization. Proposed settlement, however, would be dependent upon adequate irrigation.

Accordingly, various irrigation projects were begun after 1900 in the Big Horn Basin including the Shell Canal project. This project was undertaken by the Wyoming Land and Irrigation Company in 1907 to reclaim 10,000 acres on the east side of the Big Horn River, northeast of Basin. By 1908, the community of Shell was reported to be a prosperous community of farmers and stockmen. Population growth undoubtedly had resulted from the irrigation project but in the years preceding the Wyoming Land and Irrigation Company project, the community of Shell had continued to exist as a small community of stock owners and farmers of limited financial resources. These people, however, valued an education for their children and often sacrificed their fiscal well-being in order to provide an educational facility.

One of the first schools on Shell Creek opened in a stable where children sat on the manger. Rubber boots were split open and tacked onto the wall for use as a blackboard. The curriculum was of very limited scope. Although a Legislative Act in 1899 made it mandatory for school boards to provide free text books for use in public schools, many boards were forced to have parents supply what books and supplies they could. The local school board was faced with additional financial problems as Big Horn County had a low level of assessable property and was paying off debt incurred by parent counties before its establishment and organization in 1897. Both Johnson and Sheridan Counties financially assisted the school district.

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Continuation sheet

Significance

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The Lower Shell Valley Stone School House, built in 1903, was one of the first non-log community buildings in the area. It used a classic rural one-room school house design. The building was constructed by unknown masons on land donated to the Odessa school district. Local homesteaders assisted in the construction and quarried rock from the surrounding hills. Although the main use was that of a school, it functioned from the beginning as a Sunday school and church for travelling preachers, a hall for dances, holiday parties and a wide variety of organizational meetings from cemetery boards to Farm Bureau. Use as a school ended in the mid 1950s, but until its final abandonment in the early 1970s, it was still in use as a meeting hall.

Many of the area residents either attended school in the building or had relatives who helped in the original construction. Many area residents met their future spouses at dances or community functions held in the building and thus there is a strong local sentimentality concerning the school house.

The value of the school house is as a representative example of the vanishing one-room school house. The building's simple form epitomizes the austere life of the region's earliest pioneers. Its paramount value at the present, however, probably lies in the dramatic aesthetic appeal that the building possesses. Set against a backdrop of the Big Horn Mountain Range on a barren greasewood bluff overlooking Shell Valley, the building gives a feeling of continuity with the landscape. The unobstructed setting of the wild basin topography contrasted with the lush irrigated fields of the small farms and ranches along Shell Creek tells the complete story.

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Continuation sheet Bibliography

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Continuation sheet Verbal Boundary Description Item number 10

Page 1

The Shell Schoolhouse is located on a two-acre plot six miles east of Greybull and approximately eight miles west of Shell on U.S. Highway 14. The legal description on file on the Basin County Assessors Office describes the property as "part of SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of SW $\frac{1}{4}$  T53N R92W Sec 33." This nomination includes only the schoolhouse and the property on which it sits belonging to Mr. John J. McGough Jr. The property sits at the base of the Bighorns with little vegetation apart from sage and prairie grass in the immediate vicinity. There is no need to include additional land area in the boundary and likewise no need to exclude the property belonging to Mr. McGough. The two-acre lot provides the school with a generous margin for defense against insensitive intrusions, and because there are no natural or manmade landmarks within a quarter mile, the boundary is best defined by the existing legal survey on file with the County Clerk and Assessor.

The Shell Schoolhouse is located at roughly the center of a two-acre lot which begins at the SE corner of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 33T53N R92W 6th P.M. thence running north 403 feet; thence west 210 feet; thence south 403 feet; thence east 210 feet; to the point of beginning. The nomination includes the schoolhouse and the lot which is located north of and perpendicular to U.S. highway 14 and is .6 of one mile east of road 31 $\frac{1}{2}$  and also .6 of one mile west of Davis road and also .2 of one mile west of mile post marker 7 and also .15 of one mile west of Schoolhouse gulch. Big Horn County, Wyoming. There is a BLM marker located approximately twenty-five yards north of U.S. highway and south of the Schoolhouse which reads: RM $\frac{1}{4}$ S 33T53N R92W 135.2 $^{\circ}$  U.S. cadastral survey. The Schoolhouse is known as residence #699.