

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

106

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions 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 any 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 Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District

Other names/site number Ponca Agency Building/ NeHBS# KX00-171

2. Location

Street & number _____

Not for publication

City or town Niobrara

Vicinity

State Nebraska Code NE County Knox Code 107

Zip code 68760

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Wendell Sammes

Signature of certifying official

1/21/03

Date

Director, Nebraska State 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 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.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

Sandra McVelland

3/13/03

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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 include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	2	Buildings
1		Sites
5		Structures
		Objects
8	2	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- GOVERNMENT / Public Works
- GOVERNMENT / Other (Tribal Government)
- SOCIAL / Meeting Hall
- RECREATION AND CULTURE

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- SOCIAL / Meeting Hall
- RECREATION AND CULTURE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- NO STYLE / Vernacular

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Foundation Concrete
- Walls Frame
- Roof Wood shingle
- 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 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Ethnic Heritage – Native American

Social History

Period of Significance

1936 - 1953

Significant Dates

1936

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/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 for additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than 5

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	14	574800	4729260	3.			
2.				4.			

[] 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 Stacy Stupka-Burda / National Register Coordinator
organization Nebraska State Historical Society date 11-24-2002
street & number 1500 R St, PO Box 82554 telephone 402-471-4770
city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68501-2554

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Ponca Tribe of Nebraska
street & number 1701 E Street telephone 402-438-9222
city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68508

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined 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, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Introduction

The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District is situated in the northwestern portion of Knox County, Nebraska, near the small community of Niobrara (2000 population: 379). Niobrara is located approximately 200 miles northwest of Lincoln, the capital city of Nebraska. This historic district is located approximately 3 miles southwest of Niobrara roughly one mile northwest of the confluence of the Niobrara River and Verdigre Creek. The Missouri River, which forms the northern boundary of Knox County and of the state of Nebraska, is located approximately 5 miles north.

The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District overlooks the Niobrara River Valley eastward and is positioned on the broad flat surface of a former river terrace. Within ¼ mile west of the property, however, the topography shifts and quickly becomes the rough hilly terrain most identified with the region. The nomination includes two contributing buildings: the Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building, and the caretaker's cottage; five contributing structures: a pump house, an outdoor stone fireplace, a privy, an outbuilding, a pump house with a windmill; one contributing site: the Pow Wow circle; and two non-contributing buildings: a modern restroom; and a modern metal pole building.

The immediate setting is that of open and rural grassland, though mature evergreen trees frame the front of the house, and a few trees are visible along the intermittent creek northwest of the site. As the terrain surrounding this property increases in slope, so does the number of trees. East, about a mile, is the running water of the Niobrara. The buildings and landscape associated with this property retain their physical integrity and are in an excellent state of preservation.

Description

Constructed in 1936, the Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building (hereafter referred to as the Ponca Community Building) is a 1 ½ story frame building featuring side gables with shed extensions on both the front and rear facades. An extension of the rear façade forms a one story gabled ell. With the exception of the gable ends, which are covered with vertical wood siding, the Ponca Community Building is clad with Red Cedar taper-sawn siding. The roof is covered with wood shingles. Two concrete steps lead into a recessed porch on the front or east façade. The support columns of the porch are simple square posts with stepped bases. Two front entry doors are wood paneled with six true divided lights forming the upper portion of each door. Original screen doors still grace these exterior doors. The doors are flanked on either side by four paned vertical windows. A glass transom of five divided lights completes the front entry. Double hung, six over six windows centered on either side of the front porch finish the front façade and contribute to a feeling of symmetry.

Each façade of the Ponca Community Building is visually different, though the repeated use of multi-light windows, the same exterior doors, and wood shingle siding unifies the look and feel of this building. On the south façade, double hung windows are paired and are positioned near the middle of both the front and rear shed extension. Three double hung, eight over eight windows are centered at the base of the gable end. These large windows help to illuminate the interior central meeting space. A wood paneled exterior door with six divided lights provides side access to the central meeting space. The north façade mimics the south façade in window patterning, however, in place of the rear set of paired windows, the 1 story ell extends from the northwest end, forming a small courtyard. Two pairs of double hung six over six windows and an exterior door are present on the east façade of the ell. On the gable end of the ell, two hinged, wooden doors provide convenient outside access to office and storage space. Multi-light windows flank these utilitarian doors.

The most striking feature of the rear façade is the massive, freestanding brick chimney centrally positioned at the junction of the gable roof with the shed extension. The porch on this façade is centrally located relative to the main portion of the Ponca Community Building. The roof of the porch continues the shed extension and allows for a small shelf-lined pantry,

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accessed through the kitchen, on the southeast corner of the porch. A fixed, four-pane window allows natural illumination of the pantry. The porch column and the wood paneled door match those described previously in this nomination. With the exception of the pantry window, the windows along this façade, including those in the 1 story ell, are double hung, six over six windows. Four of these windows are evenly spaced on the main part of the Community Building, while the remaining five windows are grouped in a pair and in a trio.

The interior of the Ponca Community Building brings the feeling of the outside in, with the use of organic surface materials, expansive spaces and numerous windows. Rooms are located on either side of the front vestibule. A central door with the same arrangement as the exterior entry opens into the primary or meeting space. The primary space can also be accessed by using doors in each of the rooms located just off the vestibule. Partial height knotty pine paneling topped with pine molding surrounds the meeting space. The remainder of the walls and the ceiling are covered with fiberboard. The wall opposite the main entry features a stone fireplace with a wooden mantle. Floors throughout the Ponca Community Building are wide plank pine.

The kitchen, located to the left (south) and behind (west of) the fireplace wall, contains expansive workspaces that are well illuminated by exterior light, floor to ceiling wooden cupboards for storage, and a large open area that can facilitate numerous cooks. Floor to ceiling knotty pine paneling is featured in this room, and throughout the rest of the Ponca Community Building. Access to the shelf-lined pantry is conveniently located in the kitchen.

Two doors, located to the right (north) of the fireplace open into a central hall and into the ell portion of the Ponca Community Building. Restrooms, offices and storage space are all situated within this wing.

The Ponca Tribe has recently completed renovation of the Ponca Community Building. These renovations met the *Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation* and were subject to review by the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office.

The caretaker's cottage, also a contributing building in this nomination, is located immediately south of the Ponca Community Building. This cottage was also constructed in 1936 and is a front gabled building with a gabled, enclosed porch and a centrally located entry. A second entry faces the Ponca Community Building. Windows in this cottage are one over one double hung. The roof is covered with wooden shingles, and the exterior walls are clad with wood shingle siding.

As with the larger Ponca Community Building, renovations are planned at the caretaker's cottage. These renovations will meet the *Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation*.

Five contributing structures are included in this nomination. These structures include a pump house, a pump house with a windmill, a privy, an outbuilding, and an outdoor fireplace constructed of stone. Each of these structures was associated historically with the complex, and each retains physical integrity. One site, the Pow Wow circle, is also counted as contributing. Historically, the Pow Wows were used to celebrate the culture and the religion of the Ponca. The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska continues to host Pow Wows at this site celebrating their culture, their heritage and their religion. In addition, Pow Wows serve as an important link to the past, provide educational outreach opportunities, and increased tribal vitality through tourism.

Non-contributing buildings included in this nomination include a modern restroom facility clad in wood shingle siding that matches the Ponca Community Building, and a modern metal pole building located near the northern boundary of this historic property.

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The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building District is significant at the state level under Criterion A for its association with Social History and the Indian Emergency Conservation Work (IECW) program, a New Deal program designed specifically to provide relief for Native Americans during the Great Depression. It is also significant at the state level under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage, Native American. The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building was an important cultural center of the Ponca Tribal Community in Nebraska. Its period of National Register significance begins in 1936 with the construction of The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building and continues through 1953, 50 years prior to this writing.

The events leading up to the construction and significance of the built environment as seen today are intertwined in over two centuries of Ponca history.

The Ponca

The Ponca were a semi-sedentary tribe who relied on small-scale horticulture, gathering wild plants and seasonal bison hunts. The Ponca are closely related to the Omaha Tribe. There is little doubt that these tribes were once one nation as evidenced both linguistically and by shared culture. While it is unclear when the Ponca separated from the Omaha, by the 1700s, the Ponca were living along the Missouri River in northeastern Nebraska in the region generally recognized as the Ponca Heartland. Always a small tribe, upon contact Euroamericans always considered the Ponca a friendly, peaceful tribe.

Like most tribes, the history of relations between the Ponca and the United States has been marked with devastating changes. Treaties in 1858 and 1865 diminished the tribe's once large land base down to 96,000 acres in Nebraska. Finally, the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 with the Great Sioux/Lakota Nation, left the Ponca without title to any land.

In 1877, the United States government attempted to relocate the tribe to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. This relocation effort resulted in the death of many of the tribal members, including family members of Chief Standing Bear. Following the death of his son in 1878, Standing Bear led a group of Ponca back up to Nebraska to bury his son in the Ponca Heartland. US Army officials arrested and imprisoned them for leaving Indian Territory illegally. The incident made its way up to the Supreme Court of the United States in 1880 who decided in favor of Standing Bear, upholding the US District Court decision of Standing Bear v. Crook 1879, a landmark decision which held that members of Indian nations were "people" in the eyes of United States law. Following this decision, Standing Bear and the other tribal members who had returned to Nebraska with him, were free to return to their home. Returning to their homeland presented yet another obstacle, as the Ponca had no land. After much publicity, just over 25,000 acres in Knox County were returned to the Ponca in 1881. This land was given back to individual tribal members in 160-acre allotments.¹ Some members opted to stay in Oklahoma and became the Southern Ponca, while others stayed in Nebraska and became the Northern Ponca.

In 1887, The Severalty Act, also known as the Dawes Act, was introduced. This legislation, aimed at rapid assimilation, also provided for individual land ownership. It was believed that this, in turn, would force all Native Americans to become more self-sufficient. Another provision of the Dawes Act allowed surplus land to become taxable. Unable to pay taxes, many were forced to sell their allotments to non-Indians.² Illustrating just how much land was lost, nationwide, Indian land

¹ Elizabeth S. Grobsmith and Beth R. Ritter, "The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska: The Process of Restoration of a Federally Terminated Tribe".

² *Ibid.*

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diminished from 139 million acres in 1887 to 48 million acres in 1932.³ Unable to sustain themselves on their own land, many Native Americans were left destitute.

It was within this climate, that John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs worked to pass the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. This act ended allotment and the alienation of Indian Land. Tribes could now control surplus lands not allotted. Collier wanted to bring "the benefits of education and scientific knowledge within reach of every Indian, while encouraging preservation of traditional culture".⁴ The Indian Reorganization Act provided for increased religious freedom and a strengthening of tribal governments.⁵ Under this Act, the Northern Ponca adopted a new tribal constitution in February 1936, and reorganized as the Ponca Tribe of Native Americans of Nebraska.⁶

Federal Indian policy of the 1950's was aimed at assimilation of Native Americans into mainstream society. "By releasing Native peoples from the limitations of tribal membership, they would, in theory, be freer to assimilate in the dominant society."⁷ In 1962, suffering from decreased land holdings, and a widely dispersed tribal membership base, Congress determined that the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska was no longer a tribe and terminated its status as a federally recognized tribe.⁸ Immediately, the Ponca felt the negative effects of the ill-advised policy of termination. In addition to loss of tribal identity, the Ponca were denied access to federal services, job training, health services, child welfare programs, higher education and youth programs. In 1971, the Ponca Tribe was formed and re-incorporated. After a monumental effort, tribal members regained federal recognition in 1990.

The Great Depression

By December of 1932, farm prices were the lowest in Nebraska history. In addition, Nebraska, and the rest of the Midwest, was suffering from a severe drought that caused topsoil to erode, damaged crops and reduced agricultural production.⁹ The entire nation suffered from joblessness and despair. Native Americans, the poorest rural Americans, remained the poorest of the poor. In the midst of this great depression the daily life of Native Americans, like other poor Americans, did not change significantly. "As one South Dakota Sioux commented, "we're all on the same level now. The white man is in the same shape we are."¹⁰ Indians had very little capital other than natural resources and drought throughout the Plains had ruined much of their land. These natural resources "could not be converted into subsistence supplies in a period of economic distress, the Native American faced an almost hopeless situation by mid-1933."¹¹

Nationwide relief through intercession by the federal government came with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs. These programs took a variety of forms, and this was true for Native Americans as well. The Indian Emergency

³ Anthony J. Badger, The New Deal The Depression Years, 1933-40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.178.

⁵ Oliver R. Froeling, "Allotment in Severality on the Northern Ponca Reservation – The Geography of Dispossession". Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Grobsmith and Ritter, p.7.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Jill M. Ebers, "Wayne Municipal Auditorium" National Register of Historic Places nomination.

¹⁰ Donald L. Parman, Indians and the American West in the Twentieth Century. Series edited by Martin Ridge and Walter Nugent. Indiana University Press, 1994.

¹¹ John A. Salmond, The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study. Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina.

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Conservation Work (IECW) program, passed in 1933, and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 were both enacted with the hope that they would benefit Native Americans.

Indian Emergency Conservation Work (IECW) program

The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building and the caretaker's cottage were constructed in 1936 using federal funds. The Bureau of Indian Affairs administered these funds through a program called the Indian Emergency Conservation Work (IECW) program.¹² Similar to the more familiar public works program known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), this program has often been referred to as the Indian CCC. President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved a separate conservation program for Native Americans in late April of 1933.¹³ The first projects under this new program were initiated by June of 1933.

Most enrollees in the IECW were 30 or younger, however there were no age restrictions, and Indians in their 60's often worked alongside younger men.¹⁴ Enrollees worked for \$30.00 per month. One of the many ways in which the IECW differed from the CCC was camp life. The living arrangements of the enrollees varied according to local needs. The boarding camp most closely resembled the camps of the CCC and housed unmarried men in areas where work was expected to continue for at least a full summer. For short projects, or where unmarried enrollee recruitment was difficult, temporary family camps were established. The final type of living arrangement was widely used and allowed enrollees to live at home. Living at home allowed Indians to maintain a connection to their land and to their families.¹⁵

The Bureau of Indian Affairs established six district offices whose role was to provide technical assistance. Nebraska was located within the Billings District, a huge district that also included the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana. Typical IECW projects included fencing, stream clearance, well drilling, soil erosion control, irrigating subsistence gardens and constructing stock ponds. Projects were generally small, and often offered benefits in improving daily life, like road building and the construction of telephone lines. Partially in response to the continuing drought, projects in the Billings District emphasized water development and irrigation. Large elaborate dams designed primarily for flood control and irrigation were constructed after 1935 and were a departure from the projects of other districts.¹⁶

The Civilian Conservation Corps Act was passed in 1937. Aimed at making the CCC a permanent Federal agency, the resolution faced surprising difficulty in Congress, and the CCC was only extended for two additional years. With the passage of the Civilian Conservation Corps Act, the Bureau of Indian Affairs changed the name of the IECW to Civilian Conservation Corps – Indian Division (CCC-ID).¹⁷ The lack of compulsory and systematic education had been a major criticism of the CCC and of the IECW. Prior to 1937, production was emphasized over education, and many project superintendents felt that the on the job training Indians received was sufficient. The CCC Act of 1937 increased the emphasis on education, a direct benefit to Native Americans enrolled in the program.

¹² Donald L. Parman, The Indian Civilian Conservation Corps. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oklahoma, Norman. 1967.

¹³ *New York Times*, May 1, 1933.

¹⁴ Parman, PhD dissertation.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

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By 1938, it became increasingly difficult to keep the CCC-ID and the CCC in operation due to reductions in funding and rising material costs¹⁸. In 1940, the CCC-ID began placing enrollees in private positions. Prior to 1940, Indians were able to find better positions within the CCC-ID, within other relief programs, and permanent employment within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but the Depression afforded few opportunities for employment, and success in private employment was rare.¹⁹ The training and education enrollees received while in the CCC-ID laid the groundwork for successful private employment in later years. Indians first became eligible for the benefits of the National Defense Vocational Training Act in early 1941²⁰ and by the summer of 1941 the Billings District found it hard to recruit enrollees because so many Native Americans had entered war plants, found local jobs or had joined the armed services.

With the onset of the United States involvement in World War II, in general, enrollee recruitment became difficult for the CCC program. On July 2, 1942, Congress granted appropriations to begin terminating the entire CCC program.²¹ Over 85,000 Native Americans were enrolled in the combined programs of the IECW and the CCC-ID from 1933 through 1942.²²

Like the CCC, the programs of the IECW and the CCC-ID helped thousands through one of the most difficult periods of the 20th century. "Even the most optimistic advocates of relief, however, admitted that CCC and other relief work at best supplemented the Indians' own agricultural efforts and tided them over a crisis period."²³

There was a lot of variation within the IECW and the CCC-ID programs at the local level. Projects and camp life were designed to fit local needs. Tribal councils were able to plan their own projects, however, local superintendents had the final decision. In Knox County, numerous projects were undertaken, including grading the road between Niobrara and Santee, installing a telephone line between the two agencies, soil erosion control on Indian farms, experimental irrigation, and the construction of two Self-Help Community Buildings. Self-Help Buildings were constructed at the Santee Agency as well as the Ponca Agency, the subject of this nomination.

Site History

The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District comprises approximately 5 acres on an original tribal allotment of 160 acres. The Ponca Community Building was constructed in 1936, as was the caretaker's cottage. The construction of these buildings was funded through the IECW. According to Rocky "Nico" Mercier, a former Director of Cultural Affairs for the Ponca, "these funds were originally to be used to purchase agricultural equipment, but it was determined by the Indian agents that it would be better suited to build a building project for the purpose of vocational rehabilitation."²⁴ The July 2, 1936 issue of the *Niobrara Tribune* contained an article describing planned construction.

"Buildings are being erected on the Santee and Ponca Reservations, for use as community houses. These are frame buildings the outside being stained shingles with full basement and will have many uses. The main use however, will be for a meeting place of the tribal councilmen in carrying out their duties. It is said that each building will also be equipped to do canning of garden

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁴ Rocky Mercier, letter to NeSHPO, May 22, 1997.

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vegetables and fruits and also have a recreation room. The Niobrara Lumber Co. has an order for a carload of first grade lumber for use in building the Ponca community hall."²⁵

Construction of the Ponca Community Building must have proceeded quickly and without any unforeseen difficulties because within about a month, the *Niobrara Tribune* featured another story advertising the planned dedication in late August of the building, and inviting the public to attend.²⁶ The two day event promised numerous activities, including vocal and instrumental music, presentation of "Ancient Tribal dances," dinner for 35 cents a plate and music for dancing provided by an all Indian orchestra. By August 19, plans for the two-day celebration were finalized, and included addresses by prominent officials from Washington and an archeologist working in the area and "sports, speaking, entertainment, tribal dancing, and public dances."²⁷ The article also provides a description of the building and planned uses.

"The building which is to be dedicated has such features as a library, kitchen, sewing room, and recreation room. In this building, Indian women are privileged to can vegetables, meat, etc., under supervision of some woman who has mastered the art and can teach them correct methods. Many other activities will also be taught and ideas and knowledge can be exchanged among those taking advantage of the many opportunities thus offered."²⁸

In the same edition of the newspaper, an advertisement was placed announcing the dedication and celebration scheduled to occur on August 26 and 27. The advertisement states "This Event is for the Further Advancement of the Progressive Indians of the Ponca Tribe" and ends with the statement "We, the Tribe, Extend Our Most Cordial Invitation to the Public and also to our Neighboring Tribes."²⁹ This two-day celebration was the culmination of many hours of work by tribal members, and gave the Ponca a chance to showcase their new community building. It gave tribal members a place to congregate, to learn, to teach, to share their culture and helped promote a sense of place.

The Ponca Community Building, while designed as a vocational training building, it was also designed to meet the cultural needs of the Ponca Tribe and to serve as meeting place for the governing bodies of the tribes. In addition to government, tribal members have used the building for funerals and wakes, a tradition and custom that is still carried on today.³⁰ According to Mercier, individuals from various Indian nations used to travel from the four directions to the Ponca Community Building to take part in Tribal War Dances and Ponca celebrations held in the main hall. Mercier also indicates "because of the antiquity of the building, this is no longer done, but the tradition is still carried on with the Powwows (celebrations) that are held in an outside dance area adjacent to the building."³¹

No site-specific information is available for the remaining buildings and structures within this district. The caretaker's cottage was constructed in the same year as the Ponca Community Building. An interview with Mr. Leo Eckley, a Ponca Tribal member who helped construct the community building and worked on other IECW in the area, indicates that the cottage was constructed after the Ponca Community Building.³² Mr. Eckley also served as recreational director at least

²⁵ *Niobrara Tribune* "Community Halls Being Built On Reservations" July 2, 1936.

²⁶ *Niobrara Tribune* "Self Help Building To Be Dedicated In Two Day Event" August 5, 1936.

²⁷ *Niobrara Tribune* "Plans For Dedication Being Completed" August 19, 1936.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁰ Rocky Mercier, letter to NeSHPO, May 22, 1997.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Interview with Leo Eckley, Ponca Tribal Member 1995.

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through September 1938.³³ The remaining contributing structures are structures that would have facilitated use of the buildings and the grounds for large events such as Pow Wows and other celebrations. These structures, and the Pow Wow circle, contribute to the setting, feeling and association of this historic district.

The associated buildings and site create a concentration of features that are interrelated to the Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building. These associated properties convey a visual sense of the overall historic environment within which the Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building exists.

Significance

The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building District is significant at the state level under Criterion A for its association with Social History and the IECW, a New Deal program designed specifically to provide relief for Native Americans during the depression. It is also significant at the state level under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage, Native American. The Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building "was the cultural and social hub of the Ponca Tribal Community. It was the key location where the transition from cultural traditions and Indian way of life began its transformation and assimilation into the dominant culture. It is also the key location, where what is left of the Ponca way of life, is carried on today."³⁴

Given further contextual research, this property may well have National Significance as reflected by its connection with Chief Standing Bear and the return of the Ponca to their traditional lands as well as the nationwide importance of the IECW program.

Significant to the Ponca as a meeting place, a learning center, and a cultural center when first constructed in 1936, the Ponca Self-Help Community Building Historic District has once again risen to become an important focal point for the Ponca. The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska is carefully renovating buildings and structures located within this district. The renovations are being completed in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation*. These renovations are also being completed with close attention to the property's feeling, setting and association, those aspects of integrity that contribute to the Ponca sense of place through the built environment. This place, in the Ponca Heartland, speaks to the resiliency and determination of the Ponca Tribe.

³³ *Niobrara Tribune*, advertisement for Baseball Tournament and Indian Pow-Wow. September 15, 1938.

³⁴ Rocky Mercier, letter to NeSHPO, May 22, 1997.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic district consists of the county road immediately to the east, the fence line north of the metal building to the north, the fence line of the bison enclosure to the west, and an imaginary line intersecting with the toe of the 1,300 foot topographic line immediately to the south of the caretaker's cottage. This imaginary line runs east and west ending at the intersection point of the county road to the east and at the bison enclosure fence to the west.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes those properties historically associated with and interrelated to the Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building. These associated properties convey a visual sense of the overall historic environment within which the Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building exists.

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Photographs

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District
Knox County, Nebraska
Photographer: Stacy Stupka-Burda, NeSHPO
May 2002
Negatives in the collection of the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office

Photograph 1 of 14
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District – general view: Ponca Community Building at center;
caretaker's cottage left center.
View is northwest

Photograph 2 of 14
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District – general view: Ponca Community Building at left center; Pow
wow grounds and pump house with windmill at right center.

Photograph 3 of 14
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – general view, east façade
View facing west-southwest

Photograph 4 of 14
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – view of front entry
View facing west

Photograph 5 of 14
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – general view, west façade
View facing east

Photograph 6 of 14
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – interior view of vestibule doors
View facing northeast

Photograph 7 of 14
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – interior view of meeting space
View facing northeast

Photograph 8 of 14
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – interior view of stone fireplace
View facing west

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Photograph 9 of 14

Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – interior view of room adjacent to vestibule
View is east

Photograph 10 of 14

Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – interior view of kitchen
View is northwest

Photograph 11 of 14

Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building – interior view of pantry
View is southwest

Photograph 12 of 14

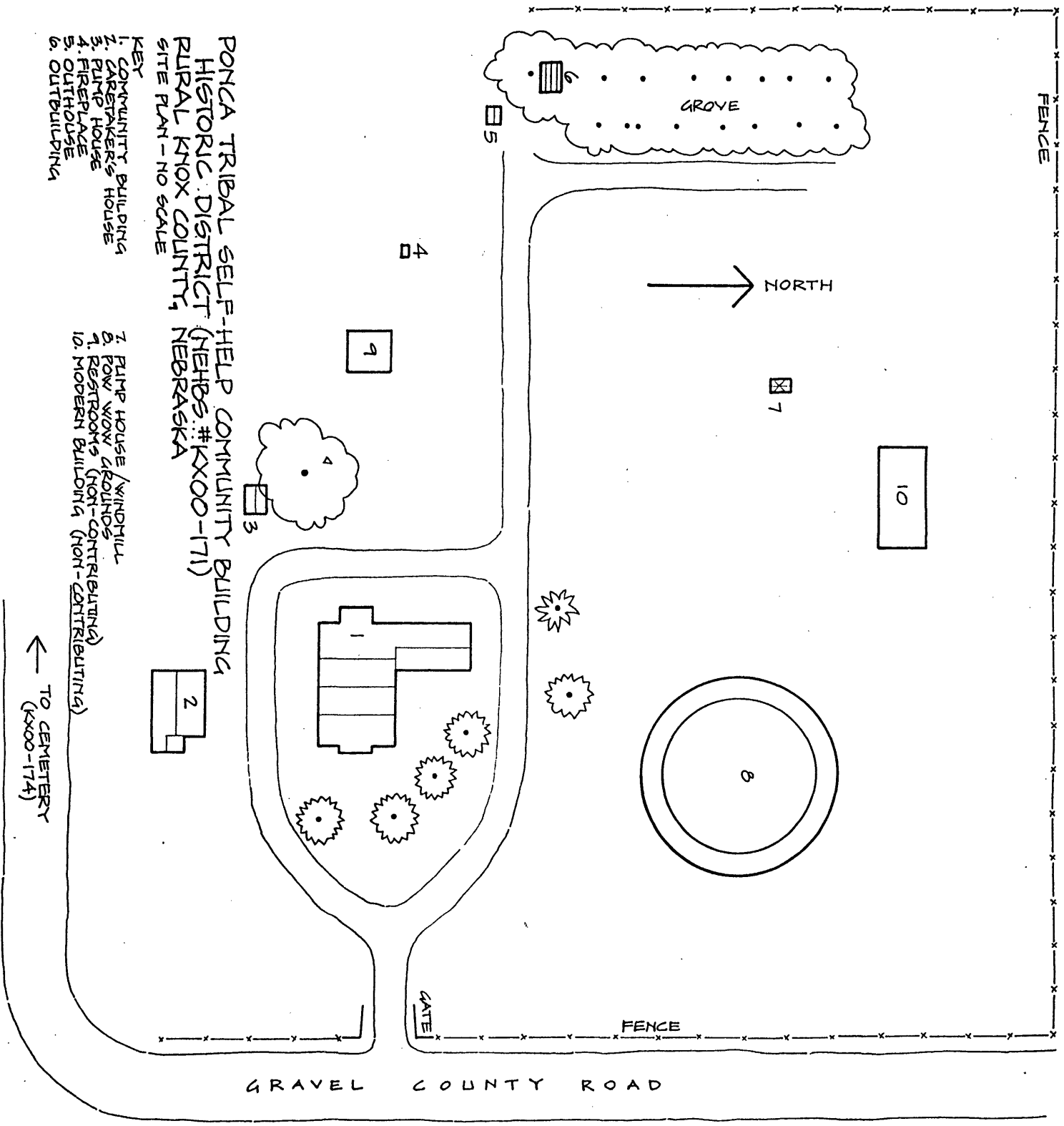
Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District – view of caretaker's cottage
View is southwest

Photograph 13 of 14

Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District – view of outdoor stone fireplace
View is southwest

Photograph 14 of 14

Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District – view of pump house with windmill, Pow Wow circle to right
View is east-southeast



PONCA TRIBAL SELF-HELP COMMUNITY BUILDING
 HISTORIC DISTRICT (NEHBS #KX00-171)
 RURAL KNOX COUNTY, NEBRASKA
 SITE PLAN - NO SCALE

- KEY
- 1. COMMUNITY BUILDING
 - 2. CARETAKER'S HOUSE
 - 3. PUMP HOUSE
 - 4. FIREPLACE
 - 5. OUTHOUSE
 - 6. OUTBUILDING

- 7. PUMP HOUSE / WINDMILL
- 8. ROW WOVEN ROUNDS
- 9. RESTROOMS (NON-CONTRIBUTING)
- 10. MODERN BUILDING (NON-CONTRIBUTING)

← TO CEMETERY
 (KX00-174)

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 03000106

Property Name: Ponca Tribal Self-Help Community Building Historic District

County: Knox State: Nebraska

none
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

March 13, 2003
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 10: Geographical Data

Acreage is, hereby, listed as "approximately 5" to more closely reflect parcel's size.

The Verbal Boundary Description is, hereby, clarified by replacing the phrase "immediately south of the caretaker's cottage," with "at a point directly south of the southeast corner of the caretaker's cottage."

The Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:
National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)